

**Rethinking Inclusive Education in Bangladesh
through an examination of children's voices
and Rabindranath Tagore's pedagogical philosophy**

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*There is really no such thing as the “voiceless”.
There are only the deliberately silenced,
or the preferably unheard.*

-Arundhati Roy, 2004

ABSTRACT

Inclusive education (IE) has become an international “buzzword,” and a globally favoured pedagogical philosophy and mechanism underpinning “Education for All” movements. Nations across the globe have responded to the call for IE, which, through changes in both policy and practice, has led schools in various countries to start opening up to the needs of more diverse student populations and redefining differences in ability, religion, ethnicity, and culture as assets. In Bangladesh, this movement has also made significant headway through the work of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). One of the pioneering NGOs with an inclusive approach and vision to education is BRAC. In this study, I explore children’s perspectives of inclusive practice at two BRAC primary schools. More specifically, I explore through qualitative methods (observation, photography, a questionnaire, informal focus groups, free associative writing and memos) 66 pupils’ likes and dislikes in relation to inclusive education at their respective schools. Emergent themes are then distilled through the educational philosophy of the Bengali scholar, philosopher, and educationalist Rabindranath Tagore, in order to suggest ways to better contextualize IE for Bangladesh. One of the major roadblocks to the implementation and evolution of IE in Bangladesh has been the essence of ambiguity and confusion that surround the philosophical and practical aspects of this complex phenomenon; many pieces of the IE puzzle in Bangladesh are currently missing. Therefore, I suggest, that some “long-forgotten” indigenous educational practices need to be revived in order to take the movement forward more meaningfully. Children’s emergent themes suggest that there are many similarities between their current wants and needs and those advocated by Rabindranath Tagore. This includes a vast range of issues, though they generally entail: (1) wanting a greater sense of autonomy as decision makers in the classroom; (2) needing adults to believe in their ability to help and support one another; (3) having more room for creative thought and expression; and (4) wishing for a closer curricular link to the natural world. Tagore, famous for his literary and creative achievements in Bangladesh, dedicated forty years of his adult life to education. By establishing a link between Tagore’s work and IE,

which is still considered a “Northern” concept in Bangladesh, the aim of this study is fundamentally to challenge that belief and show how Bengali indigenous knowledge from the past can take IE forward in the present.

RÉSUMÉ

La pédagogie de l'éducation inclusive (EI) est d'actualité un « mot clé » international dans le domaine de l'éducation, car sa philosophie et ses mécanismes pédagogiques sous-tendent plusieurs programmes en lien avec « l'Éducation pour tous ». De plus, suite à la mise en œuvre de nouvelles politiques et pratiques pédagogiques, de nombreuses écoles à l'échelle globale s'intéressent aux besoins d'une population étudiante diversifiée en redéfinissant les différences en terme d'habiletés, de religions, d'ethnies et de cultures comme étant des atouts. Au Bangladesh, des organisations non gouvernementales, notamment BRAC, ont réalisé des avancées importantes dans le domaine de l'EI. Dans la présente étude, j'explore les perspectives des enfants sur les pratiques inclusives de deux écoles primaires de BRAC. Par l'entremise de méthodes qualitatives (des observations, des photos, un questionnaire, un groupe de discussion informel, des exercices d'écriture libre et des mémos), j'explore la perspective de 66 élèves, c'est-à-dire ce qu'ils aiment et ce qu'ils n'aiment pas de l'éducation inclusive. Les thèmes émergents sont analysés selon la philosophie pédagogique de Rabindranath Tagore, un grand érudit bengali, afin d'identifier des moyens qui permettraient une meilleur adaptation de l'EI au Bangladesh. À ce stade, l'ambiguïté et la confusion ralentissent la progression de l'EI. Par conséquent, je suggère de raviver certaines pratiques pédagogiques indigènes et de les intégrer au sein des pratiques de l'EI afin que ce dernier puisse se développer de façon adaptée au contexte bengali. Les thèmes soulevés par les enfants en terme de leurs besoins et leurs désirs se rapprochent des idées de Rabindranath Tagore, c'est-à-dire : l'autonomie et un pouvoir décisionnel dans la classe, le soutien des adultes dans leurs efforts de s'entraider, la créativité et l'expression et l'intégration de la nature dans le curriculum. Tagore, reconnu pour ses accomplissements littéraires et créatifs au Bangladesh, a dédié 40 ans de sa vie au développement de l'éducation. En tissant des liens entre sa philosophie et celle de l'EI, qui est, notamment, considérée comme un concept du « Nord global » au Bangladesh, l'objectif de cette étude est de contester cette idée et de démontrer que le savoir indigène bengali d'antan peut faire progresser l'EI d'aujourd'hui.

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DEDICATION

To *Nanu*, my grandmother
& Minto *Bhai*

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TABLE OF ACRONYMS

AIS/D – American International School

BEP – BRAC Education Programme

BPS – BRAC primary schools

BRAC – previously known as the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, the name was later changed to: Building Resources Across Communities. Now, this NGO is simply known as BRAC.

CAM – Curricular Approaches Movement

CPEA – Compulsory Primary Education Act

CRC (or UNCRC) – United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

CS – Cultural supremacy

CSID – Centre for Services and Information Disability

CSIE – Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education

DPE – Directorate of Primary Education

DPed – Diploma in Primary Education

EFA – The Education for All movement

GOB – Government of Bangladesh

GPS – Government primary schools

IE – Inclusive Education

MDG – Millennium Development Goals

NCP – National Child Policy

NEP – National Education Policy

NPA – National Plan of Action for Children Bangladesh (Also – National Plan of Action on Education for All)

NSM – New School Movement

PCT – Postcolonial theory

PEDP – Primary Education Development Programme

PES – Primary Education Stipend Plan

ROSC – Reaching Out-of-School Children

SEN – Special Educational Needs

SISM – School Improvement Strategies Movement

SLIP – School-Level Improvement Plan

UDL – Universal Design for Learning

UN – United Nations

UNCRC (or CRC) – United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UPE – Universal primary education

UPEP – Upazila Primary Education Plan

WHO – World Health Organization

GLOSSARY OF BENGALI AND SANSKRIT-BASED WORDS AND PHRASES

Awami League – meaning the “People’s League,” it is the current ruling party of Bangladesh

adarsa – ideal

adda(s) – informal focus groups

ador – comfort, petting, cuddling

alpona – floor painting

apa – older sister, often used to refer to the teacher

asholei – really

ashram/asrama – an isolated site designed for spiritual instruction, education, and meditation

atma-shakti – having self-reliance and inner strength

baboi pakhir basha – baya weaver bird’s nest

beyadobi – disobedience

bhadrolok – an urban liberal class embodying more British and “refined” ways of living

bhai – brother

bhakti – devotion

bokaboki – speaking unkind words loudly

bondhus/bandhobis – male friends/female friends

brahmacharya ashram – instruction wherein students lived with the teachers in residential schools in order to gather knowledge

brahmin – caste of priests and teachers in Hinduism in which belonging members are considered the “highest” caste

Brahminacal Gurukul – education system that favoured certain castes over others and believed at the base that people of certain class and birth could not access certain goods in society

brati-balika – village-scouts

chele-mein – boys-girls

choto-boro – young-old

chotolok – refers to the lower class, the “unrefined” class of people

dakshinas – simply stated, can be considered a gift or donation a student might exchange for the services of the teacher.

dharma – duty

dushtami – naughtiness

ekshathe amra pari – together we can

faki – is a general term that denotes “avoiding responsibility” in Bengali. In the context of the school it means, “skipping or not showing up to school” and generally practicing absenteeism.

galagali – yelling curse words

gali(s) – curse words

Gora – title of one of Rabindranath Tagore’s literary pieces

Ghaire/Baire – title of one of Rabindranath Tagore’s literary pieces meaning “The Home and the World”

guru – teachers/spiritual teachers

gurukul – schools previously described where children were educated for free or minimal gifts or donations in exchange for the services of the teacher

guru-sishya – teacher-student relation

hoi choi – nosiness and distractions

jal parey/pata narey – the water falls/the leaf trembles

Jorasanko – name of Tagore’s home which embodied aesthetic learning

Karma – destiny or fate in this life predetermined from deeds or previous life.

keuu amake dekhe na – no one sees me

kichu bujhe na – limited/no understanding

khoob bhalo lage – like it a lot

kolshi – pot/water pot/ceiling pot

kotha – talk/voice

kotha keuu shune na – no one listens to my talk/voice

madhavi – spring herald or helicopter flower tree

madrasa – educational institute for the study of Islamic theology and religious laws

manush korano – a mother’s and father’s moral and material obligation to “make their child,” i.e. to raise them “properly.”

mukti – freedom, liberation, deliverance, release, salvation

nirapodh – safe

obhibabhok – guardianship

poribesh-o-amra – our environments and us

priyo – favourite

pundit – high/scholarly priest

Rabindra-Sangeet – Tagore-Songs

raja/maharaja – king

raksha-bandhan – Hindu festival celebrating the love and connection between siblings

somaj – family and larger community

somaj beboshtha – social community

shaala – brother-in-law but regularly used in Bangladesh to mean “jerk”

shahosh – courage

shalwar kameez – Bengali attire consisting of pants and dress

shishu – infant or young child

swadeshi – one country own country movement, which emphasized the focus on acting within and from one's own community, both politically and economically

tapoban – forest hermitage

(tho) tai – that's why

upanishads – sacred Hindu treatises

upazila – sub-district

zamindar – a wealthy aristocratic landowner

zila – district

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CHAPTER 1

SETTING THE STAGE FOR THE FIELD AND INQUIRY AT HAND

An Anecdote: A Mother and a Daughter

She is a young mother. In her early twenties, just learning to navigate the terrain of maintaining a family life in rural Bangladesh, she gives birth to a daughter in her first year of marriage. She is overjoyed to see the face of her newborn, a spitting image of her as a young girl. Days and weeks pass in joy and service—she feeds her daughter, bathes her, changes her clothes, smiles at her and looks deep into her eyes for some recognition. However, her daughter is a bit slow to respond. A few more weeks pass. She tries again to get her daughter to babble or to somehow respond to the adulations of all the good wishing neighbours. But her daughter's eyes wander, never settling on anyone's face and, most painfully, not on her mother's either.

The mother's home, miles away from the nearest clinic, does not make going to the see the doctor easy. Yet she knows her daughter's needs come before her own, so her decision to go see the doctor is resolute. With her husband away on business in the capital Dhaka, she musters up the courage and convinces her elder sister-in-law to accompany her.

The walk to the clinic is long. Just before the start of winter, in late October, the path is a leaf-laden canvas while arched branches above provide a silvery shade. Yet within the shade and the cool morning air, the mother sweats, her heart beats fast, and her legs, although in constant motion, tremble. Days had passed between the time she had decided to go see the doctor and today, yet her daughter has shown no signs of improvement.

Her daughter had shown no signs of improvement because she is afflicted with a severe speech impairment and mild form of physical disability. The mother does not discover this that first day she walks to her village clinic. She learns this after much trial and tribulation and dozens of referrals, including three visits to hospitals in her locality, and almost eight months after the time of her first visit. With her finances drained, and no accessible help in sight, she

eventually starts—no matter how much it hurts—viewing her daughter’s birth as a reflection of her past mistakes.

This is the story of Namoni and her mother, Lopa. Namoni is now a Grade 1 student at one of BRAC’s primary schools located in a quaint rural village about 50 kilometers north east of Dhaka.

Founded in a remote Bangladeshi village in 1972 as a rehabilitation organization, BRAC is the world’s largest non-governmental development organization. Today it operates in eleven countries in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean, and reaches an estimated 135 million people (BRAC, 2014). With over 100 000 employees, BRAC is active in fields ranging from education, health, and legal services to microfinance and community empowerment. I have had a very long relationship with BRAC, which began during the research for my master’s degree in 2006 and continued through my position as a consultant at BRAC University’s Institute of Educational Development. I have also been associated with the BRAC Education Programme (BEP), which manages over 22 000 BRAC primary schools across the organization’s global network (BRAC, 2014). It was at two of these primary schools that I conducted the fieldwork for this doctoral dissertation. Namoni’s school was one of the first I visited.

When I entered the BRAC school on a mid-September morning, Namoni caught my attention immediately. She was seated at the front of her classroom, dressed in a red-orange *shalwar kameez*, and her hair was pulled back into two pigtails. As I approached her, a broad smile lit up her face. The window across from her seat brought plenty of light into this rural BRAC school and, while a ray of sunshine danced across her face and eyes, she seemed undisturbed by it as she was immersed in interaction with her peers.

The décor of this BRAC school was similar to the others that I had visited. Namoni’s school was a small building (about 336 square feet) with tin walls, straw thatch, and four large windows. There were no benches or chairs, so the children sat in a semi-circle on the burlap-matted floor. The walls were dotted with colourful children’s artwork, signs with the alphabet, name charts, banners, and locally made paper artworks. In one corner, the teacher had kept some pottery made by the children, while in another, towards the front of the school,

she had placed two trunks for storage. Next to that, on the front wall, hung a large floor to ceiling chalkboard, a small clock, and a calendar.

I met with the local program officer, and was introduced briefly to the students and the teacher. The students were asked to perform a dance for me; however, I indicated that this was not necessary as I came simply to observe their daily lessons. The children were completing an English lesson, in which they were learning to write the letter “H.” Namoni was trying to follow along, and whenever she got distracted, the boy next to her would redirect her attention to the teacher.

Towards the end of the lesson, Namoni’s mother, Lopa, came into the classroom. She had heard from someone that I had arrived and wanted to meet the new visitor at her daughter’s school. Her face, just like that of her daughter, lit up when approached. She was eager to tell me how proud she was to have her daughter finally be able to attend school.

According to Lopa, school was a blessing for Namoni. She had been unable to enter the local government school, and until BRAC approached her family, Namoni had spent most of her days isolated and alone at home. As a result, she was timid and unapproachable. However, after six months at one of BRAC’s inclusive primary schools, she was very much changed. Her mother noticed that Namoni enjoyed school because it gave her an opportunity to interact with her peers. Although she struggled with some assignments, such as writing and mathematics, she loved to sing and draw, and Bengali was her favourite subject. Lopa observed that her daughter enjoyed being outside of her home and amongst people, or with her teacher who gave Namoni extra attention. As explained by the program officer, BRAC’s goal, after meeting Namoni, was “de-isolation.” This means bringing the child out of the home and into the school and surrounding community, and is achieved through meetings with parents and village leaders to create awareness and acceptance of the child as he or she is, and by making the school an agent of change. Often the effort to raise awareness is difficult, as discrimination against mental illness and disability is still rampant in Bangladesh. Yet for the parents, enrolling their special-needs children at a BRAC school instils hope and brings about instrumental shifts, not only in their children’s lives, but in their lives too. Since enrolling her child at the school,

Lopa's tensions with her husband have mellowed, her relationship with her in-laws has improved, and community support and concern for both her and Namoni have grown. Therefore, although inclusive education is in an embryonic stage in Bangladesh, practices of inclusion in every community, whether large or small, have brought about positive, empowering changes. In that sense, this story for me is a powerful way to set the stage for this dissertation. It is a way to show the clear connection of work being done in education, through the inclusive movement, for the betterment of society.

This is a dissertation on inclusive education (IE) that explores the role that children and indigenous knowledge can play in contextualizing, enriching, and moving forward the meanings and mechanisms of inclusion in Bangladesh. It is also about underlining some of the limitations that inhibit the ability of schools to achieve the benefits of inclusion, and indicating pathways that could potentially address those problems. IE in its most simplistic notion is a major, global, and growing response to ensuring that *all* children regardless of age, ability, ethnicity, or any other form of vulnerability, have access to appropriate, relevant, affordable, and effective education within their communities (Booth & Ainscow, 1998). Within inclusive systems, all stakeholders that create the make-up of any educational system are of equal importance, starting from theorists, scholars, researchers, policy-makers and administrative staff to head-teachers, teachers, parents, community members, and students. In my study, I have chosen to engage with two of these key stakeholders: students and a key Bengali educational theorist.

Setting the Backdrop

Education is not only a human right, but as Sen (1999) explains, it is vital for improving one's quality of life and eradicating poverty (Mahbub, 2007). Singal (2004) further states "that education is a catalyst for human development; it allows us to realize our creative potential, take responsibility for our own lives, and achieve our personal aims" (Mahbub, 2007, p. 1). Furthermore, education makes it possible for people to be responsible and informed citizens, and is a tool for "sustaining democracy" (UNESCO, 2004, as cited in Mahbub, 2007, p. 1). In

short, education is valued largely in light of the various desirable personal, economic, and political aims it serves (Brighouse, 2009). The world over, leaders are pushing for equitable, accessible, and localized educational measures that prepare young individuals to lead meaningful, successful lives, allowing them to fully reach the potential of their capabilities. However, reaching their potential depends on several different contextual factors, and literature in the area of education and learning confirms that massive gaps remain between the goals that are envisioned for the future of the youth and what is actually available for them to work with. A major breakthrough in the field of educational research and global educational movements in general, which is aimed towards filling some of these gaps, has been the push to make schools more inclusive.

Inclusive education aims to gradually change the whole education system, so that every school and every teacher is able to welcome any child (regardless of disability, talents, gender, poverty, ethnicity, etc.), and provide them with a good, quality education alongside their peers (Lei & Lewis, 2015). Starting at the school, IE is an approach that caters to the children's various learning needs and speeds as part of the curriculum (Stubbs, 2002). Going a step further, it is also a strategy that contributes to an inclusive society, one that enables all individuals, regardless of their gender, age, ability, ethnicity, or impairment, to participate in society (Stubbs, 2002). Therefore, in debates of IE, the participation and inclusion of the different and diverse voices of all stakeholders is key. This dissertation seeks to include two important voices in the development of inclusive education in Bangladesh: those of children and that of the respected and relevant Bengali scholar and educational theorist, Rabindranath Tagore. More specifically for Bangladesh, I aim to fill the current gap in the IE movement—a movement that is shrouded by hegemonic and un-contextualized Northern understandings of inclusion and education. My study, a qualitative visual-phenomenological inquiry, re-directs the focus to existing usable knowledge of a past indigenous scholar in conjunction with present-day children's voices. This, I suggest, is a necessary way forward in localizing and contextualizing IE, which currently faces a myriad of obstacles. In the next section, I address those obstacles by unpacking

relevant problematic aspects. I then continue by illustrating how my research addresses many of those challenges.

Problematic Aspects

Inclusive education.

Since its inception, inclusive education has evolved as a means of educating all children (Lehman & Lava, 2014). IE stands as a systematic reform in the structure of schools (Ferguson & Ferguson, 1998; Grenot-Scheyer, Fisher, and Staub, 2001); a large number of scholars agree that this method is part of a greater cultural shift towards building a more equal and just society (Artilles, Harris-Murri, & Rosenberg, 2006; Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Frattura & Capper, 2007; Kugelmass, 2004; Slee, 2001; Zollers, Ramanathan, & Yu, 1999). It calls on governments to prioritize and model principles of equity and social justice within civil society and make sure that no child is left out of education, regardless of the physical, mental, economic, or ethnic disadvantage he or she may have. The policy aims to change our perspective on *difference* and to value social diversity (Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2011; Ghosh & Galczynski, 2014). In other words, it is a movement to shift people's ideologies away from the tendency to view one another as "resources," and the poor, disabled, female and generally disadvantaged persons as "damaged goods."

IE also requires broadened parameters, so that education is not simply left within its traditional curricular framework of teaching and learning, nor as only the responsibility of teachers (Hill & Rahaman, 2013). It ensures that all children have access to education in their communities through formal, non-formal and/or community or home-based types of education initiatives (Stubbs, 2002). It understands that education starts from the home, with the very language we speak in our communities, and comprehends that education is displayed in the way we treat each other, and whether we are able to value each person as ends in themselves and not merely as units of human capital to be trained for sectors of the economy (Brighouse, 2009). Change at the institutional level is based on this idea of valuing diversity, as the premise of IE is that schools are about belonging,

nurturing, and educating all students regardless of their differences in ability (Kozleski, Artiles, Fletcher & Engelbrecht 2007). In an inclusive school, children are given equitable support so that every child can participate physically, socially, and academically with their peers (Pearce, 2009). This means that in an IE setting, the environment, curriculum, teaching methods, assessment and reporting need to be adjusted or differentiated according to the requirements of individual children.

International policy initiatives, such as the United Nation's *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, the *World Declaration on Education for All*, the *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education*, and the *Millennium Development Goals*, have all identified inclusive education as *the* movement of global educational reform, marking it as the key strategy to achieving the “education for all milestone” (Ahmmed, 2013 p. 1). Many nations have responded positively to the call for inclusive education, and through changes at levels of both policy and practice, communities and schools have started to provide access and education to more diverse populations. For example, in the Czech Republic, discrimination has traditionally kept the majority of Romany children confined to special schools. However, since the early 2000s, NGOs have challenged such attitudes by placing Romany children in mainstream schools, and even piloted educational programs for Romany adults (Stubbs, 2002). In southern India, disabled activists work with communities to promote social inclusion, wherein disabled children are trained as agents of change who are viewed as valuable community members (Stubbs, 2002). Inclusion, therefore, is the world's response to narrowing and bridging the gaps that have affected vast sections of the world's people, portrayed as burdensome, unreliable, or unworthy.

Like most South Asian countries, Bangladesh has ratified all the conventions and international declarations made on inclusive education. Bangladesh, a developing country with a population of 160.4 million in 2015,¹ operates one of the largest primary education systems in the world, with

¹ This statistic is from the 2015 World Population Review, which is taken from the most recent UN estimate (<http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/bangladesh-population/>).

approximately 17.5 million children (Ahsan, 2013). The country has achieved progress in some of the various educational arenas, such as the net enrolment rates (overall 98.7%, with boys at 97.2%, and girls at 99.4%), gender parity (1.02), and in strengthening the pre-primary education systems over the last few years (Ahsan, 2013). However, there are still more than 5 million “primary and lower-secondary age out-of-school children” in Bangladesh (UNICEF, 2014). Further, the opportunities for schooling are limited for certain specific groups, including children with special needs, children in remote areas (flood-prone areas, disaster-prone areas, etc.), children living in extreme poverty, children living in slum areas, and working children. The enrolment of children with disabilities in primary education is very low (less than 1% of the total student population), taking into account the total number of children—1,69,57,894—enrolled in primary schools (Directorate of Primary Education [DPE], 2011, as cited in Ahsan, 2013, p. 30-31).

In such a scenario, the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) has prioritized inclusive education as one of their key operations. The GOB has legislated several important policies, including the National Education Policy of 2010 and the National Child Policy (NCP) of 2011.² They have been supporting non-governmental organizations in Bangladesh, such as Plan Bangladesh, to develop an Inclusive Education Framework (Ahsan, 2013). In 2001, the UNESCO-Dhaka office developed a functional definition of inclusive education for the context of Bangladesh:

Inclusive education is an approach to improve the education system by limiting and removing barriers to learning and acknowledging individual children’s needs and potential. The goal of this approach is to make a significant impact on the educational opportunities of those: who attend school but who for different reasons do not achieve adequately and those who are not attending school but who could attend if families, communities, schools and education systems were more responsive to their requirements. (Ahuja & Ibrahim, 2006, p. 6)

² A detailed and more extensive review of educational policies (in chronological order) is presented in Chapter 3.

In Chapter 4, I unpack and critically analyze this definition in more detail, however, as is clear from this definition, in Bangladesh, a key step to bringing more children into schools, involves making schools more responsive to local needs.

Despite this recognition stemming from stakeholder and state commitment to the agenda of inclusive education, Bangladesh's post-independence reliance on patron-client relationships and public/private partnerships has weakened its ability to practice strong inclusive reform (Hill & Rahaman 2013). Taken back up and discussed in greater detail in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, it seems that the philosophical premise of inclusive education—which is based on the human rights agenda and views people as “ends in themselves, deserving of a standard of dignity based on the equal entitlement of all people to life, liberty, and security of person” (Hill & Rahaman, 2013, p. 5)—does not fit well with the contemporary realities of Bangladesh. For government policy to translate into practice, the first step is to identify the contradictions between the lived experience of “progress” and the rhetoric of policy (Hill & Rahaman, 2013). Therefore, considering the unified support for IE, the key now is to locate, analyze, and resolve the contradictions that continue to hinder IE from evolving at a greater pace and in a more nuanced way in Bangladesh.

Children's voices and rights.

The best way to identify and explore lived experiences of progress is to ask the local people. As argued by scholars across the globe, the most crucial stakeholders of education are the students. “Students are the only legitimate source for some of the answers we need for understanding and promoting school inclusion, because it is their world, not ours, that defines it,” explains Schnorr, (1990, p. 240). Due to “the principled approach to education” that defines IE, this source of information, is therefore, very valuable. Messiou (2008), goes a step further to highlight that for IE, no matter the context, children must be involved and engaged as important stakeholders who can freely speak about their educational experiences and make suggestions for change:

To this end, no matter what policies may say, no matter what resources are available and what changes have been made, those that really experience inclusive or exclusive practices are the children. Consequently, don't they have the right to be heard? (Messiou, 2002, p. 17)

Messiou's reflections and claims of other comparable scholars (Barker & Weller, 2003; Biggeri, Libanora, Mariani, & Menchini, 2006; Jones, 2005; Lewis and Porter, 2007; Messiou, 2008) are rooted in the emergent "new social studies of childhood" viewpoint. In this approach, children are understood as individuals with distinct identities, who independently create social worlds and possess unique voices (Greene & Hogan, 2005 ;Prout, 2002;). The new social studies of childhood approach is underpinned strongly by the United Nation's position on the rights of the child. Briefly here followed with more detailed discussions in Chapter 3:

Children's Rights can be seen as "[state parties ensuring] that a child who is capable of forming his or her own view should have the right to express these views freely on all matters affecting the child, and those views should be given weight in accordance with age and maturity" (Article 12 UNCRC 1989, as cited in Einarsdottir, 2005, p. 199).

Participation Rights can be seen as "children having the entitlement to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice" (Article 13.1 of the UNCRC 1989, as cited in Beazley et al., 2009, p. 370).

- Within participation rights, children have the right to provide their opinions (article 12); the freedom of expression using the medium of their choosing (article 13); the right to protection from forms of exploitation not addressed in other articles (article 36); and the right to the highest possible standards used in working with children (article 3.3) (Beazley et al., 2009).

But children's abilities to voice themselves and participate are rather limited in Bangladesh, which directs me towards the discussion of my second problematic aspect.

In Bangladesh being vocal is a risky and difficult task for most young people. Children and young people below the age of 18 constitute 47 % of the

population (Government of Bangladesh, 2007, as cited in Ahsan, 2009), but they rarely have the opportunity to express their opinions or to participate in decisions at home, at school, or in legal and administrative proceedings. Although the language and rhetoric of children's rights is quite prominent in Bangladesh (White, 2002), this is overshadowed by a culture that does not wholeheartedly value children's individuality and voices. Parents, teachers, civil society members, and even the children themselves are ambivalent about the fact that young people constitute a social group with a specific set of rights, especially the right to participation (Ahsan, 2009). Considered unsophisticated and immature, lacking the capacity for abstract thought, small children are considered to understand almost nothing: "*kichu bujhe na.*" Thus, parents, guardians, and teachers are touted as those who "can do no wrong" for "they *always* know what is best and for their children." In short, two crucial realities dominate the position of children in Bangladeshi society, "that they are powerless compared to adults, and that they are embedded in relational structures" (Ahsan, 2009, p. 393). This makes it difficult for practitioners and researchers to engage in work with children autonomously, especially if they are going into the field informed by a rights-based research approach or believe strongly in the new sociology of childhood framework.

Over the past two decades, some scholars (Siddiqui, 2001; White, 1992, 2002, 2007) have examined the tensions associated with imposing a child's rights ideology in the Bangladeshi context. Active engagement with children at school, home, workplaces and other research settings is a more recent trend (Hamid & Baldauf Jr., 2011; Woodhead, 2001). Further, the main reason for the limited number of research projects carried out with children and young people in Bangladesh is the lack of expertise in appropriate methodologies (Singh, 2003, as cited in Ahsan, 2009). In contrast to the number of studies carried out with adults in educational settings, the number of studies with children is alarmingly low.

My research addresses this discomforting gap. Like many scholars in the field, (Ahsan, 2009; Messiou, 2002; Messiou, 2008) I argue that research is the catalyst through which the lives children and young people live, stand the best

chance of being improved. In addition, in contexts where children's voices are discouraged, it is even more essential to stop and listen to their contributions, while always being careful not to harm the children in any way, or rob them of their protection in the name of participation, through reflexive and carefully planned research (Ahsan, 2009).

Purpose of the Study

My study has several purposes. *First*, it addresses the problematic state of inclusion in Bangladesh and proposes pathways to improve inclusive policies and practices in the country. I propose a framework within which we value and listen to the voices of the least heard in research and debates on inclusive education in Bangladesh—the children. In addition, I undertake an overview of the lessons relevant to inclusive education from Tagore's educational theories and distil their relevancy to children's perspectives. This highlights how contextually relevant Southern philosophies of education can aid in the development of inclusive education.

Second, through an exploration of children's voices, I set out to create a space for children to speak out. I am not asserting that this experience will change them or their lives, neither am I proclaiming that it will make them more vocal, or abate complicated feelings. However, what it will do is allow them to speak freely on a topic they already know much about. It may even go as far to instill in some children the confidence to believe in their own voice. Furthermore, through the exchange of voices between participant and researcher—insider and outsider, child and adult—the importance of children's input in education, especially inclusion, will be re-enforced. This is essential if we want to empower children in Bangladesh and transcend the idea that listening to Bangladeshi children has no value. While research on children's voices in Bangladesh is fraught with complications, the most prominent philosopher of Bengal, Rabindranath Tagore, himself advocated the importance of children's voices at school. His values and teachings provide solid justification for why children's voices are so necessary in schools and why listening to them is so relevant to the context of Bengal. This leads me to the *third* purpose, which is to highlight the

ways in which IE today can benefit from retracing its steps towards indigenous educational knowledge, and, for the purposes of my work, that belonging to Tagore.

According to Tagore, each student has a distinctive character of his or her own, and any education system should attend to his or her distinctiveness carefully, thereby enabling each to blossom in his or her own way (O'Connell, 2010). Born to an illustrious land owning family of Bengal in 1861, Tagore was largely homeschooled, as he despised the rigidity of formal school systems. As a result, he believed in a system of education that would not stifle the free and creative minds of children, but rather let them grow at their own pace. As will be illustrated in greater depth in later chapters (4,7), Tagore's philosophy provides tremendous grounding for the realization of inclusive education in Bangladesh. As explained by Mukherjee (2015, p. 46):

The schools Tagore built in rural Santiniketan were a self-reflexive and critical response against indigenous inequalities, as well as "apartheid" colonial policies perpetuating segregation and exclusion. Tagore invited not just Indians across ethnic, religious, social class, caste and gender divide to attend his school; but he also invited students and scholars from abroad to his school to study and teach.

Nevertheless, Tagore's voice is almost invisible in debates on education in Bangladesh today and his teachings remain absent from mainstream educational thought. In agreement with Ranjan Ghosh (2015), I re-emphasize that it is high time we discard "the narrow confines of hitherto well-encrusted models of understanding on [Tagore]" (p. 399) and stop invisibilizing him in debates of education. Tagore is famous in Bangladesh for his poetry, novels, plays, and songs (even for his paintings and copious letters) but no longer should we focus on those at the expense of ignoring the rich body of writing that explores the philosophy and principles of pedagogy and education (Ghosh, 2015). This is especially necessary at a time when those ideals can inform and strengthen the evolution of education in Bangladesh. Further, as Mukherjee (2015, p. 46) explains, drawing from Ghosh, Naseem, and Vijn (2010), Tagore is an important

“indigenous native intellectual³,” a contemporary of John Dewey and intellectual forerunner of Paulo Freire. Therefore, his educational work needs to be considered seriously to understand the challenges of inclusive educational reforms within postcolonial contexts of the Indian subcontinent.

My *fourth*, and last purpose is to demonstrate, in practice, reflexive research mechanisms with children in the Bangladeshi context. As explained by Krumer-Nevo and Siddi (2012, p. 301), “[Reflexivity is] when the author turns to her own navel, metaphorically and literally, bringing to the forefront her own feelings, experiences, and history, she demonstrates her processes of interpretation.” Reflexivity was key for me as my research largely depended on identifying and exploring the lived experiences of progress, in relation to children and inclusive education in a richly nuanced, qualitative manner. It helped me to focus my positioning in the study, which is a qualitative visual-phenomenological inquiry at two nominally inclusive BRAC primary schools: school “U” and school “M.” Alongside reflexivity, my project is rooted in a social constructivist worldview, which allowed me to utilize a range of qualitative and visual methods in the field. It was necessary for me to interact with the participants in multiple ways and through numerous methods, in order to successfully answer my research questions.

Research Questions

This research is driven by the following questions:

What do children in nominally⁴ inclusive primary schools operated by the NGO BRAC express when asked what they like and dislike about their school?

Sub-question 1. What central motifs,⁵ with regard to IE, emerge from children’s pictorial, spoken, and written perspectives?

³ “Indigenous” means originating or occurring naturally in a particular place, of being “native”. There is a complex relationship between this concept and Tagore’s work although Tagore is undoubtedly an indigenous native intellectual. I have utilized the word “indigenous” extensively to refer to Tagore and his thoughts throughout this dissertation. However, in Chapter 7, I unpack some of the complexities associated with using this word.

⁴ Nominally means the act of someone or something self-identifying with the claim that it makes about itself. In that sense, accordingly, BRAC as an organization has committed itself to inclusive education. An explanation of what that commitment entails is given in Chapter 1.

⁵ Motifs here refer to distinctive features or dominant thematic ideas.

Sub-question 2. If the children's voices (derived through data collection) are distilled through Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy of education, how can lessons be offered to better contextualize IE in Bangladesh and, more specifically, in BRAC?

With respect to the research questions, it is essential to first clarify a few points.

The reason I chose BRAC schools for my study is due to the fact that BRAC is a sustainable NGO and its schools are a lifeline for a large population of children in Bangladesh. BRAC has several core programs, education being one of their central provisions. In addition, the organization is continuously working to reach out to greater numbers of disadvantaged and destitute young people. Covering all 64 districts (*zilas*) of Bangladesh, as of December 2013, the Inclusive Education Unit had enrolled 9051 physically disabled, 8266 visually impaired, 4316 hearing impaired, 21 155 speech impaired, 3260 intellectually disabled, and 213 multiply disabled children at BRAC's primary, pre-primary, and ethnic minority schools (BRAC Internal Report, 2013). The total number of special-needs graduates stood at 161 787 in December 2013 (BRAC Internal Report, 2013). In their inclusive program, BRAC does not exclusively focus on children with disabilities; however, as highlighted on the NGO's website and reiterated by Senior Manager of the BRAC Inclusive Education Unit, Limia Dewan, overall BEP's target is to:

bring education to millions of children, particularly those affected by violence, displacement or discrimination and extreme poverty in rural areas as well as urban slums...areas that are seasonally submerged under water...[there are] boat schools....underprivileged children...from small ethnic communities [to] those with special needs. (BRAC, 2014)

The organization's philosophy of inclusion is that:

Inclusion is an approach, which addresses the needs of all learners in ordinary classroom situations, including learners with special needs, indigenous children, children with disabilities, girl children and poor children. (Charanji, 2005:2; Dewan, p.c., 19/04/2006)

The purpose of this research is not to evaluate BRAC's philosophies on education and inclusion, but rather to explore children's experiences in the BRAC primary school setting. I chose to work at the primary level due to the fact that it currently

has the highest number of special needs children enrolled, in comparison to other levels.

In addition, it is essential to clarify the definition of a child and who is considered a child in my research. Bangladeshi policy documents, at one time, considered anyone below 14 to be a child (Ahuja & Ibrahim, 2006). More recently, the GOB's 2004-2009 NPA, which is more in line with the UNCRC, states anyone below 18 years of age (Ahsan, 2013). Thus in my research, "child" refers to any individual under the age of 18. However, I agree with Beazley et. al (2009), that childhood and everyone under 18 is not a homogenous phenomenon; 0 to 18 is perhaps the most heterogeneous stage in the life cycle of a person. I am also aware that the age of a child is mutable in Bangladesh. The system of birth registration is ineffective (Blanchet, 2001), and parents often give an incorrect age when registering their children in schools (Banks, 2007). There is no perceived social need for birth registrations because child development in the cultural context of Bangladesh is viewed as a natural process unrelated to chronological age (Blanchet, 1996). Thus, it can be expected that some of the reported ages of the children I worked with are incorrect by a year or two. Nevertheless, all participants were below 18, and fit my pre-determined description of a "child."

Essential Underpinnings

In addition to these points of clarification, there is a multifaceted framework that underpins this study. When I use the word *underpin* here, I mean that these ideas, and how they're applied, create a form of awareness in my study and play an essential role in how I understand, discuss, and present the material at hand, whether in the literature or the findings. However, this is not an analytical framework upon which the findings are distilled. That differentiation is crucial.

Of philosophy.

While this dissertation is about inclusive education and children's voices, at the same time it is an analysis and critique of IE as it is currently practiced and

promoted in Bangladesh. I conduct this critique drawing from previous research conducted in Bangladesh and other countries of the South where the need for high quality education for all is most urgent. Questions of educational quality can only be articulated by reflecting on the purpose and aspirations education serves in any given context. This reflection, however, often gets lost in the global rhetoric of inclusion. While the thrust of the Millennium Development Goals⁶ (MDG) and the global Education for All (EFA) movement are obviously important aspects of IE, pushing governments such as the GOB to prioritize IE (Ahsan, 2013), it is far from clear whether they actually promote the sorts of personal, economic, and political values that inclusive education is intended to achieve. For instance, critics of EFA have argued that, in practice, the implementation of the MDGs, particularly in the developing world, often works to undermine human freedom, well-being, economic potential, democratic participation and agency (Kalyanpur, 2011). As Hill and Rahaman (2013, p. 3) explain, enormous amounts of capital have been loaned to Bangladesh by global donors to make the country a “middle income nation” by 2012. However, while education is in fact an integral part of this endeavour, the global dominance of neoliberal forms of rationality have deeply impacted Bangladesh’s governmental structures. In addition, the on-going friction between rival political parties, practice of patron-client politics, and prominence of instrumentalist mentalities have reduced education to a means of maximizing market efficiency (Hill & Rahaman, 2013). Children who do not fit into the “maximum ability bracket,” are not prioritized and often drop out. Further, despite the fact that international aid has produced economic benefits by some measures, the distribution of these benefits remains radically inequitable, with the poorest and most vulnerable (e.g. disabled children) receiving the short end of the bargain and, consequently,

⁶ The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) launched in 2000 recently “expired” and as a result were reformed and reframed to “The Sustainable Development Goals” (SDGs) during the United Nations Summit on Post 2015 (held in New York from 25-27 September 2015). However, as much of the literature I refer to pre-dates this summit and discusses the UN’s functions in relation to MDGs, I have remained within discussing only the MDGs in my dissertation. Further, governments across nations have only recently started since September 2015 to finalize their agreement on the SDGs.

remaining excluded. Therefore, I agree with Brighouse (2009) who explains that distributive aims are among the fundamental philosophical aims to be considered in IE, especially in a scenario where education has been and still is driven by a market model. My discussions in Chapter 2, furthers these criticisms by commenting on issues such as instrumentalism and neoliberal politics. I do this to cast doubt on the conclusions that: the MDGs of EFA are effective in promoting, through the implementation of IE, participation in schools, and reducing exclusion by contributing to the ongoing development of democracy in such contexts. I question whether the dominant mechanisms of IE as a global phenomenon actually perform as intended in promoting locally valued ideals and goals of IE. Central to this discussion is the apparent disconnect between IE as a mechanism of democratic liberation, and the actual social, economic, political, and historical interests that have continued to deflect the liberatory potential of inclusive education in practice. Moreover, this discussion is especially pertinent to the topic of my dissertation, as it has led me to unpack the expansion of IE globally and make a case for why it is so essential to excavate lost Southern voices on inclusionary teaching methods. The movement for IE needs to be embedded in a series of contexts, extending from the socio-political context of the broader society, through to the local community, family, school, and classroom (Mitchell, 2005). Alongside the global push for IE, a thorough examination of the historical and indigenous knowledge's of education should be an integral part of its contextualization in Southern countries.

Rights and voice-based.

The analysis of inclusive education in this dissertation is also informed by a strong commitment to children's rights. As explained by (Beazley et. al, 2009), children's rights are not separate from human rights, and the latter is not superior to the former. Rather, forwarding children's rights is essential to protecting human rights. Although none of my *other* discussions in this study is dependent on it, my stance on this does frame my need to legitimize my work with children in a context where such work may not be appreciated. The second point of clarification is that my discussion here does not address all of the various

different rights of the child. Rather, I focus singularly on the issue of children's voices, in other words, their participation rights, which is defined earlier in this chapter. My stance is that "...there is really no such thing as the 'voiceless'. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard" (Roy 2004, p.1) Hence, I am mostly concerned with changing the unfortunate fact that children remain uninvolved and unheard in matters that directly concern their lives. What I want for Bangladeshi children, as elucidated by Jensen (2007, p. 118-119), is that they be able to:

...have opportunities to articulate their views, be listened to, and be respected for those views, and in which they have a chance to influence decisions about their lives, communities, and the larger society...in process, children may challenge decisions made by people with more authority than themselves [and in the process they become social participants with agency].

In this dissertation, I have utilized the words "voice" and "participation" interchangeably to explain this type of active participation. More detailed discussions on the epistemological roots of the new social studies of childhood, participation, children's rights, and methodological issues of unearthing voice, are carried out in Chapters 3 and 5.

Narratives, multiple voices, and reflexivity.

Narratives capture the affective and cognitive domains of individuals by focusing on their thoughts and emotions. Leavy (2009) emphasizes that it is important that the act of scholarly writing is not only significant to the academy, but is also unified and resonant with who we are as individuals. For me, in order for my writing to be resonant with who I am, certain aspects are key. That is why I begin this chapter with a narrative. Furthermore, this narrative allowed me to position myself more closely to my participants. Everyone who interacted with me in my research endeavour brought his or her own stories into the "research zone." Whether they were child participants or gatekeepers, it was through listening and relating to each other's stories that we were able to unlock and gain access to each other's knowledge and expertise. The few narrative episodes that are dispersed in this dissertation were generated using the method of

ghostwriting-drawing on both participant voice and my own interpretation of casual conversations (recorded with permission and followed up with prompt reflective memos) I had with children, parents, teachers, and adults at the schools. These casual conversations were significantly important and chosen to generate the narratives, because they were not a part of my other methodological tools and often resulted due to a spontaneous happening or unplanned activity. They help bring to the surface novel and interesting issues. In Appendix I, I have given the process used in generating a narrative.

The second “key” to my research and writing process is my understanding that scholarly writing should involve acknowledgement that research is not about representing “absolute” truth. It is about capturing the multiple voices and perspectives in a contextually framed situation and acknowledging that those voices interchange, override and exist in accordance with each other (Denzin, 1997). In other words, as explained by Rambo-Ronai (1995, p. 396), it is often an act of presenting “layered accounts.” According to Rambo-Ronai, a layered account “is a narrative form designed to loosely represent to, as well as produce for, the reader, a continuous dialectic of experience, emerging from the multitude of reflexive voices that simultaneously produce and interpret a text” (p. 396). It is similar to the *durée* (Schutz, 1970, as cited in Rambo-Ronai, 1995), or stream of consciousness as experienced in everyday life, which does not contain “the understanding of the world” (p. 396), but rather impressionistic sketches that build upon our layers of experience.

The topic of *durée* leads me to the third key of self-resonance in my writing process: the act of *reflexivity*. As explained by Leavy (2009), in order for scholarly writing to be holistic, it must not only address the nexus of epistemology-theory-methods, but also the relationship the researcher has with his or her work. Reflexivity is a form of writing that acts against the authoritative stance of the text or researcher.

Namoni’s story illustrates, for example, my storytelling style. Through the way I framed the narrative, and in my choice of texts, words, facts, and figures, one can decipher my relationship with my research, field, and participants. The tone of the story, for example, says much about my feelings about Namoni having

to wait months before her condition was diagnosed. In another paragraph, my word choice and tone hint towards my bias and admiration of BRAC breaking down boundaries of exclusion. In short, reflexivity in my writing process, in which my voice, placement, biases and understandings play an important role in my representation of this dissertation, is a theme that will reappear throughout the dissertation, diffusing and disseminating into the academic text including my methodological discussions.

Rationale

This dissertation examines inclusive education through children's voices and Rabindranath Tagore's educational thought. In this section I explain my rationale for my interest in this topic, starting with my curiosity for IE, then my rationale for engaging with it the way I did.

I am a 33-year-old Muslim female who is Bangladeshi by birth. I grew up in a moderately conservative family in Dhaka. My father, although traditional in many ways, always aimed to provide his three children with the best education possible. Thus, in 1991, at the age of 9, I was enrolled in the American International School (AIS/D), which was considered the "best" school in Bangladesh at the time. AIS/D followed American educational principles and hired mostly international staff, the majority of whom were from the USA. One of the basic principles that guided our education at AIS/D was the idea of "wholesome" education. As a result, we were not only exposed to academic knowledge, extra curricular activities, and international exchange opportunities, but were required to complete community service hours. For example, Habitat for Humanity, Amnesty International, and Service Learning Days were popular at our school. My interest in teaching and inclusive education began during one of those service-oriented tasks that required us to work with disadvantaged children from the streets of Dhaka.

In the eleventh grade, I worked in a service program where I was part of a team of ten students who taught street children Math, English, Art and Physical Education. These were children from some of the most impoverished locales of Dhaka. They attended NGO-run informal schools, as they had no access to formal

schooling systems. Most of our sessions were held on site at the children's various schools, but on Saturdays when we taught swimming, the children were brought to the AIS/D campus. Once I introduced one of the pupils I was teaching to my then 10-year-old brother, who also attended AIS/D. Soon after the introduction, the young boy who I had now been teaching for about two months, quietly, with hesitation said to me, "*Apa...issh Allah amake apnar bhai banaito?*" (Sister...I wish...God had created me as your brother). I wondered, for a moment, if that had anything to do with me, but found out momentarily that he wished he could be my brother to be able to attend, in his words, this "*chokchoka boro*" (shiny/immaculate and big school). At the time, I did not well understand the subtle forms of post-colonial hegemony, coupled with entrenched and direct classifications of class and wealth that divide Bengali society, which impacted how we were all functioning and present in this very "charitable" social initiative taken on by AIS/D. However, it did spark my interest in why children, through no fault of their own, experience educational exclusion and discrimination. That incident planted a seed that grew into my desire to study education, specifically inclusive education, in later years.

Once I found a footing in inclusive education—first through a couple of lectures in my educational psychology class during my undergraduate in Communication Studies and later during my Masters in Education at the University of Cambridge—I discovered that focusing on children's voices in inclusive education resonated best with me. This resonance stems from my struggle to find my own voice.

The voice to communicate our wishes and beliefs is an important tool for individuals of all ages, cultures, and contexts. This was emphasized in my American education at AIS/D. In so many of my experiences, as a Bangladeshi female growing up in a moderately conservative family, my voice regarding important life decisions went ignored and silenced. I never understood why my teachers at school valued my opinions and listened to me so much more than my parents did. I did not understand why at home my self-assertion was always viewed negatively. What I did comprehend, however, was the frustration that resulted from this suppression. As a teenager, I remember experiencing

frustration for months on end for suppressing my wishes and not having any courage to stop doing so. This fuelled my interest in critically analyzing the issue of voice itself, what it means to be vocal and to what extent that is even possible for a child in that context.

My interest in Tagore first came after my arrival at McGill University. By that time, I had read widely on IE, but was saddened by the dearth of Southern voices in Bangladeshi IE debates. This was and continues to cause not only academic unbalance, but, in my opinion, leaves gaping holes in the evolution of IE in Bangladesh. Through my two supervisors' recommendations, I therefore started reading on the educational theories of Southern scholars. It did not take me long to find the legacy of work left by Tagore, but what surprised me the most was that since my childhood, although I had been trained in *Rabindra-Sangeet* (Tagore-Songs), while in Bangladesh, I was never exposed to Tagore as an educationalist. As the most respected Bengali scholar, Tagore's works on education need to be revived in the Bangladeshi context. That is my main rationale for choosing his work through which to distil children's voices. Further, his philosophy on education and educational practice will highly enrich the movement of IE in Bangladesh by emphasizing the need for whole-school development. To emphasize, I believe that IE is about whole-school improvement, wherein children of all ranges of ability and strata are empowered and engaged through curricula that are built to cater to their needs. It is not about delivering education to one specific need-based group, but understanding that meeting the needs of the most vulnerable in the classroom will be the key to the success of the rest of the pupils.

Contributions and Implications

The topic of pupil's perspectives on inclusive education, distilled through Tagore's philosophies of education, is meaningful and makes a significant contribution to four main areas of scholarship: inclusive education, children's voices in Bangladesh, Tagore scholarship, and reflexive research procedures with children. In addition, it has implications for educational policies.

Contributions to IE scholarship.

This study contributes to the scholarship of IE on a micro and macro level. At the micro-level, the study is significant as it illuminates, unpacks, and critically examines the context of inclusive education in Bangladesh through the lens of children. More importantly, the contribution it makes is that it prioritizes and centralizes the voices of children in inclusive education—the least heard stakeholders of the IE debate in Bangladesh. Furthermore, given that it is a qualitative study, which cannot be generalized but rather particularized, it is “timed” well for the context in question, since in 2004 the GOB launched a study involving young people in the development of the National Plan of Action for Children (NPA) 2004-2009. The NPA, first unveiled in June 2005, supported the idea of children as active, “meaning-producing beings” (Young & Barrett, 2001, p. 141). One of the main programming goals of the NPA 2004-2009 was to establish that, “children are active participants in defining their needs, developing suitable programming responses, implementing the interventions, and evaluating their success” (Ministry of Women and Children’s Affairs, 2005, p. 10). Going further, in the years 2012 and 2013, Plan International Bangladesh conducted a comprehensive and large-scale study, which aimed to develop an effective, participatory, and inclusive primary education implementation model for Bangladesh. In their statement of purpose, Plan International Bangladesh articulated that the study aimed to develop this model by involving all “credible” stakeholders in the conversation of inclusion, including discussions with disabled children on their perspectives and understandings of inclusion. Hence, my study, which does an in-depth exploration focusing solely on children’s voices in the inclusive setting, could not be conducted at a better time for the context of Bangladesh.

This study is further significant for the context of IE in Bangladesh because it aims to unearth indigenous voices in the largely Northern⁷ playing field of inclusion. In Bangladesh, the notion is that IE is a Northern concept. Caused by the systematic erosion of indigenous education in the global South,

⁷ Here Northern refers largely to Western, more economically powerful nations. See next footnote for further explanations of the “North.”

and the dearth of knowledge in this area, practitioners of IE in the country have come to believe that inclusion is a Northern concept (Alur, 2001). They think that IE needs to be contextualized, amended, adopted, and adapted for the country context because it is something that “originated in Western countries” (Alur, 2001, p. 288). In its most formal rhetorical sense, IE is in fact a Northern concept. However, I see a strong link between what IE is supposed to be today and what was practiced in many schools across Bengal, especially Tagore’s schools, years ago, such as valuing children’s opinions, allowing flexibility of curriculum, and studying in open spaces without confinement. This is why this study makes the rare attempt of linking and distilling children’s voices through the philosophy of Tagore to bring to the forefront a conversation between the two and create a space within which they support one another and bolster the idea that inclusive education is indeed not just a Northern concept in Bangladesh, but embedded within the fabric of our educational history.

At the macro-level, this study is also significant outside of the realm of IE in Bangladesh, in that it contributes to the growing body of knowledge on inclusive education. It critically analyzes the development of IE in countries of the South and explores the complexities surrounding multi-lateral educational movements developed across neoliberal and often nouveau-imperial North-South⁸ interstate relations. Further, it locates the niche space of debates on inclusive education, wherein more Southern voices and philosophies related to IE are necessary, and suggests that in order to tackle the challenges of today, we must not forget the lessons of the past. It makes a contribution to IE scholarship because it bridges two consistently ignored but significantly important players in the field of inclusion (one from the past and the other from the present) constructively and definitively to illustrate what lessons for the organic evolution of IE in Bangladesh can be offered.

⁸ Throughout this dissertation, I frequently utilize the words “North” and “South” to refer to clusters of nations. The difference between these clusters of countries of the North and South is not necessarily a geographical one, as two rich industrialized countries, Australia and New Zealand, lie south of the equator. Instead, North and South refer to a major difference in the availability of resources and in standards of living. Also, while most of the countries of the South share a colonial past, countries of the North share a dominant position in international developments and are more industrially developed (Singal, 2004).

Contributions to the scholarship of children's voices in Bangladesh.

This study contributes to the scholarship of children's voices in a few ways. The first contribution is that it illustrates in practice how to create safe spaces for children to speak in schools in Bangladesh. Second, it highlights that Bangladeshi children too have great insight on their own experiences and are able to contribute meaning to their own experience of schooling.

This study contributes to unpacking the important role IE can play towards creating a safe space in which children can exercise some of their rights, especially their "right to voice." Living in the shadows of their older family members, and within the hegemonic power structures of patriarchal family systems, children in Bangladesh often remain voiceless. However, an institution based on an inclusive model can illustrate to others in that specific community how children's input at the school can improve, change, and forge an effective learning space. There are arguments in the field that Bangladesh is not yet ready for this type of full, "thick" inclusion, but only for thin inclusion or integration (Hill & Rahaman, 2013). However, a call for integration, in my opinion, circumvents all the recent development Bangladesh has made towards inclusive education, wherein goals and objectives of IE have finally been aligned towards eliminating discrimination and providing *all* socio-economically disadvantaged children quality education—whether they be children from the street, with disabilities, or from ethnic minorities. One of the main priorities of the most recent Primary Education Program III (PEDP III) is quality in education. In this kind of a scenario where policy transformation is slowly creating space to include those traditionally excluded, the study at hand is a timely one. I say this specifically because, through the study's methodological applications of active engagement with children in inclusive learning spaces, I show how children can comfortably share their experiences. More importantly, however, I try to show how the school can be that first place where hegemonic tendencies to see children as immature beings can be challenged.

Once the idea that children are immature beings is left behind, one can see more clearly how capable they are of making a meaningful contribution. In hindsight of having collected my data and spent time with children in the field for

months, I saw that with some patience and probing, it is possible to receive nuanced, deep, and complex responses from children. They are able to communicate the motives behind their decisions, and also articulate their likes and dislikes with valid reasons. There were some instances when the children's responses were inconsistent. However, more importantly than focusing on the fact that they were changing their minds over time, which adults do too but with more caution, I focused on the extent of their engagement during certain methodological activities and absorbed the richness these experiences provided. The most important step in this process was my ability to be patient, give children time to think, speak slowly, repeat, and rephrase questions as and when required. In this course, it was important that I shift my focus from the "end-result" of my research to the "process." This helped me see the meaningful and growing abilities of children's engagement. Therefore, the contribution in this respect would be to highlight how this small shift in the research process really opens the doors to being able to see the capabilities of children more clearly, not only in answering questions, but also in their ability to engage with, help, and take the research project forward. The richness of the study, then, is derived not only from the results, but also from the process, which is an essential and central aspect of any qualitative, reflexive research project.

Contributions to Tagore scholarship.

The linking of Tagore's philosophy of education to IE is a novel area of research. Only a handful of scholars, namely Mukherjee (2014), based in Australia and O'Connell (2002,⁹ 2010), based in Canada, have started tackling this topic. For the context of Bangladesh, this study is quite singular. Several Tagore scholars (Anwaruddin, 2013; Ghosh, 2015; Samuel, 2010) have critically examined and applied his educational lessons for international, religious, cosmopolitan, aesthetic, and multi-cultural education and religion, as there has been a surge of growing interest in Tagore's teachings over the past decade. However, combining emergent themes of children's voices from the field of

⁹ This source, a book named *Rabindranath Tagore: The Poet As Educator* by Kathleen O'Connell was reprinted in 2012, however, I decided to maintain the original publication date of 2002.

inclusive practice in Bangladesh with Tagore's educational thoughts for the contextualization of IE is a completely novel way of looking at and applying Tagore's scholarship. It is novel and significant first, of all, because it is not only about dissecting and critically examining Tagore scholarship, which has already been done at greater length by other scholars, but rather looking at the prospective application of that scholarship in direct ways with emergent voices from the field. It is also novel because Tagore himself advocated children's autonomy, voice, and participation, but his work has rarely been linked directly and practically to what children have to say about their schooling experiences. Therefore, on the one hand, it is an attempt to show all those attributes Tagore advocated for children in "action" and create space for children to voice themselves autonomously and participate. On the other hand, one of the novel aspects of this study is that the analysis is dependent on emergent findings from the field. Emergent findings cannot be predicted; this makes the application of the findings to Tagore scholarship nuanced, layered and complex. The findings can reveal that the children and Tagore could potentially agree or disagree, and it would be interesting to see how those gaps can still be bridged for the improved contextualization of IE in Bangladesh today.

Contributions to reflexive research procedures.

Monira Ahsan (2009) produced one of the few pieces on conducting research through measures of reflexivity in Bangladesh. Utilizing the UNCRC's universal research methodology in her PhD dissertation, she problematized the issue of whether the UNCRC can provide a universal framework for viewing children as socially active individuals with agency and voice in the context of Southern countries. She suggests that perhaps it cannot and, in Bangladesh, full and voluntary participation of children in research is difficult due to adult domination and a strong network of gatekeepers. Further, she emphasizes how perhaps conducting rights-based research with young children makes them more vulnerable and robs them of their protection in the name of participation. However, from my past experiences of fieldwork in Bangladesh, I would argue that the instances of joy, ownership, and creativity experienced by participating

children, despite them being dominated by their elders, cannot be denied. I recognize that the terrain is a difficult one but research in Bangladesh in which children are central players should not be restricted based on the fear of their protection being robbed. It is high time to listen to their voices. Moreover, through the practice of methodological reflexivity, as conducted by Ahsan (2009) herself, the dilemmas of “protection” can be countered. For this, reflexivity has to be practiced by the researcher through the fieldwork process in a way that he or she always remains aware of his or her biases; through detachment and internal dialogue the research process can be scrutinized and made more child friendly, fair, egalitarian and aware of child protection. The adults around the children can and should also be involved in the research process, so they see the essential utility of the child’s voice. Furthermore, it is possible for the researcher to bring them together with careful consideration of the multifaceted playing field and the relationships that govern any research terrain. My work is part of that vein of research, especially because I intend to show in “practice” the “employment” of reflexivity in a research process in which the engagement of young people is a core value. Therefore, my thesis adds to the few pieces that attempt to make a methodological contribution in showing how reflexivity can be useful while doing research with young people in Bangladesh. This is an especially important contribution, as it is a way to encourage further work with children, which is all too often avoided by scholars on the grounds of it being too messy and complicated.

Policy implications for Bangladesh.

In addition to contributing to the research and literature on inclusive education, my study has direct implications for IE policy in Bangladesh. As pointed out by Ahsan (2013), who conducted a national baseline study on the current status of IE, the future of strengthening IE policy in Bangladesh, depends on targeting several key areas. These include:

- Developing *holistic* inclusion policies at the national and school levels (this is discussed in more detail in Chapter 8).

- Addressing the values of inclusive education in the teacher-training preparatory exams for primary school (the Diploma in Primary Education, DPED). Also, carefully revising the current in-service training manuals devised by the Directorate of Primary Education. These documents are currently based heavily on the medical model, but what is needed for the training of schoolteachers, teacher educators, and education officers are other humanistic models.
- The need to develop “some experimental inclusive primary schools” (Ahsan, 2013, p. 68), which would serve as models for other schools. Some currently exist. Those can be improved and others can be developed.

My study can contribute and make a constructive difference to each one of these key areas.

The dissemination of Tagore’s philosophy of education, especially with the incorporation of children’s voices, has the potential to strengthen the evolution of IE in Bangladesh in a holistic manner. This is because Tagore’s philosophy addresses education in greater humanistic terms. It moves the focus of education towards whole-school development, wherein the emphasis is on methods and mechanisms of *how to* enable the creative potential of each diverse child, by valuing their strengths in an organic and flexible learning environment. Furthermore, it strengthens the place and position of children’s voices in schools and even in curriculum development, which is key to making school improvements. Therefore, it provides two differing angels on educational policy in Bangladesh, which is still very much focused on filling the “gaps” to address individually problematic target groups (i.e. children with disabilities and ethnic minorities), and not on whole-school improvement strategies, rarely including children’s voices in the development of policy. A shift towards Tagore would not only introduce these two new angels to policy, but also iron out some of the gaps that dot the messy and fragmented special, integrated, and inclusive schooling systems. Perhaps it could direct *all* schools to make steps towards being more

inclusive, not only in enrolment, but with a direct focus on educational culture, policy, and practice, in order for them to be better versions of themselves.

The next goal, an important aspect of strengthening policy in Bangladesh, is regarding teacher development, both preparatory and in-service. Again, as this study will clarify, for the children, the teacher's role is central to their performance and learning in school. Children who are vulnerable require greater understanding, care, and support from their teachers. This point has been established by the children themselves, as the findings will later on suggest. In this sense, Tagore's teachings on the role of the *guru* (teacher) can highly impact the developing and evolving role of the "inclusive teacher" in Bangladeshi training policies and manuals. In other words, in the DPE curriculum or the in-service training manuals, the role of the schoolteacher as defined by Tagore can be incorporated. This can be done to integrate not only more "inclusive" understandings of instruction, but generally to introduce teacher trainees to the myriad qualities of a real *guru*, which should be the ultimate goal of those in this profession, especially those aiming to lead the inclusive classrooms of the future. In Bangladesh, for example, teachers, as observed in pre-service and in-service training workshops, often complain about the fact that "low pay" holds back their desired performance. In other words, they state that because they are paid a meagre salary less should be expected from them. This type of deficit thinking is a major roadblock to achieving inclusion and it is something that can be countered, for example, through an in-depth and careful study and appreciation of Tagore's definition of tutelage, of being a *guru*: how to develop meaningful relationships in the classroom and, most importantly, to understand the large emotional quotient and sacrifice required by this profession. Teaching in impoverished localities of the world has often suffered from being viewed as a "second-option, easy-vocation," taken up by individuals who could not do much else with their lives or taken up by women who had limited employment opportunities and are efficient at handling children (Singal, 2004, p. 56). However, that is far from being the case. For educators leading the inclusive classrooms of tomorrow, teaching certainly cannot only be that and, as mentioned by Tagore, will require every ounce of an individual's emotional, mental, and physical effort. These types

of values need to be integrated into the new DPED curriculum, which was last amended in 2001, and is currently in need of revision.

Lastly, as pointed out by Ahsan (2013), policy strengthening will require some solid evidence from a few model inclusive schools that operate in order to show, rather than tell, how inclusive aspects should be incorporated in school culture, policy, and practice. This is a very tangible and practical way to approach IE in its overall development in Bangladesh, and is certainly an area where all the lessons derived from this study can be of use. For instance, at such a school, which the government can establish in any locality of Bangladesh, children can be given more autonomy and leadership opportunity and space to voice themselves, as did Tagore in his schools. Local resources can be better used; the natural world itself can become a pedagogical tool. Specifically, to address “difference” in the classroom, the curriculum can allow children with varying and special abilities to introduce what they would like to learn in a day of activities and lessons can be designed more around engagement, rather than achievement. Government curricula can provide structure, but tools, treatment, policy, and overall school culture can be modeled after Tagore’s *ashram* schools, which have been considered a model and the best New Schools of the orient (Paz, 2013). However, I am not suggesting that Tagore’s teachings be the only mode of instruction at these schools, rather that they be incorporated into what Ahsan (2013) suggest: training teachers to have more positive attitudes, helping to change current stringent teaching and assessment systems, and incorporating more child-friendliness and greater participation by the students.

Dissertation Structure: What to Expect Along the Way

This dissertation is divided into eight chapters. In this first chapter, I started the discussion with a narrative of an experience that was partially told and partially encountered in the field in order to add nuance, depth, and meaning to the mechanisms of IE in Bangladesh. A few other narratives are presented in the dissertation and have been separated with [***] from the academic text. In the rest of this chapter, I reviewed the background of my study and discussed the problems associated with inclusive education and children’s voices in Bangladesh.

I explained how my research aims to address some of these problems and outlined my research questions and goals. After that, I provided my rationale for conducting this study and situated myself within it. Lastly, I outlined the scholarly and policy implications of this inquiry.

In Chapter 2, I review the literature on the development of inclusive education in both countries of the North and South, critically reflecting on issues such as instrumentalism and neoliberalism in inclusive education. I have approached inclusion with a postmodern stance, which has allowed the discussion to shift from disability to diversity, and institutional change to social development. For example, I discuss the shift from the medical to the social in models of disability in countries of the North and how that has created a blueprint for global changes in education, pushing IE, through international and multilateral organizations, into every corner of the Southern world. Here I trace some of the tensions this has created for IE in Southern contexts, where special education and disability have always been understood in dissimilar frameworks. Therefore, I unpack some of the existing roadblocks in current practices of IE in Southern contexts, especially the subcontinent. The last part of Chapter 2 suggests that a particularly useful way of overcoming barriers would be to reflect on the past and allow Southern philosophers' teachings to enter into debates on inclusion in those countries, for which I suggest Tagore.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the place and significance of children's voices in the research of inclusive education. I review the literature on the "new social studies of childhood", and consider the potential contribution of children's voices to the movement of IE and how my research specifically benefitted from including children. In this chapter, I also unpack the complications surrounding rights-based research in a context such as Bangladesh in which children's rights often go unrecognized. I point out that the implementation of the Human Rights Framework is not an easy task in a Southern country, where the culture and society operate in ways that restrict the flourishing of the rights of the vulnerable. However, I still advocate that this can only be overcome with further rights-based advocacy work, especially in education.

In Chapter 4, I move on to a contextual discussion by focusing on the current status of IE in Bangladesh. I focus specifically on the history and evolution of primary education in the country, being that my research centres on primary schools. I also unpack some of the debates surrounding the non-formal education debate and the current strains of tension that stain NGO and government relationships, which impact the evolution of IE in Bangladesh. Subsequently, I endorse Mukherjee's (2015) point and emphasize the need to build a "Southern Inclusive Vision" by giving attention to contextually relevant scholars, such as Tagore. Finally, in the last section of this chapter, I go in depth into the life and teachings of Tagore.

Chapter 5 is my methodological chapter. Here, I delve into my ontological, epistemological, and axiological positioning. Together these lead me to explicate the worldview(s) or belief structures that have informed my study and created the methodology upon which my inquiry is grounded. In that chapter, I illustrate how I have drawn upon my worldviews to inform the paradigm in which this study is based, which in turn inform my methodological approach and finally methods employed in the field. The next part of this chapter details my analysis procedures, while the final sections address trustworthiness, ethics, and issues of voice in my study.

Chapter 6 is where I present my data as generated from the field. In analyzing my data, I found it useful to separate the children's perspectives into conceptual motifs of "likes" and "dislikes," grouped under two major concentration areas" *physical* aspects and *relational* aspects of school. Each of the emergent motifs (i.e. "engaging in collaboration" or "capitalizing on diversity") is discussed in great detail with quotes, photos, and stories that supplement and support each point.

Chapter 7, which is the final analysis chapter of the dissertation, goes into the detail by distilling each of the conceptual motifs in relation to Tagore's educational teachings in order to illustrate how his philosophy can specifically supplement the progression of IE in Bangladesh. As each of the motifs are related to IE and generated by the children specifically, this discussion creates the basis for suggesting the use of Tagore's framework as the way to move forward in the

evolution of IE in Bangladesh. At the end of the chapter, further links are drawn to specifically outline this goal by critically discussing the “definition” of IE, as developed by UNESCO, through Tagore’s teachings. Scenic representations of Tagore’s school versus those of BRAC, leads into the final conversation on counter arguments which may arise in regard to utilizing Tagore’s philosophy in the current context of Bangladesh.

Chapter 8, the concluding chapter, recaptures the key findings, arguments, and limitations of the study. I readdress my research questions and briefly revisit how I have answered them. I also suggest ways through which we can review and reconstruct our vision of inclusive education in present-day Bangladesh by commenting on policy, moving it away from its stage of nascency and allowing the emergence of children’s voices and indigenous, traditional teachings. As such, a novel theorization and speedier movement of inclusion in Bangladesh can become a reality.

CHAPTER 2

GLOBAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE POST-COLONIAL ERA

The Complexity of Inclusion

In my dissertation, I present and analyze motifs from children's experiences of inclusion at two BRAC primary schools in Bangladesh. As a first step toward this goal, my focus in this chapter is on examining the intricacies of *IE as a broader movement of educational reform*. Therefore, in this Chapter I unpack the literature on the global terrain of IE, and critically analyze the essential movements within this multidimensional phenomenon in order to build the background and case for this study.

Millions of children worldwide make their way through life uneducated, excluded, and invisible. There are many reasons why children are excluded from education, ranging from failing education systems that do not adequately serve the needs of children, to high costs of schooling, child labour, and gender discrimination (Mahbub, 2007). IE is a major, global, and growing response to the fact that many (if not most) of the world's young people are currently deprived of their right to education and the various human goods that right is intended to promote.¹⁰ For some proponents of IE, inclusion is about valuing children with disabilities, ensuring that they become essential member of the school community (Uditsky, 1993). For others, it is about dealing with diversity, accepting all children, and responding to the needs of all pupils (Forest & Pearpoint, 1992; Sebba, 1996; Thomas, 1997, all, as cited in Florian, 1998).

However, experts across the world argue that inclusion is a rather complex process, as well as a multi-dimensional notion. Dyson (1999), for example, says

¹⁰ An important terminological issue to keep in mind throughout this chapter is that, in general, when "inclusive education" is referred to, it is defined as "*a classroom, school, or other educational setting that welcomes all children without discriminating based on race, class, gender, disability, religion, etc.*" However, in certain contexts, inclusive education is a term whose meaning is different, sometimes radically, depending on the educational and social aims it serves, or aspires to serve. When I use the term in a different manner, it will usually be explicitly indicated. Otherwise, the term will be used in the first, more generic sense.

that inclusion is not a monolithic concept. Messiou (2002) states that inclusive education is like a puzzle, of which each one of us holds a different piece. Without having all the pieces, the picture can never be complete.

Chapter Structure

My goal in this chapter is twofold: to review the global and local aspects of IE in order to show how this puzzle has evolved, and, at the same time, to analyze and critique the spread, practice, and promotion of IE through a postcolonial lens. More specifically, after a discussion on the global evolution of IE, I focus on how it is currently practiced and promoted in countries of the South, where the need for a high quality education for all is of utmost importance. Through a discussion of inclusive education framed in the trajectory of postcolonial theory, my purpose is to highlight how a regeneration and reconstitution of past educational traditions is now needed to take inclusive education forward in Bangladesh.

My discussion in this chapter has eight sections. Section one focuses on unpacking the phenomenon of economic instrumentalism, neoliberalism, and Janice Gross Stein's (2001) "cult of efficiency." A discussion on Stein's work alongside an unpacking of neoliberalism helps to explicate that—although the global attraction to inclusive education, especially in policy documents in several countries, the United Nations (UN) and World Bank's agenda, is on IE's promise to promote participation, equality, and democracy in education—often the means of IE do not lead to its desirable ends. Sections two, three, and four centre on the global scene of IE. Here, I delve more deeply into postcolonial theory to highlight how IE, if overtly made into a vehicle for forwarding the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Education for All (EFA), runs the risk of becoming a part of the new imperialist bandwagon for education. Sections five, six, and seven chart the differential evolution of IE in countries of the North and South. Here, I illustrate that in countries of the North, IE primarily grew out of a context of movements that sought to challenge the stigmatization, exclusion, and oppression of disabled persons. In countries of the

South, on the other hand, in which IE is often considered a Northern/Western¹¹ import, this was not the case. Currently, in Southern countries, IE tends to operate and be understood in terms defined normative by the North. This has resulted at the very least in some harmful consequences for the South, which I explain. In order to address this harm, in the concluding section eight, I suggest that the movement of IE needs to be embedded in a series of contexts extending from the socio-political realities of broader society, through to the local community, family, school, and classroom (Mitchell, 2005). Furthermore, IE needs to be framed in a bottom-up way, so it can achieve success owing to relevancy and appropriateness from the field. For this, a thorough examination of the historical and indigenous knowledge's of education is essential and for Bangladesh, I suggest Rabindranath Tagore. However, an in-depth discussion of Tagore and the "Southern Inclusive Vision" (Mukherjee, 2015) is carried out in Chapter 4.

Another salient point to keep in mind while I critique the global movement of IE through a postcolonial lens is that, although I agree with several scholars' writings and discussions on the hegemonic power relations underlying global agendas, nowhere in my argument do I aim to take an essentialist¹² position and claim that the global push for IE and its framing within hegemonic power relations operate monolithically. Nor do I claim that aid agencies working in loan-recipient countries indicate the full spectrum of the problem. I am fully aware that local NGOs, think tanks, political leaders or people responsible for handling the loan/aid money can be corrupt and oppressive (Anwaruddin, 2014). Therefore, I agree with the colonial discourse theorists such as Said (1979) and Bhabha (1994) and more recent education scholars (Anwaruddin, 2014; Dalal-Clayton, 2003, Mukherjee, 2014, Kalyanpur, 2011) who argue that binary

¹¹ I have primarily used the terms "Northern" and "Southern" or "North" and "South" to differentiate between powerful industrialized and weaker developing countries in this dissertation. In some cases, the word "Western" has also been used to refer to the powerful nations. This was preferred usually when the author I drew from used the same term in his or her writing.

¹² In Anwaruddin (2014) the author points out his non-essentialist position, which I also take regarding the argument I make in this section. By non-essentialist, I mean that I do not claim that *all* aid agencies always establish a neo-colonial relationship with loan-recipient countries.

categories of the powerful and weak are “fundamentally flawed because they constantly diffuse and intersect within the complex networks of domination that weave and connect international development” (Anwaruddin, 2014, p. 146).

Parameters of Economic Instrumentalism and the Cult of Efficiency

I have noted that IE, both in theory and practice, is a multifaceted global phenomenon. Despite this complexity, IE as a broad-based initiative—originating in late capitalist Northern societies in the last half of the twentieth century—has increasingly influenced educational and economic policy in Southern countries, including Bangladesh. In this sense, IE is an exemplary case of neoliberal education reform.

A key feature of neoliberal education reform, as I understand it in this dissertation, has to do with the imperative to treat educational aims and purposes in fundamentally economic terms. I will refer to this conception of education as economic instrumentalism. Economic instrumentalism in this context means that policies designed to encourage or advance IE are considered to be warranted insofar as they promote economically desired aims, for example promoting skills and knowledge that increase human capital (Ben-Porath 2012; Brighouse, 2006). As previously mentioned, there is nothing inherently worrisome about educational policies that seek to promote extrinsic goals or outcomes, even economic ones. For example, proponents of inclusive education (or any form of education for that matter) seek to promote and provide some desirable goals and ends for its receivers. Whether objectives equate to having students become more knowledgeable, or acquire the tools to transform one’s struggles into successes and accomplish certain practical opportunities, the ultimate aim of education is to enable students to realize their goals and develop capacities that enable them to lead fulfilling and happy lives. Nevertheless, the noblest aims of education are liable to be corrupted if they are badly implemented, and one very common way this occurs is when policies and institutions are developed in such a way that considerations of economic efficiency are prioritized at the expense of alternative purposes of education. Furthermore, economic instrumentalism essentially subordinates all other desirable aims of education to the overarching, main goal

of human capital. This gives way to problems of implementation, not because policy makers do not have the right aims in mind, but rather because they fail in designing effective policies to achieve those aims. This is likely due to the fact that they are in the grips of a narrow, economically instrumentalist ideology, and therefore fail to identify educationally worthwhile aims in the first place.

Philosophical critics of notions of human capital in education have objected to the focus on economic considerations as the main determinant of efficiency (Ben-Porath, 2012; Brighouse, 2006). Canadian political theorist Janice Gross Stein (2001) applies a particularly useful label—the “cult of efficiency”—that helps to explain how IE has developed on a global level in ways that subvert desirable educational aims. This “cult of efficiency,” (Stein, 2001) has emerged due to post-industrial societies’ emphasis on production, affluence, individualism, comfort and, most importantly, a market driven by the “smart” state.

The focus on efficiency, according to Stein (2001, p. 6), provides “the best possible use of scarce resources to achieve a valued end.” The problem with neoliberal educational initiatives, including those pertaining to IE, is that the valued ends are always assumed to be ones that promote economic growth. As such, educational aspirations having to do with increasing the capabilities or functionings of all students, of enabling students to learn skills to exercise effective citizenship, or of ensuring that economic benefits are equitably distributed among all students, are either omitted or subordinated to the more important goal of promoting overall economic growth. Of course, this does not mean that IE has always been explicitly articulated in economic terms only. For example, initiatives such as EFA typically invoke other desirable educational aims, such as increasing students’ freedom or promoting citizenship, alongside other more directly economic goals. Nevertheless, as many critics have noted, the reality on the ground is usually that economic goals are given highest priority while other are assumed to harmoniously serve and promote the hallowed goal of economic growth and human capital. The possibility that an IE initiative might subordinate economic aims in order to focus more on liberatory or democratic goals of education is rarely, if ever, entertained. It is in this sense, then, that Stein argues that the focus on efficiency becomes a “cult”—be it in the arena of public

health, law or education. This changes the question from “what goals should IE be efficient at promoting?”, to “how can IE promote economic efficiency?”. More importantly, over time the association of efficiency with economic goals becomes so ingrained and habitual that it is no longer necessary to state it explicitly. This is when, as Gross Stein notes, efficiency starts to be seen an end in itself, as valuable in its own right, and as the overriding goal of public life. In short, it becomes a cult.

The problem with efficiency as a “cult” (i.e. as a goal in itself) is that it favours considerations about means over ends (in practice, at least). Importantly, this re-prioritization of means over ends is maintained, even if the rhetoric about health care, the economy, the political system, or public education remains firmly entrenched in a vocabulary of desirable purposes or ends. Stein (2001) further explains that the conversation on efficiency leads one to question the persistent theme of choice— the mechanism citizens have in order to exercise their efficiency. However, the poorest, most vulnerable, insecure citizens do not insist on choice as a right; “They focus their energy on survival” (Stein, 2001, p. 9). This cult therefore repeatedly continues to short-change the most needy in societies.

For Gross Stein, the “cult of efficiency” reflects the fact that policy makers and, in particular, legislators have become too focused on the relatively straightforward task of finding and tinkering with indicators. This is in part due to the intellectual and political difficulties that accompany reflecting on ultimate ends, that is, they systematically reverse the appropriate order of reflection on means and ends whether in education, health care, or other policy domains. As a result, while official discourse about, for example, health care and education continues to pay lip service to the well-being of patients and the autonomy of students, the actual practice or measurement of promoting well-being and autonomy becomes increasingly couched in references to highly imperfect statistical markers – e.g. of labour input (e.g. “contact hours”) or “knowledge output” (e.g. standardized test scores). The problem is that these indicators provide, at best, only the most tenuous understanding of the actual effects that schools or hospitals actually have on the lives and experiences of real students or patients. Another problem with the indicators is that they are based on economic

gain, and therefore imperfectly measure progress towards autonomy—a process that ends up being harmful towards the citizens involved. Effectively, signs of efficiency replace evidence of effectiveness.

To illustrate this process, let's turn our attention to the practice of testing and scoring. Test scores are supposed to stand in as an indicator of many educational aspirations, including autonomy and well-being. But the processes by which schools and educational policies seek to improve test scores are often harmful, especially when testing cause students to drop out or to be relegated to educationally deficient programs that are not overseen by the regulatory mechanisms that tests are meant to measure. The mechanism here is similar to Stein's (2001) description of hospitals, in which they achieve cost-efficiency only by ensuring that patients move through the system quickly—even if this means overlooking important health concerns. So patients are treated efficiently, in the sense of cost-efficiency, but may experience serious health consequences once outside the hospital (for example, death or more serious long term issues). Nevertheless, as Stein (2001) points out, these costs do not count in the efficiency equation since they happen outside the hospital (from which the patients were pushed out). In a similar manner, students may be pressured to drop out or to enter into special education classes in order to improve a school's overall test scores. There may be serious negative consequences for many students because of this. However, these negative effects are not reflected necessarily in a system that measures success only in terms of cost efficiency and the schools' overall ability to perform well. The institutions' performance overshadows the individuals' needs, requirements and difficulties.

Inclusive education, which operates within the neoliberal structures of post-industrial societies, is heavily impacted by this “cult of efficiency.” We can see this more easily if we first note how the idea of a “cult of efficiency” in education is linked to other elements of neoliberal ideology. As explained by Thorsen and Lei (2006), it is stated that we are living in an age of neoliberalism. Yet, theoretically and conceptually it is a very difficult concept to define. After reviewing the vast literature on liberalism and neoliberalism, these two authors have attempted to offer a definition, which is also the definition used in this

dissertation. Neoliberalism can be understood socially as (Thorsen & Lei, 2006, p. 14-15):

- A political belief that centers on the conviction that the only legitimate purpose of the state is to safeguard individual, especially commercial, liberty, as well as strong private property rights.
- The belief that *freely adopted market mechanisms are the optimal way of organizing all exchanges of goods and services*. Free markets and free trade will, it is believed, set free the creative potential and the entrepreneurial spirit which is built into the spontaneous order of any human society.
- Neoliberalism could also include a perspective on moral virtue: the good and virtuous person is one who is able to access the relevant markets and function as a *competent actor* in these markets. Individuals are also seen *as being solely responsible for the consequences of the choices and decisions* they freely make; *instances of inequality and glaring social injustice are morally acceptable*, at least to the degree in which they could be seen as the result of freely made decisions.

From this social definition of neoliberalism, especially the italicized parts, it is clear as to why something like the “cult of efficiency” has gained popularity in our societies today. The underlying thought is that all citizens must be competent *economic* actors in the free market, and efficiency is key in achieving that competency. Those who are not able to participate are somehow “morally depraved and underdeveloped” (Mises, 1962, as cited in Thorsen & Lei, 2006, p. 15). When efficiency becomes an end in itself in inclusive education, the emphasis falls on how effectively or quickly IE agendas are forwarded in countries across the globe by governments in their policy documents, or pushed by EFA signatories. In other words, IE itself (and not the goals for which it stands) becomes an end. IE, as a form of education to be established in school discourse and policies, becomes that which is evaluated, rather than whether the inclusion that is practiced forwards its goals or not. Furthermore, this unfortunately leaves the imperative questions of efficient *at what* or efficient *for whom* unanswered

(Stein, 2001). When these fundamental questions are not adequately addressed, it causes a hindrance to desired goals of IE.

As I shall argue below, the MDGs have come to play the leading role as indicators of success or compliance with the goals and aspirations of IE in a global context. Simply examining how well (or how poorly) the MDGs are being met by a country's IE policies, however, may prove to be a very poor and crude way of gauging how genuinely effective policies can be developed or how existing policies can be reformed. In addition, the standards of cost-effectiveness guiding the MDGs need to shift, as they seriously underestimate the kinds of educational values, aims, and purposes that IE is meant to promote. Truly some of the MDGs contain useful and laudatory educational values and goals; however, when understood in the context of the larger neoliberal system that entrenches an ethos of economic efficiency, the result is often that some MDGs, or at least some of their elements, tend to fall by the wayside while those that are most compatible with the economic agenda of neoliberal efficiency get prioritized. Moreover, the MDGs provide a highly general and incomplete picture of what IE might desirably aspire to in a particular context. In addition, the MDGs generally come with strings attached—that is, strings that specify the proper mechanisms, such as well-resourced, accessible schools with properly trained teachers, for achieving educational goals—mechanisms that have generally been popularized in Northern contexts without consideration of some key contextual features from Southern settings. In the next section, I delve in more detail into the development, spread, and challenges of the MDGs, in relation to the movement for inclusive education.

MDGs, EFA, and IE's "Global Design"

In 2003, Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen stated that, "if we continue to leave vast sections of the world outside the orbit of education, we make the world not only less just, but also less secure" (p. 1). In that scenario, leaders across the globe acknowledged the importance of education, especially basic education and, therefore, ratified Education for All (EFA) as a Millennium Development Goals (MDG) as a "world framework" in 2000. In the table below, I have provided a

glimpse into the MDG and EFA goals as set out by the UN. It is important to keep that as a backdrop as I embark on my discussion of the global design of inclusive education.

Table 2.1. MDGs and EFA Goals in Brief

“At the beginning of the new millennium, world leaders gathered at the United Nations to shape a broad vision to fight poverty in its many dimensions. That vision, which was translated into eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), has remained the overarching development framework for the world for the past 15 years.”

(The United Nations Millennium Development Goals Report, 2015, p. 1)

There were eight goals outlined, of which **GOAL 2** was to **ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION**. Under this GOAL, two specific educational MDGs were instituted (Bernett & Felsman, 2012, p. 1-2):

- Ensure that by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.
- Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015.

In addition to this, the EFA dialogue culminated in a meeting in Dakar, Senegal in 2000, which adopted a new set of six goals (Bernett & Felsman, 2012, p. 1-2).

- Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
- Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to, and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality [same as MDG2].
- Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met

through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes.

- Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.
- Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full access to and achievement in basic education of good quality [same as MDG3].
- Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

Since the establishment of these objectives, and in some countries since 1994, inclusive education has been a global agenda as an educational model through which the MDG and EFA goals can be achieved (Peters, 2003; Vislie, 2003, Mahbub, 2007). Multilateral organizations have ratified the validity and impartiality of inclusive education as an essential aspect of educational growth in countries across the globe. The United Nations has endorsed the idea of inclusion vastly by creating a number of legally binding international conventions or treaties, for which countries have been made accountable (Mahbub, 2007). The first of the series of authoritative documents to impact the movement for IE across the globe was UNESCO's 1994 watershed document—the Salamanca Statement. In it, the efficiency of more inclusive learning environments is clearly identified and endorsed. As explained in the Salamanca Statement:

Regular schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society, and achieving education for all. (UNESCO, 1994, p. ix)

Ratified by representatives of 88 national governments and 25 international organizations, this document has been one of the most powerful

instruments for innovations in the field of inclusive education. After the Salamanca Statement, several other documents have furthered inclusion on a global scale. For example, in April 2000, more than 1100 participants from 164 countries adopted The Dakar Framework for Action, Education for All. As explained by Peters (2003), the framework affirmed the notion of education as a fundamental right and established the MDG of providing every girl and boy with primary school education by 2015. However, more importantly, in Dakar inclusive education was highlighted as the key strategy to be used in overcoming barriers to education (Mahbub, 2007). At the 2000 UN Millennium Development Summit, the MDGs were further reviewed, in which achieving UPE was identified as one of the top two concerns of world leaders (Stubbs, 2002). Additionally, the 2003 South Asian Islamabad Declaration on EFA established further provisions for inclusive education with a special focus on gender equality (Ahuja & Ibrahim, 2006). The Convention on the Rights of Person's with Disabilities was held to promote, protect, and ensure all persons with disabilities fully enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms, specifically focusing on their rights to education, health, family, and personal mobility (UNESCO, 2015). In addition, the 2008 Inclusive Education Conference, held in Geneva, ratified that given the current scenario of the global financial crisis, inclusion is the way forward in education (UNESCO, 2015).

From this overview, it becomes evident that the global documents on IE were vast and all encompassing, having been influenced in their development and dissemination by disability studies and special education in particular, as well as multicultural education and gender studies. IE as an aspect of development was also impacted by the realities of pan-national globalization. As coined by pre-eminent scholars (Booth & Ainscow, 1998), IE, in hindsight of the global push, can therefore be understood as a major, global, and growing response to ensuring that *all* children regardless of age, ability, ethnicity, or any other form of vulnerability, have access to appropriate, relevant, affordable, and effective education within their communities. Again, as previously mentioned, it is considered to be a concept “on the move” with a multifaceted aura. However, the duality herein is that, although IE has gained so much currency and insurgency

due to it being viewed as an essential tool in achieving the goals of the MDGs and EFA, when those goals occupy the primary role as indicators of success, the actual goals or aspirations of IE in local contexts get clouded, muddled, and, in certain circumstances, lost. This was especially problematic for the global South as, through this global push, educational changes required for IE came down from rapidly transforming notions of special and inclusive education in powerful countries of the North. Embedded in differential and diverse social and political norms, it was at a time when many of the Southern contexts were not yet ready for this welcome change. Also, it was and still is the fact that many of these Southern countries just do not have the infrastructure to keep up.

In short, and in essence, the MDGs are therefore complexly related to the “cult of efficiency.” Framed within neoliberal politics, albeit it indirectly, they fall short of breaking neoliberal barriers in the most vulnerable of communities, in spite of their stated aims. This is also the case because the MDGs not only serve a neoliberal economic agenda, but also a post-imperialist agenda that has not done much to incorporate within its movement indigenous educational knowledge.

Indigenous Knowledge Overlooked

The basic premise of international development—that the prevailing concepts and values in developed countries are superior to those in developing countries—is very problematic (Kalyanpur, 2011). Inclusive education, which was emphasized as an imminent goal for governments across the world after the World Bank’s 1994 Salamanca Statement, had considerable impact on global governmentality and became an agenda that signified human development, equity, gender parity, and empowerment in education. IE established by multilateral organizations such as the UN, UNESCO, and the World Bank influenced policy makers in countries across the world to adopt similar definitions, frameworks, and parameters of education. However, for the reasons of creating a “global design,” in this process the movement of IE failed to include Southern indigenous knowledge or philosophical traditions of education (Mukherjee, 2014).

According to Connell (2007, p. 44), this is problematic as “...the intellectuals of colonized societies are unreferenced, and social process is analysed in an ethnographic time-warp.” As pointed out by Mignolo (1993, pp. 129-131), “the Third World produces not only ‘cultures’ to be studied by anthropologists and ethno-historians but also intellectuals who generate theories and reflect on their own culture and history.” In such a scenario, it is problematic if the emerging literature on inclusive education from the developing postcolonial world appears to be running into the theoretical impasse of being trapped in an orientalist cultural nationalism (Mukherjee, 2014). Hence, contextual meaning-making or conceptual thinking about inclusive education filtered, influenced, and framed more directly by indigenous philosophies is crucial. As explained by Shizha (2006, p. 21-22), “people’s ways of thinking and knowing are rooted in their indigenous lives...it is not ‘primitive’ or ‘backward’ as once portrayed in Western philosophical thought...these are historical and social constructions that stem from people’s experiences.” Due to the dearth of its presence in current inclusive literature and debates and in order to solve the problems IE faces in countries of the South, it is now necessary to refer to bodies of knowledge on indigenous education. As explained by Mukherjee (2015), engaging with Tagore’s philosophy of education, or other scholars of indigenous origin, is useful to reposition the debate on inclusive education, which is by and large considered by postcolonial scholars as a hegemonic neo-colonial imposition of Northern concepts. However, why has this not yet been achieved or, at the very least, why has this journey been so difficult? Through a discussion of post colonial theory and its linkages to and criticisms of inclusive education, more light can be shed on this “linear theorizing” and historically “Northern influenced” trajectory of inclusive education (Mukherjee, 2014, p. 6). I do that in the next section.

Postcolonial Theory, Neo-Imperialism, and Cultural Supremacy

According to Carby (1987, as cited in Viruru, 2005, p. 8):

rather than [offering] prescriptive definitions of what should or does constitute postcolonial theory, [it is more] useful to explore and interrogate the arguments of different positions, to see contemporary

postcolonial theory as a sign that should be interrogated, a locus of contradictions.

Originating in the three continents of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, PCT in its most simplistic and basic form addresses the legacy of colonialism imposed by attempts by the West to dominate the globe over hundreds of years (Viruru, 2005). This thought gave rise to a set of debates that, according to Diana Brydon (2005, p. 4):

...challenges the failures of imagination that led to colonialism and its aftermath, a failure that continues with globalization, but is not assuming horrific new forms. Postcolonial work involves re-examining the past to see where things went wrong and where they might have been set right, abandoning Darwinian narratives of progress for an openness learning from other ways, not to return to the ways of the past but to imagine better ways of living together in the future.

In this sense, it problematizes the representations of countries of the South as being “somehow subordinate” in voice, culture, and power to countries of the North. It questions the notions of development and visions of reality that are imposed as universal (Andreotti, 2007). It also questions Eurocentricism, charity, and “benevolence” (Andreotti, 2007). For my purposes, as previously mentioned, I use postcolonial theory to: 1) question elements of Northern supremacy in the movement for inclusive education in Southern contexts; and 2) to suggest that a regeneration and reconstitution of past traditions is necessary in order to create a relationship of dependence and continuity as a way forward (Mitchell, 2005; Andreotti, 2011). This is for a better working of IE in the country in question. In order to achieve the first of my two aims, I must refer to Leon Tikly’s well-known work on new imperialist movements in education.

According to Tikly (2004, p. 173), although Post Colonial Theory has come to be known as the “critical idiom” that allows for analysis of the continuing legacy of European imperialism in order to visibilize oppositional discourse, it can also be used to argue that:

what we are currently witnessing on a global scale is in fact the emergence of a new form of Western imperialism that has as its purpose the incorporation of populations within the formerly so-called ‘Second’ and ‘Third worlds’ into a regime of global government. Central to the new

imperialism is education, which has become for the World Bank and the multilateral development agencies a key aspect of their vision of 'development'.

New imperialism (or neo-imperialism) can loosely be defined as “the political, diplomatic, and military strategies of the state (or some collection of states) operating as a political power block as it struggles to assert its interests and to achieve its goals in the world at large” (Harvey, 2003, p. 26). It is a more subtle form of domination and control exercised on poorer, low-income nations often practiced through political and economic control and aid treaties, cloaked in the promise of development. Often it is forwarded through vehicles of Western forms of education, which continually to undermine existing indigenous knowledge (Tikly, 2004). In effect, whereas earlier times of imperialism and colonialism allowed for direct violence and coercion against indigenous knowledge, now there are more subtle forms of dominations (i.e. donor activities and international development). As explained by (Anwaruddin, 2014), this form of domination came into existence during periods of political decolonization after World War II, in which most colonies were still weak and inadequately prepared for independent self-governance. This created a vacuum that had to be filled by aid, mostly economic and policy-oriented from the same former colonial powers, creating a sense of acquiescence for these countries to take part in progress, development, and the global economy. Therefore, although Southern countries, such as Ghana or Bangladesh, achieved technical independence, ex-colonial powers and newly emerging superpowers such as the US continue to play a decisive role through international monetary bodies (Anwaruddin, 2014).

When policy is established within a framework of economic constraints and global pressures, Southern governments often take initiatives without being fully prepared for them. Frequently these initiatives may be conflicting or even duplicitous, unaligned with the government's own priorities and taken only as a result of pressure from donors. Framed within the global context of international development—overshadowed by a neoliberal logic in which the members must be efficient and competent or risk losing membership if they don't perform—countries like Bangladesh simply cannot refuse to accept international aid

(Kalyanpur, 2011). It would be tantamount to refusing to march towards Northern-defined goals of development. This unfairly holds these developing countries to the same standards of political and economic sophistication as their Northern counterparts. However, countries of the global South are simply not prepared for this due to differing ideologies and socio-political structures, internal conflict, and perpetual shortage of resources. Further, when policies are developed with the priority of merely having a policy, without properly attending to its implementation, the policy itself becomes that which is evaluated. It exists, accordingly, as a means; those means do not necessarily result in the ends of students achieving their desired goals at school. Therefore, when today's neo-colonial powers "adopt similar strategies of domination and dictate the education policies in the so-called developing countries in various ways such as providing loan money and technical assistance for educational reforms" (Anwarduddin, 2014, p. 145), these reforms often do not translate into the kind of reality envisioned by participating Southern nations.

The trend of neo-imperialism lies in several different formations—at different conjunctures and formats, and via separate methods—through historical interludes that delineate culture and power between countries of the North and South. It is not an overt but rather a covert discourse, often hidden under the benevolent intentions of Northern proponents. One major underlying aspect of neo-imperialism that underlines North-South interactions of inclusive education, is the practice of "cultural supremacy." According to Andreotti (2007), cultural supremacy (CS) is the projection of one's own values as superior to those of others. It is connected to European Enlightenment and the justification for colonization. One of the problems associated with CS, especially in the context of education, is the driving attitude and objective behind it, which is one of a "civilizing mission" of the North/West "educating" the South in order to attempt to solve their problems – to "sort them out" (Andreotti, 2007, p. 5). Andreotti (2007, p. 5) explains:

Cultural supremacy is based on the premise that one has achieved a better, more developed or universal way of seeing and being and prompts patronizing and paternalistic attitudes towards the South and Southern peoples, as well as a foreclosure - or necessary denial - of the colonial past

and of causal responsibility or obligations towards the South. This ‘foreclosure’ is related to the idea that, in our uneven ‘interdependence’, the North is also part of the problem. Without this understanding the argument for global citizenship is left to rest on notions of compassion, charity or a notion of ‘common humanity’ or ‘interdependence’ that do not necessarily address issues of power, inequalities and injustice, as a notion of seamless linear progress and development is adopted and ‘Northern’ ways of seeing, being and doing are projected the yardstick for the measurement of all humanity (Shiva, 2004).

However, again the problem rises as the Northern ways of seeing are projected onto the South while Southern peoples’ ways of doing and thinking are sidelined, engendering ignorance about that which is local. However, since this is a covert and subtle form of “domination”, no Northern actors would actually endorse CS. Furthermore, stakeholders on either side would deny or reject the claim that their actions reflect such an ideology. Yet in the complex workings of policy formation and implementation in Southern contexts, this is a reality. Essentially, setting aside practices of CS, a more constructivist approach to what entails “good, relevant education” in each given country could be done by valuing and including indigenous thought in the process (Shizha, 2006).

One of the most recent but subtle practices of neo-imperialism through CS, which reflects neoliberal trends, was conducted by way of the establishment and enforcement of the MDGs. As explained by Dalal-Clayton (2003), in low-income countries it has been extremely challenging to implement a strategy to achieve the goals set out by the MDGs, one of which is Universal Primary Education (UPE) by 2015. Firstly, a large number of the strategies set out in the MDGs have not been country-led, but rather induced and, at times, imposed by Northern-based external agencies. Some governments have demonstrated a commitment to addressing the MDGs, as has Bangladesh. But it has been the international agencies that have pushed the MDGs strongly, rapidly making them a central focus of policies (Dalal-Clayton, 2003). For example, in light of the movement for UPE in Bangladesh—aside from the country’s previous policies of 1997 and 2001, and implementation of welfare for people with disabilities in 2002—the government’s initiation towards inclusion and UPE was furthered by the 2002-2015 Education for All: National Plan of Action-II. This policy document had a

major component dedicated to the education of children on the margins of society. The document also provided a definition of the inclusive approach, very similar to that in more global documents on IE:

Inclusive Approach: Children with disabilities (mental, physical, and hearing and vision impaired), of ethnic/tribal minorities and those living in isolated areas have very limited scope of access to general primary level institutions. The current emphasis is on inclusive education, which provides access to all children in regular schools. (MOPME, 2000, as cited in Donaldson, 2005, p. 85)

Around the same time that the NPA II was established, the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) also issued the Primary Education Development Programme-II (PEDP II), 2003-2008. Interestingly, however, the PEDP II defined inclusion as a means to mainstream special needs children by way of “...a special needs task force [that] would be established to devise strategies to mainstream special needs children into primary schools” (Ahuja & Ibrahim, 2006, p. 21).

These policy documents from Bangladesh illustrate: 1) how the country was heavily influenced by the global definition of IE due to external trends and pressures; and 2) how unclear they were in their understanding of IE. The confusion in the understanding of IE can be linked directly to the second neoliberal trend, as demonstrated by multilateral organizations. According to Dalal-Clayton (2003), one of the major problems with the proper implementation of the externally driven MDGs is their lack of integration. The MDGs, as a strategy, are not often well integrated into a country’s mainstream decision-making processes and oftentimes, while one body of the government may have grasped the goals set out by a certain MDG, others may not have. This is especially problematic in the context of Bangladesh, where primary education responsibilities fall under the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, but all responsibilities related to people with disabilities fall under the Ministry of Social Welfare. For the proper implementation of IE, a large part of which is based on the educational integration of the disabled, formal collaboration is required between these two ministries. A lack of unity between the two runs the risk of situating the movement for IE as another factor of confusion and disintegration in the country.

What further alienates externally driven and loosely integrated global movements is their lack of links to “on-the-ground realities” (Dalal-Clayton, 2003, p. 80). Often policy formation and debates are not fully informed by local realities, and people in the field cannot participate in policy making. Rarely are members of underprivileged groups (such as the disabled, children, or women) able to participate in policies that impact their well-being. This not only hinders the opportunity to link progress in the area of policy as well as amongst people, but also establishes a lack of ownership on the part of the stakeholders of those policies. Few people feel the policies have been developed by them or for them, which further deters and slows down processes such as those stipulated in the MDGs. Specifically considering EFA, it is a paradigm that has emerged from contemporary Northern sensibilities and, therefore, is often incompatible with the needs and realities of countries of the global South. EFA, which strongly stems from egalitarian ideals and emphasizes notions such as equal access, opportunity, and rights, does not always fit well into extremely hierarchical societies, which is still the reality in many Southern countries, including Bangladesh. This, coupled with inadequate means of implementation due to insufficient policies, continues to keep MDG targets out of reach. Furthermore, in an effort to meet international expectations, governments may project a false image of progress in achieving EFA by being creative with the numbers. They are not always transparent about how initial enrolment numbers do not indicate dropout rates, which are acute amongst marginalized groups.

Further illustration of the points above, with some statistics, will perhaps help. For example, in Bangladesh, despite the political commitment to EFA and inclusive education, the education of marginalized children, especially those with disabilities, still remains less significant in comparison to other pressing issues. The Millennium Development Progress Report, from 2009, indicated that in Bangladesh the second MDG of UPE was on track in terms of enrolment, reaching as high as 91.1 percent in 2008 (GED, 2009). However, the proportion of pupils who started in Grade One and completed Grade Five was still at 54.9 percent. Further, the literacy rate of 15-24 year olds was still at 58.3 (GED, 2009). Enrolling the last 10 percent of children (mostly disabled, ethnic minorities,

impoverished), and ensuring quality and equity of education for them and those already enrolled, remains a major challenge for Bangladesh due a scenario aptly portrayed by Sabates and Fernandez (2010, p. 1):

Children's brief schooling experience consists frequently of limited learning opportunities in overcrowded classrooms with insufficient learning materials and under-qualified teachers (Alexander, 2008). Children of different ages and abilities are mixed together in single classrooms without proper adaptation of teaching methods to improve learning and to induce school engagement (Little, 2008). Such schooling circumstances, together with personal and family level factors such as ill health, malnutrition and poverty, jeopardize meaningful access to education for many children. As a result, many children are registered in schools but fail to attend, participate but fail to learn, are enrolled for several years but fail to progress and drop out from school.

It is clear that the latter components of UPE—decreasing drop-out rates and increasing the enrolment of older and/or vulnerable children—will not be achieved in Bangladesh by the end of 2015 (a time which alarmingly has arrived). It is significantly important to understand that the previously discussed neoliberal tendencies for forwarding global movements (e.g. MDGs and UPE) is not working in favour of the children in the country. These neoliberal tendencies, practiced in policy development and implementation, alienate the very policies for the people by the people, maintaining drop-out rates and keeping more and more children in Bangladesh as non-literates, semi-literates, or functionally illiterate. The goal for education for any nation is not to develop non-literate and semi-literate individuals who cannot lead the lives they envision for themselves. Rather, it is to equip individuals with the tools necessary to lead the life they want—to equip individuals with the means for their desired ends. IE gives the unique opportunity for countries to develop an education system that is not only more accessible and equitable, but also one of quality, where children have access to well-trained teachers, proper pedagogical methods, necessary materials, and contextualized learning environments. However, if policies in Bangladesh continue to fail to be of the people and for the people, schools will continue to face the enrolment-dropout paradox—a paradox that will persist in Bangladesh so long as the phenomenon of neo-imperialism exists. This point I am making

here is a concrete reiteration and expansion of my main point up until now, i.e. that neoliberal mechanisms end up transforming and manipulating the MDGs. Rhetorically speaking, the MDGs are compatible with goals of human well-being, development, gender equity, global citizenship, etc., but in practice they are transformed into a priority for economic efficiency.

In sum, it is clear that a different path forward would be ideal for countries of the South. As illustrated in great detail in the two previous sections, IE has become a part of the efficiency and neoliberal bandwagon, and is seen as a way of achieving the goals set by EFA and the MDGs, but not as an end in itself. As a result, the soul of IE, which is focused on the empowerment of all children's well-being and capabilities by providing quality and appropriate education that keeps children in school, gets pushed under the rug for other priorities such as efficiency in enrolment and meeting the gender gap. IE needs to be detached from goals of economic efficiency, or, at the very least, such goals need to be deprioritized so more liberatory goals of inclusion can be elevated or emphasized.

Tracing IE in the North and South

As a response to prior segregated education systems in the North, these countries¹³ have infiltrated the global evolution of IE due to the fact that they are the ones who continue to wield more power globally. They continue to exercise this power, as previously explained, through neo-imperialistic terms. That is why as definitions of special, integrated, and finally inclusive education shift in countries of the North, so do its understanding on a global scale through UN and UNESCO watershed documents, policies, and statements. In addition, as the global agenda puts forth these “novel ideas,” countries of the North and South have had the impetus to continue evolving and adjusting this concept. As I previously illustrated, the countries of the South rarely can define these concepts for their contexts on their own terms and parameters. However, differences between the development of IE in countries of the North and South do exist. In

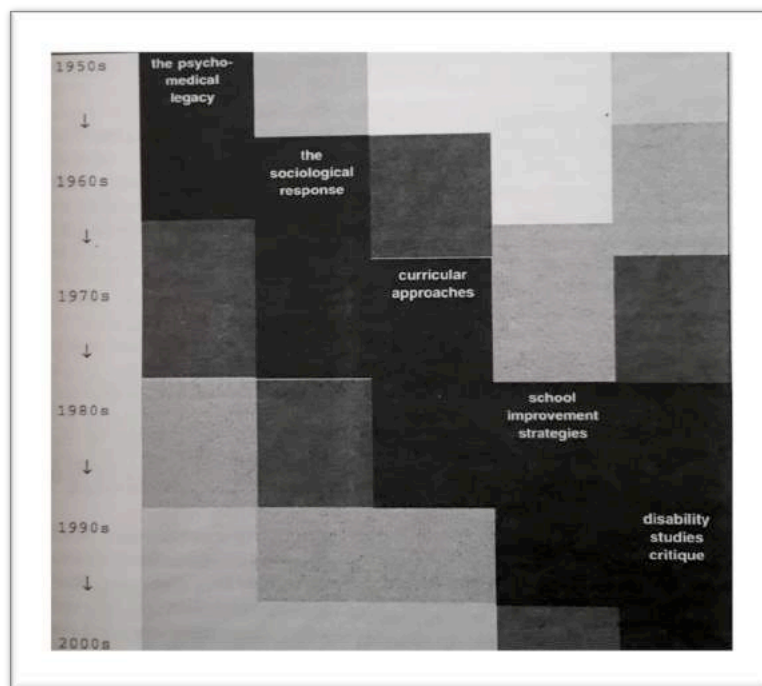
¹³ These “Northern” countries, to name a few, include the US, UK, and Canada. Along with several others, they are countries that belong to the G8/G7 forum of “leading advanced economies in the world.” Consequently, neoliberal system is backed by powerful global entities.

the next sections, I turn towards exploring in further detail the *differential* ways in which IE developed in countries of the North versus those of the South. However, when it comes to the South, I only refer to the Indian subcontinent, as that is my context of concern.

The North: Theories of IE.

When thinking about the major theories or perspectives that outline the development of inclusive education in countries of the North, an image is very helpful. Taken from their guidebook on “Theories of Inclusive Education” by Clough and Corbett (2000), and presented below as Image 2.1, it is a pictorial depiction of the major perspectives that shaped IE up until the turn of the millennium.

Image 2.1. Theories of IE with Brief Descriptions



The psycho-medical legacy: This is understood as the system of broadly medicalized ideas, which essentially saw the individual as being somehow “in deficit” and, in turn, assumed the need for “special” education for those individuals.

The sociological response: This position broadly represents a critique of the previous model and

draws attention to the social construction of special educational needs.

Curricular approaches: Such approaches emphasized the role of curriculum in both rectifying and, for some writers, effectively creating learning difficulties.

School improvement strategies: This movement emphasizes the importance of pursuing a systematic organization for truly comprehensive schooling.

Disability studies critique: These perspectives, often from outside the field education, elaborate an overly political response to the exclusionary effects of the psycho-medical model.

(Adopted from Clough & Corbett, 2000, pgs. 8-9)

As explained by Clough and Corbett (2000), each of the movements that developed from the 1950s on (including up to UDL) has had distinct epistemological, curricular, pedagogical, and institutional aspects. They warn that these movements are in no way entirely distinct or separate from one another, even if they developed in a certain distinct “chronology.” The relational movements of the theoretical frameworks are not simple, linear developments from one position to another; it is a dynamic relational process between the various theories and perspectives (Clough & Corbett, 2000). In light of this, it is important to highlight that the epistemological, curricular, pedagogical, and institutional aspects of each movement do not always neatly stand out or come together. In reality they sometimes come apart, shift, and even fall back on each other. Some, as parallel movements to IE, give to and draw from the theories of inclusion, while others move the previous theories of IE forward.

In order to start the conversation on IE, it is essential to unpack the two major preliminary debates that influence and form the base of the development of inclusive education: the psycho-medical legacy and the sociological response. In the following section I continue the conversation on the remaining theories.

The two base theories: Psycho-medical versus sociological.

In terms of its epistemic features, the Psycho-Medical Model puts forth broadly medicalized ideas emphasizing the perspectives that causally attribute a disabled child’s difficulties to their individual characteristics, often seen as individual limitations and deficits (Terzi, 2005). Usually the focus is on the

impairment, rather than the needs of the person. At the heart of this approach, is the view of the individual child as deficient in relation to some intuitional norm or view of normality. Deficits are identified as something exclusively within the child and not in the context of instruction.

The Medical Model directly translated to the implementation of pedagogical approaches in children's curricula in schools in the 1950s and 1960s in the countries of the North. As reiterated by Clough and Corbett (2000), in the context of the 1960s, when this model was most popular, there was little or no apparent recognition made between the nature of a task given to a child, on the one hand, and the child's performance of it, on the other hand. This illustrates that, at the heart of this model, there was a distinct disconnection between the means and the ends of curriculum, school, and education at large. When the curriculum, pedagogical approaches, and teaching methods did not have a system built within it to gauge children's performance but focused merely on failure as a yardstick, failure itself became the end for children with disabilities. The focus in this system was therefore not on the means but the "ends" of disabled people, which expectedly in those times was failure as students, professionals, and members of society. When the disabled were destined to fail, it only made sense to not waste resources on them and shut them away in specialized institutions or an isolated home. The failure of the disabled in this model was established through the prevalent use of institutionalized clinically-based assessments, and normative testing systems at the time (i.e. Weschler Intelligence Testing, Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities). These tests determined the systematic-interventions of what type of learning environment a child could access: an asylum, a special school, or a normative school (Kisanji, 1999). Furthermore, in this model professional assessments designed for non-disabled people (done by doctors, psychiatrists, educational psychologists) usually determined what support a disabled person would receive, where a disabled person would live, and whether or not he or she could work. Hence, in short, this legacy saw the disabled person as the problem that had to be adapted to fit into the world as it is; if they could not and failed (which was essentially expected of them), the world could then shut them out.

By the end of the 1960s and 1970s in countries of the North (i.e. UK, USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand), experts started to question the validity of such a model in order to understand disability and the existence of a separate system of special education for disabled children. As a result of this shift in people's views, the idea of integrated education emerged in which children with disabilities started to be brought into mainstream schools.

However, in the early 1970s, integration came to be interpreted mainly as an issue of the placement of students without giving much attention to the quality of placement (Lewis, 1995). Furthermore, integration still emphasized that the child must change to fit into a certain schooling system. According to Stubbs (2002), this meant the system had to “fit the square peg (child) into the round hole (normal school system)” (p. 25) through therapy and rehabilitation. Hence, the process of integration was locational, social, or functional, which fed into the idea of normalization, or the concept that people should be given the means to live according to cultural norms.

It is important to also mention that normalization implied adaptation to preordained cultural norms. The problem were not cultural norms themselves (which seems like a necessary feature of any way of life), but the fact that, at the time, disabled people were expected to adapt to norms that were defined for and by non-disabled people as disabled people's voices and input on their own needs was not given serious consideration (Florian, 1998; Kisanji, 1999). Therefore, at the epistemological heart of integration, elements of the medical model were still retained, in which the individual remained “a problem to be solved.”

If the Psycho-Medical Model saw special educational needs as arising from children's own characteristics or deficiencies, then, by contrast, the second model known as the Sociological Response saw them as the outcome of social processes (Clough & Corbett, 2000). In the 1970s, the second model came as a self-conscious response to the Psycho-Medical Model, driven by disabled people and organizations. As such, it challenged the Psycho-Medical Model directly and sharply at every level: epistemic assumptions, curriculum and pedagogical approaches, and institutional designs and arrangements. Almost an inversion of its predecessor, the key epistemological feature of this development lies in

concentrating on social disadvantage rather than individual deficit. The Social Model of disability identifies prejudice and discrimination in institutions, policies, structures, and social environments as the principal reason for the exclusion of people with disabilities. As explained by Terzi (2005, p. 6):

[The Social Model] sees disabilities and difficulties as caused by institutional practices, which marginalise and discriminate through the use of labeling procedures and disabling categories and methods. These positions criticise the use of categories of disability for their arbitrary, socially situated and discriminatory use. The use of categories, [from the Medical Model] is seen as aimed at separating, segregating, labeling, and devaluing disabled children and children with special needs. Consequently, and in line with the social model of disability, according to proponents of this perspective, ‘difference is not a euphemism for defect, or abnormality, for a problem to be worked out through technical and assimilationist education policies. Diversity is a social fact’ (Armstrong and Barton, 2000, p. 34). Differences and diversity, therefore, instead of constituting a ‘dilemma’, have to be promoted and celebrated.

The Sociological Response, in reaction to the pedagogical and curricular approaches of the Psycho-Medical Model, shifted the focus from the means of education to the schools. Through this model, experts were able to gauge how children’s difficulties and needs are caused by the inflexibility of the school system and by its inability to work children in all their diversity. It is, therefore, the pedagogical limitation of schools that causes special educational needs (Booth & Ainscow, 1998). This model says that disabilities are not caused by children’s impairments, but rather by a disabling system. The Sociological Response hence focused on people’s health, individual experiences, environmental factors, holistic support, and preventative measures. It addressed the idea that in education, diversity should be welcomed. Due to the shift towards a more sociological response to disability, institutional changes were made in countries across the global North. For example, in the United States in 1975, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act set the provision for “free and appropriate public education” (FAPE) in the “least restrictive environment” (LRE) (McLaughlin & Jordan, 2005, p. 99). Additionally, Canada created the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1985, which made explicit in

Section 15 that all individuals in Canada have equal rights and freedom from discrimination, explicitly stating, among others forms, discrimination based on disability (McLaughlin & Jordan, 2005). In Table 2.2, I have highlighted the significant differences between these two models to briefly recap the discussion above.

Table 2.2. Summary of Two Major Disability Models

PSYCHO-MEDICAL LEGACY	<i>Epistemic</i> Child is deficient → impairment is the focus of attention	<i>Pedagogical/ Curricular</i> Diagnosis; assessment; monitoring; programs of therapy imposed; no link between the nature of a task given to a child and the child's performance of it	<i>Institutional</i> Segregation and alternative services → asylums special schools	<i>Means and ends</i> Means: Unchanging/Rigid/ 'Normal' curriculum Ends: failure of disabled child → exclusion; education system not at fault and remains as is
THE SOCIO-LOGICAL RESPONSE	<i>Epistemic</i> Disabilities and difficulties caused by institutional practices → Child is valued → strengths and needs defined by self and others	<i>Pedagogical/ Curricular</i> Outcome based programs designed → resources made available to 'ordinary services' → training for parents and professionals → relationships nurtured → diversity welcomed	<i>Institutional</i> Movement from integration → inclusion Policies and provisions established for no more special schools. The focus is on getting children out of special schools into 'schools for all', where diversity and difference is valued and welcomed. Erase 'idea of disability' and replace it with 'diversity'	<i>Means and ends</i> Means: Flexible, changing, with diverse curricula Ends: if a marginalized child fails then it is a failure of the marginalizing, discriminating school system and institutions. We have to create school systems that do not allow marginalized children to fail, but are an agent of celebration of difference and diversity. Erase the 'idea of disability' and replace it with 'diversity'

(Adopted from Clough & Corbett, 2000, pgs. 11-17)

As apparent from the table above, there are rather radical differences between the Psycho-Medical Legacy and the Sociological Response. In their “purest forms” the two models are at odds in their basic assumptions and implications. In practice, however, they’ve been modified, adapted, and forwarded to be less oppositional for greater pragmatic integration. Some of the movements that followed these two seminal models and built on them include the Curricular Approaches (1970s-1980s), the School Improvement Strategies Movement (1980s-1990s), part of which was also the movement for Special Educational Needs (SEN), and the Disability Studies Critique (1990s-2000s and ongoing). It is essential to keep in mind that each one of these movements focused on one or two of the aspects of epistemology, curriculum, or institution, trying to bring about slow and effective change for the inclusion of marginalized children. However, they were not able to completely change or override these two influential philosophies upon which IE is built in countries of the North. They continue to be at the heart of the debate and even today when scholars speak about inclusive education as a response to diversity, they state how utilizing a more sociological approach can continue to expand its notion.

Additional theories.

In the Curricular Approaches Movement (CAM), which in the 1970s marked a turning point, for the first time in countries of the North, led by the UK, the curriculum was defined in terms of four interrelated issues (Clough & Corbett, 2000). Those issues were: 1) the setting of objectives; 2) the choice of materials and experiences; 3) the choice of teaching and learning methods to attain those objectives; and 4) the appraisal of the appropriateness of the objectives and the effectiveness of the means of achieving them. These curricular approaches, to a certain extent, represented the ways in which the social model started to influence the ways in which curricula were viewed at that time. People started to recognize that earlier assumptions about the deficits or impairments of children were not fixed or static, but instead could be transformed through reforms and adaptations of social structures (in this case, school curricula). Efforts to reform school curricula brought into question the reasons for a

separate school system for children with special needs, and experts began to develop methodologies to help bring special needs education into the mainstream educational policy discussions of the 1990s (Clough & Corbett, 2000). This was a major step in countries of the North in desegregating the prevalent, rigid, and prolific system of special education, leading to SEN and also SISM .

Next came the School Improvement Strategies Movement (SISM), which was embedded in was the SEN movement. Here the focus was on changing the overall institutional designs by separating special and mainstream schools into an inclusive school system. Finally, a breakthrough was reached when stakeholders working in Northern contexts were asked to engage in a process of inquiry into their own educational contexts. They were asked to try to better understand educational mechanisms and develop solutions by engaging with it in a gradual and nuanced manner (Ainscow, 2000). Stakeholders wanted to know how it would be possible that they can transform the education system so that it can be develop its capacity to reach out to all learners as a continual, ongoing process (Ainscow, 2000). It was essential that this development and evolution of the inclusive school system could respond to diversity in the student population, student learning, and student achievement (Stubbs, 2002). As explained by Clough and Corbett (2000), as national policies changed in countries of the North due to the global movements of EFA, mainstream schools in these same countries were required to take on inclusive cultures, policies, and practices. An inclusive school culture aims for the highest possible achievement of its pupils, and within the SISM movement of SEN, school cultures' started orienting towards being safe, accepting, collaborative, and stimulating for communities. The ideals of IE started to permeate school plans and policies, ensuring the actual teaching-learning methods in classrooms to be flexible, open, and inclusive. In short, SISM and SEN required schools to have a more holistic approach to education as a means to achieving attainable goals set not only by the teachers, but also through the involvement of the students themselves and their parents.

It is important to note here that the three movements of CAM, SISM, and SEN evolved with the aim of adopting some of the insights and criticisms of the social model into what had been an institutional, curricular, and pedagogical

setting dominated by the Psycho-Medical Legacy. However, the aims of these three movements are not a given in Northern contexts, like their predecessors are. Actually, most Northern countries are still in the process of achieving the goals set out by SISM and SEN. Some have only instituted variations of it, while others have implemented the goals of different movements. Although CAM, SISM and SEN forwarded the ideals of IE, these ideals were evolving as the movements unfolded, and continue to evolve until today as a shifting, bending, complex, and multidimensional phenomenon.

The North: IE related schools of thought.

As the movement of IE developed and evolved, several other schools of thought interrelated to the movement of IE started to emerge in countries of the North. It is important to mention these here very briefly because they can be considered “off-shoots” of the same movement, albeit in different terms and frameworks. Often these similar movements draw from one another. At other times, they operate under the single conglomerate umbrella of school movements aiming to ameliorate the education system and make it chiefly more inclusive.

One of these is the broad-based philosophical, institutional, curricular, and pedagogical concept of the Common School. This was a movement that was behind the formation of public schools as the main institutional embodiment of public education in the US, Canada, and the UK from the late nineteenth century to the present. Common Schools are schools that, at a very basic level, are open to and intended for all students within a given society, regardless of their specific differentiating characteristics (McLaughlin, 2003). Another school of thought working along the same lines as IE is the “New School Movement” (NSM)—a movement that began in countries of the North in the 1920s then spreading to Asia. NSM functioned under a league whose members adhered to seven key principles, which included respecting children’s individuality and children having a voice in establishing their lessons. Much more recently in countries of the North, and also similar to IE, the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) was put forth. The principles of UDL prompt teachers to design curricula that are flexible and adaptable to multiple forms of learning and engagement in order to facilitate

the learning of all students (Rose & Meyer, 2000). It does away with retrofitting curricula for students via accommodations and modifications (Lancaster, 2008).

The North: Some underlying discourses of IE.

The complexity of IE also lies in the multiple ideological discourses that feed into it. The unifying thread in these diverse but overlapping discourses is that “inclusive education is superior in one or other way to non-inclusive education (Dyson, 1999, p. 43). Nevertheless, it is useful to disentangle the rational discourse, which is “the rights and ethics discourse” from the realization discourse, which is “the pragmatic discourse” (Dyson, 1999, p. 39-45). Inclusive education, if viewed from the rights-based discourse, reflects a commitment either to rights or to some more generalized notion of social justice (Dyson, 1999). This commitment stems from the notion that “equity requires inclusion” (Lipsky & Gartner, as cited in Dyson, 1999, p. 39) or that “equity is the way to excellence” (Skrtic, 1991a and 1991b, as cited in Dyson, 1999, p. 39). In this sense, the rise of IE was linked to broader developments in children’s rights and structuralist sociology, “which problematized the notion that universal education as a means to equalizing opportunities and spreading economic and cultural benefits more widely in society” (Dyson, 1999, p. 39). In addition, as explained by Dyson (1999), across Europe and North America theorists such as Bernstein in 1970, Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, and Bowles and Gintis in 1976, began to theorize the ways in which education systems reproduced rather than removed social inequalities, and how education was a major agent of social reproduction in a capitalist society. Such theorizations illustrated the need for individuals to align themselves with oppressed groups in a wider social struggle and in some cases even demanded that these struggles be entirely handed to such marginalized groups, such as disabled people (Dyson, 1999). These movements engrained the rationale for a more just and empowering objective of education in countries of the North, and provided a major impetus for the growth of IE.

The concern with the struggle for a more just form of education is what differentiates the political discourse out from the pragmatic discourse. This latter is about what IE looks like in practice and with how, in practical terms, it can be

brought about (Dyson, 1999). In this practical consideration the first requirement is that inclusive systems have certain structures, practices and ethos in place that distinguish it from non-inclusive schools (Stubbs, 2002). Once these characteristics are delineated it becomes possible to set out a series of practical steps that practitioners, policy-makers, managers, and teachers can take on to realize inclusive education (Ainscow, 2000). Consequently, there has been a proliferation of guidebooks, handbooks, and indexes that outline what is possible by taking “the right sort of action at different levels of policy-making and implementation” (Dyson, 1999, 43).

However, there may be sufficient reason to be concerned about the relationship between the “rational” and “realization” strands of IE. It is doubtful that the relationship is a simple and unproblematic one. For example, often it is assumed that the realization strand efficiently promotes the rational, but matters of practical implementation can lead to a distortion or narrowing of the rational strand too. The relationship between IE and the cult of efficiency, as previously discussed, shows that the instrumental relationship between implementation and rationale seems to have transformed with the rationale morphing into an economic discourse of human capital rather than a rights-based discourse of social justice. In this case, often the pragmatic strand does not always serve the overall aims of the rational one, due to its excessive dependency on “how” to do certain tasks. On the other hand, the talk of rights and social justice can become overly utopian. In this sense, it is essential to recognize the difference between these two discourses that undergird IE and to understand that, although they are related, they can also be oppositional at times.

The North: Useful critiques.

Despite the advancement of IE in Northern countries, numerous criticisms have been put forth as well. One major criticism, advanced most forcefully by theorists in the emerging field of disability studies is that, despite greater educational access to mainstream schools for children with physical, mental, and sensory disabilities, these students continue to be marginalized within inclusive classrooms and schools. According to these critics, policies that enable access

without challenging larger social power structures inevitably fail to rectify entrenched inequities in schools (Nguyen, 2011). Accordingly, genuinely effective IE policies require “community, co-operation, and co-partnership” wherein stakeholders, including disabled persons, collaboratively re-define what disability means in society by questioning societal laws and norms (Clough & Corbett, 2000, p. 28). In addition, the degree to which situations engender disability is determined by the community, and again stakeholders need to reassess on a whole how disabling effects result from the situations created by systems of education, social circumstances, and employment (Clough & Corbett, 2000). Schools can be places where such instructive changes are fostered in a reasonably organized and systemized manner.

Notably, disability theorists have recently emphasized the importance of redefining disability, and challenging entrenched meanings, as a means to shift the emphasis toward extra-economic educational goals of human development, freedom, well-being and active citizenship. This particular critique is two-fold, with the first side challenging dominant conceptions of disability as signifying impairment and lack of capability, and the second side emphasizing meanings of disability as features of normal human diversity. When disability is redefined in this way, it requires educational policies designed to promote and recognize previously ignored or submerged forms of agency on the part of disabled individuals. According to Terzi (2008), full inclusion goes far beyond granting formal access, but also requires educational practices in which students with disabilities are truly involved, engaged, and empowered.

One significant difficulty in realizing this goal of full inclusion can be attributed to the dilemma of creating a sense of balance in a school system that is open to all and does not discriminate, but at the same time must identify students who need special help (without alienating them) in order to provide them with proper provision. As explained by Terzi (2008, p. 36), this “Dilemma of Difference” is:

The seemingly unavoidable choice between, on the one hand, identifying children’s differences in order to provide for them differently, with the risks of labeling and dividing; or, on the other hand, accentuating the ‘sameness’ and offering a common

provision, with the risk of not making available what is relevant to, and needed by individual children.

The Dilemma of Difference arises due to the interplay of certain theoretical and political frameworks. At the theoretical level, it arises in large part due to an reconciled tension between two competing models or meanings' of disability: the medical model and the social model. Educational theorists and practitioners need to understand and take this dilemma seriously, as this lack of reconciliation at the theoretical and political level leads to educational practices and policies that are likely to be worse than inadequate (Terzi, 2008). For example, an inclusive classroom may have interpreters available for deaf children or students who do not speak English. While such assistance can facilitate communication to some extent, Deaf advocates point out that it can also stigmatize and thus reinforce a sense of disability on the part of Deaf children. Phyllis Jones (2005) conducted a study in a UK classroom in which disabled children voiced that having “extra help” was as a marker of difference. Therefore, the recognition of these student's differential needs may run the risk of isolating them, creating “a different from rest” mentality.

Sensitivity to the Dilemma of Difference and the Social Model of disability can help to address such problems by calling attention to the ways in which existing attempts to include students with disabilities may depend upon, and unnecessarily reinforce, entrenched power relations (e.g. assuming spoken English as the dominant mode of communication). The same sensitivity underlies the kinds of political challenges mounted by blindness and Deaf culture advocates in their attempts to overturn dominant ableist educational norms and practices.

Furthermore, professionals and policy makers at schools need to understand that engaging and empowering learning is the key. For each individual, curricular measures of success alone cannot adequately gauge a pupil's advancement in a class towards empowerment or happiness—the ultimate goals of inclusion. A child may feel empowered or happy in a classroom where he or she is included, accepted, and valued, regardless of being able to meet

measures of curricular success. Accommodating the individual within the given social structures, which need to change to be able to view difference and success in a different light, is not an easy task considering the two have been at odds with each other in how education has been understood historically.

Countless strides in scholarly and policy work have taken IE in the North to great heights, yet there is still this deep and unresolved tension. To address some of the tensions, we need to shift away from the discussion of the two base models in countries of the North. We also need to shift the conversation of education away from neoliberal, and competitive currents. In other words, what we need to do is shed the opposing and contending ways in which we value children's engagement and empowerment in the classroom, and not associate them with production or meeting curricular success. This is especially true for the most vulnerable of children. It is time we move the conversation along more strongly towards whole school development in which disability, poverty, or ethnicity as singular difficulties are no longer the main issues, but rather important pieces of the puzzle for improving the *whole* school. Again it is important to reiterate that I do not see either theory as a lone standing solution. Rather I see them as works in progress that can resolve some of the dilemmas of IE in countries of the North with additional support from and partnership with other available contextually appropriate theories or bodies of knowledge.

An alternative model for the North?

I endorse the “New School Movement” as a principled and guided approach that can help shift the focus of IE away from the two base models. This “New” school is no longer new, as it was a movement that grew in power in the 1920s in the US and Europe, and later spread to Asia. However, the first “new” school was opened by Cecil Reddie in 1889 (Paz, 2013). Since then, the thought behind the new school movement has been advanced and endorsed by several education scholars, including Maria Montessori, Pierre Bovet, Adolphe Ferrière, J.J. Rousseau, and even Tagore himself, evident in many of his ideas regarding

Santiniketan¹⁴. Several schools were also established under the provision of this movement until the First World War in Europe. However, in recent times, for one reason or another, the New School Movement is not commonly spoken about in larger academic or practical circles, and the essence of its principles has been somewhat lost. Yet, it is a very useful framework that can help shed light on moving this conversation away from “psycho-medical versus social models” in countries of the North due to its emphasis on whole school improvement strategies. The NSM is based on seven key principles (Paz, p. 27):

- The essential *aim of all education is to prepare the child to love and to realize in his or her life the supremacy of spirit*. Therefore, it must, irrespective of the educator’s point of view or stance, aspire to conserve and increase the spiritual energy of the child.
- The education system *must respect the individuality of the child*. The child’s individuality can only develop through discipline, which leads to the growth of the spiritual powers in him or her.
- Studies and learning for life in general must work to *free to the innate interests of the child*.
- Each age has its own characteristics. Thus it is necessary that *the personal and collective discipline is organized by the pupils themselves* with the collaboration of the teachers. This reinforces the sense of individual and social responsibility.
- *Competition or selfish competitiveness must disappear from education* and be *replaced by cooperation*, which teaches the pupil to place his or her individuality at the service of the collective.
- Each gender should be able to freely exert on the other a healthy influence.
- The child should not only be taught to be responsible as a future citizen, but also be engrained with the ability to be conscious of his or her dignity as a person.

¹⁴ This is a town in India where Tagore conducted his educational experiments.

The NSM, as the italicised parts illustrate, moves the conversation away from unfair systems that fail students to evolving a more wholesome understanding of the aims of education. If children were not competing with one another to meet standardized curricular expectations, perhaps the need for teacher aids that cause children to feel marginalized, would diminish. Further, if children can decide the pace and rate of their learning, and even the type of lessons, perhaps they can plan their objectives in such a way that everyone can meet some aspect of their needs. Again, everyone's needs will be different, as such a diverse heterogeneous set of learning objectives would be the norm. This would an atmosphere where children would feel less compelled to compete with one another and more focused on achieving their individualized goals on a daily basis.

These are merely suggestions, rather than fully developed stand-alone solutions, that help address the previously mentioned shortcomings. Furthermore, for each context the solutions would be different, and NSM, as it were developed as a cross-country, cross-cultural endeavour, can be applied to both countries of the North and South. The point of my endorsement of NSM also lies in the fact that for the future of IE, more knowledge sharing from Southern to Northern (not only the other way around) will benefit the movement. A discussion of how that will happen is beyond the scope of this dissertation; however, a brief outline would possibly help to further explain my reasoning for favouring NSM as a theory to draw from for the future of IE; it was a cross-border cross-national effort of scholars working together, from North and South America, Europe, and India, before the emergence of EFA and the MDGs on a global scale, highlighting how co-partnership, rather than one-day deliverance, is the key to the success educational endeavours across the globe.

In the next section, I review in more detail the development of IE in countries of the South, namely the subcontinent, which had a different type of trajectory. As previously mentioned, Tagore applied many of the theories and practices advocated by NSM at his schools, and discussions of his thoughts are taken up in the following chapters. Here, I focus on the historical evolution of IE in the South and point out that, even if the impetus for inclusion also existed in

the South, the theorizing of IE therein (unlike in the North) has hardly been done. Therefore, the following review of the literature of the South will be rather historical and example oriented, in contrast to the overview of the North, which was based on unpacking theories, discourses, and critiques of IE.

The South: Charting a different course.

Embedded in different frameworks, the way in which inclusive education has evolved in Southern nations varies from those of the North (Alur, 2001). The evolution of IE has been rather fragmented and challenging in countries of the South. This is especially true for the Indian subcontinent, where the development has been overshadowed by simultaneously competing philosophical, political, religious, educational, and social forces. In this section, I will be discussing the various complexities associated with IE in the subcontinent.

The following review will illustrate that the inclusive discourse in the South did not arise out of a groundswell against the outright segregation and institutionalization of disabled people, as it did in the North (Singal, 2004). Neither has there been any theorizing of inclusive education for the Southern context (Mukherjee, 2014).

In ancient India (of which Bangladesh was part until 1947), referred to below as the Vedic period, there was an impetus for educating children with disabilities (and those considered “slow”). This continued throughout the history of Indian education systems. However, as the colonial impositions of the British grew, starting in the second-half of the eighteenth century, large-scale efforts were taken to alter the existing indigenous education systems. The education systems were altered by a structured inflow of Northern educational ideals, wiping away many of the previous educational mechanisms, and ways of life, which catered to vulnerable populations.

This is the historical backdrop that taints the overall educational development of the subcontinent, including the more recent phenomenon of inclusive education. It is important to note, however, that this overview of the Indian subcontinent has some gaps, due to the fact that published literature on inclusive education is relatively sparse and somewhat misleading in countries of the South

(Stubbs, 2002). Also, as Stubbs (2002), notes, "...policy and practice on special [and sometimes inclusive] education has either been imported and imposed by donors, or introduced by educated elites from those countries choosing to imitate North-based practice" (p. 17). This has resulted in the existence of major fissures in the scholarship on indigenous knowledge and skills, and the local influences that help IE evolve in South.

Casual integration in communal settings.

The communal cultures of India allowed for casual integration of marginalized children (Singal, 2004). In India there have been efforts to educate children with special needs since ancient times. Individual differences in pupils' mental and physical ability and achievement were noted some 3000 years ago in the hymns of the Rig Veda¹⁵ (Miles, 1997). In the Vedas, it was also stated that a teacher's response to slow learners often was to "let them stay, for whatever they can learn...let them go, when they are not able to learn" (Miles, 1997, p. 97). Other ancient sayings such as, "Try it a different way," "Observe closely what the child can do," or "Give them more time" (p. 98) indicate that, in ancient times, there was provision of education for disabled and slow learners. There were no separate classes, no marks, and no exams, indicates Miles, as "Each student went ahead according to his own pace and was free to leave the school as and when he liked" (p. 99).

In ancient times and until the end of the nineteenth century in India, there were also several teachers and headmasters that were physically disabled (Miles, 1997; Miles, 1998; Miles, 2008). Being disabled and being a teacher proved to offer several advantages. First, it provided role models of people with disabilities. Second, work in elementary schools, although not high status or skilled, provided disabled people with a dignified job. Third, it was highly unlikely that a disabled headmaster would turn down disabled students from their school. Usually the more students a school had the more wealth it was considered to hold, so disabled boys were encouraged to come to school to learn whatever they could.

¹⁵ Sacred Hindu scriptures.

In many of the documents from nineteenth century India, as explained by Miles (1997), there is mention of blind teachers and students. For example, William Moon invented the “Moon’s Embossed Script”¹⁶ for blind readers, which was used in India from the 1850s on. Many of the teachers using “Moon system” were blind themselves. The first regular teacher at an industrial school for blind people at Amritsar was Mis Asho, a young blind woman who had been educated in an ordinary school in Lahore (Miles, 1997; Miles, 1998). Asho read Moon first, then Braille, and later on became competent at various handicrafts. In 1838, Dwarakanath Tagore, father of Rabindranath Tagore, made a large donation of Rs. 100 000 to the District Charitable Society. He wished to establish the “Dwarakanath Fund for Poor Blind,” and through these funds 214 blind people benefited (Miles, 1997; Miles, 1998). Later on, his son would dedicate 40 years of his life theorizing on education and practicing child-friendly schooling for all walks of life.

In spite of these developments towards educating vulnerable children in ancient and more contemporary India (up to the nineteenth century), this road was plagued by several problems. First, in these ancient documents and reports, the education of girls is scarcely mentioned. Few girls had any formal schooling until the nineteenth and twentieth century in India. Mahatma Jyotirao Govindrao Phule opened the first ever girls school in 1848 (Sirswal, 2013). Second, as explained by Mukherjee (2015), in the later Vedic periods, the rich tradition of *Gurukul* education in India—previously described as schools where children were educated for free or minimal “Guru *dakshinas*”¹⁷ in residential schools¹⁸—started to degenerate due to the *Brahmanical Gurukul* philosophy gaining greater stronghold. The philosophical and educational mechanisms of the *Brahminacal Gurukul* system, which favoured certain castes over others and believed at the

¹⁶ Moon’s Embossed Script is a writing system for the blind, using embossed symbols mostly derived from the Latin alphabet. Moon type is made up of raised curves, angles, lines and shapes, which can be read by touch. Letters of the Moon alphabet can represent individual sounds, parts of words, whole words, or numbers (Omniglot.com, 2015).

¹⁷ A *guru* is a teacher. A *dakshina*, in simpler terms, can be considered a gift or donation a student might exchange for the services of the teacher. The *Gurukul* is the school.

¹⁸ These were schools at which the students and teachers lived. They are comparable to modern-day boarding schools, however, in ancient times the teachers also boarded at the schools.

base that people of certain class and birth could not access certain goods in society, became a tool of social and class oppression. It started to divide society into the narrow boundaries of the hierarchical caste system,¹⁹ which, although originating in indigenous Hindu society, later became a distinct phenomenon of Indian society prevailing even among non-Hindus (Mukherjee, 2015). It started to influence members of the Muslim community, and both *Madrasa*²⁰ and Gurukul educational systems were primarily delivered to men belonging to certain privileged sections of society. In addition to this, starting from the mid-eighteenth century, indigenous education mechanisms were highly obstructed by colonial imposition.

Colonial detriments to education.

According to Miles (1997), Kisanji (1998), and Alur (2007), most indigenous educational ideas were ignored during colonial times. There was a systematic wiping away of indigenous forms of education and anything native in both African and Indian nations. Specifically in India, in 1835, Lord Macaulay formulated the British policy for education in which he rejected all that was Indian: culture, languages, literature, and history (Alur, 2007). Furthermore, as mentioned by Ghosh and Talbani (1996), the colonial administration cast the education system in a male mould, preferring boys for government and service jobs. In India, where the education system already favoured males, women were constantly left out of the formal schooling system during the colonial times; it did not help that the Indian culture itself also left women out of education.

Moreover, during this time higher education was prioritized, while primary and mass education was essentially ignored (Alur, 2007). Some charity and missionary schools for the disabled were established, such as the 1895 Calcutta School for the Blind. However, these also followed British curricula

¹⁹ The caste system is a form of social stratification prevalent among people belonging to the Indian subcontinent. Originally they were professional labels equivalent to medieval European guildsmen. There were four major caste groups: the *Brahman* (priests and the learned class), *Kshatriyas* (rulers, warriors and property owners), *Vaishyas* (commercial business class and traders), *shudras* (labourers/workers/farmers) (Gupta, 2005).

²⁰ Educational institute for the study of Islamic theology and religious laws.

(Miles & Hossain, 1999). The Indian forms of education that did continue were limited by a scarcity of resources, although it was in these schools that there was some evidence of children with mild to moderate physical and mental disabilities being casually integrated.

More specifically, in the case of Tagore, who protested against Western forms of education on Indian soil, he faced several hurdles in popularizing his philosophies in the early 1900s (Gupta, 2005). As a scholar of education, he started²¹ his philosophy by reviving older, ancient educational practices, which favoured a deep student-teacher bond in rural, residential settings. On 22 December 1901, he inaugurated his school at Santiniketan, in the district of Birbhum of today's West Bengal in India (Chakrabarti, 1995). There were just five students and five teachers. He named it *Brahmacharya Ashram*.²² Tagore's school at Santiniketan was developed as a model of anti-colonial teaching-learning practices, and the school education was emphasized to be national, highly progressive, and respectful to Indian tradition (Gupta, 2005). Through the school's aims, Tagore revealed his resistance to the colonial policy of divide and rule. *Brahmacharya Ashram*, however, became unpopular amongst colonial bosses. They issued secret circulars asking Government servants and loyalists not to send their children to his school at Santiniketan or to help it in any way. Tagore became a political suspect and was under surveillance (Bhattacharya, 2013). It was not until much later, after 1913 and Tagore's Nobel Prize in Literature, that his works regained popularity across India and the world. Tagore's university Visva-Bharati was built under tenets similar to those of his *ashram* school (O'Connell, 2002). The scholar's efforts in one small rural

²¹ Tagore's educational thought at the beginning of its development was entrenched largely in notions of ancient teachings such as the *Brahmacharya Ashram* (explained below), the *guru*-disciple (teacher-student), and residency. But it was always transforming, and as his travels and international links grew so did his notions on girls' education or expanded curriculum, among others. The former, base ideas remained, but his emphasis on other pedagogical issues increased. How that happened becomes clearer in latter chapters.

²² An *ashram*, in Hindu texts, is usually described an isolated site designed for spiritual instruction, education, and meditation. *Brahmacharya* represents the bachelor, student stage of life and instruction, wherein students lived with the teachers in residential schools in order to gather knowledge (O'Connell, 2002).

community in Eastern Bengal was a beacon of hope in an otherwise bleak educational picture in the subcontinent subdued under colonial rule. Furthermore, around the same time there was an influx of literature on eugenics, which gave an additional blow to people belonging to vulnerable groups, especially the disabled.

In the late 1930s, literature on eugenics started gaining popularity in South Asia. In it people with mental disabilities were considered “social evils of tremendous proportions” (Miles & Hossain, 1999, p. 70). Children with disabilities were, therefore, supposed to be sorted and filtered out of existing schools and put into special schools. The philosophy of eugenics had a long-standing impact on the people of the Indian subcontinent, and even today, over a decade after the introduction of writing on eugenics, traces of it can be found in people’s attitudes. As a result, children and young people with disabilities in countries of South Asia continue to be one of the most disadvantaged groups (Singal, 2004). They are seldom given the opportunity to become contributing members of society, which shuns them, and they constantly have to battle discrimination at educational and vocational institutions. Some are labeled as curses on the family and to the community to which they belong, making it even harder to access educational and vocational opportunities (Alur, 2001). The discussion on children with disabilities and their current status is expanded upon later in Chapter 4, but in summary, children with disabilities in Bangladesh continue to live on the margins of society.

Another colonially developed obstacle in the route to social inclusion on the Indian subcontinent that is still visible until today is the *Bhadrolok-Chotolok*²³ system of societal classification in Bengal. Mukherjee (2015, p. 143) states, “the *Bhadrolok* (genteel people) subculture emerged as part of the colonial civilizing process of native population apparently considered by the European settlers as savages.” As the British tried to expunge indigenous ways of life (while Western systems of education gained popularity) mostly through “benign” missionary schools in colonized India, an urban liberal class—or *Bhadroloks*—

²³ *Chotolok* refers to the lower class, the unrefined class of people.

started to emerge in Bengal, embodying more British and “refined” ways of living. The native, feudal society of Bengal, started to embody in many ways the class-driven Victorian and Edwardian English model, which further reified the social hierarchies amongst them. This subculture, therefore, came to life as a “by-product of the colonial encounter and indicated social status, replacing other markers of social distinction like caste and religion, particularly among educated urban liberal Bengali society” (Mukherjee, 2015, p. 143). From the mid nineteenth century on, the *Bhadroloks* have continued to play a major role in Bengali society. In a recent report it was stated how:

Well heeled, middle-class Bengalis, who ineluctably locate themselves in the colonial field of power and privilege and thereby make the claim of being different and modern, continue to be Bengal's political and social elite, dominating the machinery of the political parties and state apparatus (Nandy, 2014, p. 1)

They make up a large portion of Bangladeshi society and it is their deeply entrenched valuation of social aesthetics and continued practice of distinguishing themselves from the rest of the native population; these exclusive practices are rampant in schools. This is a “social characteristic [that is] nationally” ubiquitous in Bangladesh, where the power of the elite has been normalized, in spite of constitutional commitments and educational policies (Dirlik, 1997, as cited in Mukherjee, 2015, p. 143-145). It continues to act as a barrier to the inclusion of children of diverse backgrounds and different walks of life to be able to attend school together. This type of attitude can be found across a broad range of stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and school administrators, and, as noted by Ahsan (2013), one of the major barriers to IE is a society gripped by class associations. Although individuals in this class can empathize with the plight of people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, as independent, educated, genteel men and women they still find it hard to break completely out of their social class divisions (Mukherjee, 2015).

My point up to now has been to illustrate that, in the Indian subcontinent, educational provision for those outside the scope of “the mainstream” has always been present. However, it has been overshadowed and fragmented due to the

political and social history of the Bengali context. Further, we can see through this overview, that cultural oppression resulting from colonization and evangelical missions has had a disabling impact on the education systems of the subcontinent until today (Kisanji, 1999).

This historical landscape makes it clear that the road to IE was present but lost over time in countries of the subcontinent. This trend continues even after 68 years of the British having left and 44 years since Bangladeshi independence. Even if colonialism in its original structure has ended, it left behind imperial structures in which people of the South continue to live. Class divides society, and as the genteel people continue to dominate modern societal mechanisms, with their “great regard” for anything Northern, they continue to entrench the idea that their lives and history are unworthy of investigation and that their indigenous knowledge is in some way lacking. When it comes to IE, South Asian stakeholders, NGO members, policy makers, and the educated elite choose to imitate Northern-based practices. These stakeholders imitate the practices focusing on the perpetual shortage of resources, funding and training, and a lack of enabling legislation, but seldom stop to consider what resources their own history or people might offer. In other words, they somehow believe that perhaps their available local knowledge won’t be “good enough” for their own contexts.

This type of attitude has created several roadblocks and has done harm to the development for inclusion in the subcontinent until today, also obstructing the development of a Southern theory of inclusive education (Mukherjee, 2014). I view these roadblocks as *harmful*; they are the result of past and present, overt and subtle neoliberal and imperial tendencies practiced in the global politics of education. In the next section, I discuss the point about harm in more detail.

Harms and Roadblocks in the Global South

As previously mentioned, at the very least, Northern hegemonic tendencies, coupled with the ignorance of Southern stakeholders, has harmed the understanding of inclusive education in the global South and, specifically in my case, the subcontinent. This harm done needs to be highlighted and questioned

before a conceptual framework for the proper implementation of IE in that context can be proposed.

The first harm done is the belief that IE is a Northern concept. Caused by the systematic erosion of indigenous education in the global South, and the dearth of knowledge in this area, practitioners of IE in the South have come to believe that inclusion is a Northern concept. They further believe that IE needs to be contextualized, amended, adopted, and adapted for their Southern contexts. As per the EFA movement, IE is in fact a Northern concept, but I see a strong link between what IE is supposed to be today and what was practiced in schools in countries of the South centuries ago. As such, what will be the place of the historical practice of casual integration of special children in today's IE practiced in the South? It is harmful to forget about those practices and not take any lessons from them for inclusion, especially when those practices are contextually relevant. Being in tune with indigenous philosophies can help overcome some of the roadblocks IE faces in these countries today. Brown (2005), for example, points out that although, in policy, many countries have committed themselves to inclusion, and that some of the basic cultural values and sentiments towards children with disabilities provide support, deeply rooted traditions and beliefs pose obstacles that are difficult to overcome. For example, in India (Mitchell & Desai, 2005), the doctrine of *karma*²⁴ has often worked against the disabled because it is believed that their disabilities represent retribution for sins committed in a previous life. Any interference with their current state would mean meddling with divine justice. For those implementing IE, the terrain is difficult, for it is not just about enforcing existing practices, but searching for proper cues to realize inclusion in the cultural parameters.

It is true that the current scenario of countries of the South (e.g. India or Bangladesh) is not the same as it used to be in the past. Massive immigration from rural to urban areas in these countries has loosened the ties to close-knit village communities, while in the larger cities the very essence of the community is slowly disappearing. These societies are going from being non-industrialized to

²⁴ Destiny or fate in this life predetermined from deeds or previous life.

industrialized (Kisanji, 1998), as forces of neoliberalism and globalization continue to superimpose pre-existing hierarchies. In addition, the objectives of the education system in those countries are changing from fostering social stability and continuity, to fostering and managing controlled change in the economy. Moreover, in these same countries of the South where there is an increasingly large nationalistic identity, commonly held sets of beliefs and values that largely characterized separate communities is no longer as important as it once was (Kisanji, 1999). The realities of the socio-political climate of Southern countries, therefore, make it difficult to advocate for the pure implementation of educational practices as dictated in the Vedas or ancient rituals. In current times, some of those practices simply would not fit. What is important, however, is to give credit to the existence of those practices, and validate those philosophies of the past as tools of learning for IE today. For example, one of those tools can be the utilizing of marginalized or disabled people as role models, which could help foster an overall better attitude towards these people and take the goals of IE forward in those contexts.

Not crediting the historical and indigenous teachings of IE in the global South, and utilizing IE as a tool for neo-imperialism, brings me to the discussion of the second harm done: *government inactivity due to policy ambiguity*. Due to the large migration of global ideologies to countries of the South, there is extensive ambiguity on how IE is understood and implemented in those contexts. Furthermore, as previously discussed in the section on the MDG's, often the top-down, loosely integrated, and locally alien policies do little to motivate people to implement or follow them. In inclusion in the subcontinent, while the global push has mostly been on changing education systems to better respond to diversity, much of the focus still remains on children with disabilities (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002). In Bangladesh, since the EFA declarations, inclusive education has not been discussed consistently in government documents. As previously mentioned, the GOB has incorporated inclusive education in a limited disability perspective in some documents, and in a wider framework in others. Hence, it is apparent that there is a lack of consistency in the understanding of inclusion on the part of the government. A lack of consistency and policy ambiguity make it exceptionally

difficult for proper IE implementation in Bangladesh, because, firstly, it sends contrasting messages to locals in the field, and, secondly, it allows the locals to use policy uncertainty as an excuse for incomplete implementation. For example, under the PEDP II, the Reaching Out-of-School Children (ROSC) project was developed; however, it still remains to be properly implemented (Zia-Us-Sabur & Ahmed, 2010). This project aimed to identify children who are not in school, focusing mainly on areas where enrolment was low and incidences of poverty high. However, the ROSC project has not yet been properly implemented as its responsibility has fallen on local education officers who 1) are overwhelmed with supervising their own schools, and 2) have not fully grasped the ideology of inclusion. The conflict of interest in the implementation of inclusion lies in the fact that, although in Bangladesh non-government and quasi government schools have flourished, the GOB still does not acknowledge and specify the role and significance of multiple, flexible provisions in education (Zia-Us-Sabur & Ahmed, 2010). The government still has ideological inclinations that favour a common, single government-run model for primary education, which are unfavourable to inclusion. I contend that unfavourable feelings towards inclusion can be resolved to a certain extent if professionals in the GOB are able to understand and accept the fact that indeed an understanding of IE can be formulated in their own Bengali terms. This is because mechanisms and practices of IE, albeit defined in different terms, were an integral part of their own educational history. Learning from the past could help government bodies better understand that IE can be realized in Bangladesh without having to adapt foreign imports on educational culture, policy, and practices. IE can be realized in Bangladesh with existing educational resources and local tools if they are amended and modified in conjunction with some historical precedents. As such, governments can make inclusion a priority, and the education of marginalized children could gain currency as an ideological commitment.

Alongside the ideological commitment for true IE, it is essential that governments secure proper resources, reform stigmatizing influences, ameliorate educational quality, and improve existing educational policies to enhance, value, and transform schools. The goal is to empower the child to “do and be” the best

he or she can in that given context and culture. However, for children attending inclusive schools in the global South this is often not the case, which leads me to discuss the third harm done by the global push for IE: the dilemma of enrolment without proper support.

As previously discussed, in countries across the global South, students are registered in schools but fail to attend, those who participate fail to learn, and many of those who are enrolled for several years fail to progress and end up dropping out. When the push for EFA came, the race to reach target enrolment rates became even faster in countries of the South. Hence, children from all margins of society were enrolled across government, NGO, and non-formal schools, many of which lacked the resources to support these diverse populations. Several studies from Bangladesh have illustrated the complexities resulting from enrolment without proper provision. For example, in 2011, Dejaeghere and Kyoung completed a study on reasons that children drop out in Bangladesh. Conducted with 78 mixed and diverse populations of Bangladeshi students in the 3rd to 5th grades, including some minority children, the authors found some interesting reasons for dropping out from the children's perspectives. According to Dejaeghere and Kyoung (2011) children have knowledge on their rights to education but cannot act on or achieve well-being through these rights, as they do not feel supported in their education by parents, teachers, or community members. In addition, most children feel there is only moderate support for their schooling in the form of small stipends, or emotionally through encouragement from the community. While 80% of parents supported their boys' education, only 44% supported girls' schooling. Children do not feel safe to go to school. Girls especially felt that they were not protected from abuse and violence in the community. Lastly, children do not regard education as relevant to their current or future lives. The challenges faced by the children above indicate that the available education does not seem to enhance children's doings and beings as individuals, nor does it help them reach their ultimate educational goals. It is interesting to note that while the push for EFA in countries of the North has brought about the dilemma of difference (which has brought about the call to avoid mentalities based on difference) in countries of the South, the push for EFA

has created the dilemma of provision. In countries of the South, where vast populations of children remain out of school, inclusive education essentially should be about giving those children access to quality education. Instead, it seems to have become a trend for increasing numbers of children in school to reach EFA goals. Inclusion should be brought more in line with the discussions held during the 1998 Agra Seminar, where it was emphasized that in countries of the South inclusive education should be broader than formal schooling, including in the home, community and in non-formal education systems (Singal, 2004). Moreover, inclusion should be considered a dynamic process, which is constantly evolving according to its culture and context, and the emphasis on enrolment rates needs to shift to provisional improvement with a focus on quality education.

Concluding Comments

Inclusion is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. As an agent for educational change, the movement as a whole has brought large numbers of students into classrooms in schools across the world. However, as an agent of development framed within neoliberal politics, inclusive education has also become a part of the neo-imperialistic bandwagon in education. In countries of the North, as previously explicated, inclusion grew out of a response to the direct stigmatization of disabled people, and has currently evolved to being about the education of all children. In countries of the South, where special education is not so deeply rooted, inclusion has been popularized as a Northern concept, required by international declarations and endorsed by powerful multilateral organizations in those countries. Although being positive to the extent that it has brought more children into the schools in Southern nations, multilateral organization activities in countries of the South have created obstacles to the contextually appropriate implementation of inclusive education in those countries. For example, while the goals for IE command that the focus shift to the means of education, the tangible experiences in the classroom, the goals set for EFA set by the multilateral organizations continue to concentrate on the ends of the education system—numbers and enrolment rates. In addition, inclusion in countries of the South suffers from social stigma and superstition on the one

hand, and a lack of proper funding, facilitative legislation, and properly trained teachers on the other. However, it is not merely the lack of resources, but also the fact that at the time of the development of the Salamanca Statement and the Millennium Development Goals, these countries simply did not have the structural composition comparable to those in countries of the North to be able to shift to EFA—at least not in the parameters defined by the North, which is based on funded, well-resourced schools led by an ideological commitment to inclusion.

To make inclusion a priority in countries of the South, the education of the marginalized must become an ideological commitment for local governments. What might help this commitment is the endorsement and acknowledgement of IE, not as a foreign import, but as integral parts of the educational histories of the South itself.

What is required for the global South in this case, to resolve the problems set out by the practice of neo-imperialism, is a retracing of those countries' educational roots. Miles (1997) for example, states that South Asia's historical heritage of ideas and practices for educating children with special needs contains many of the approaches that Northern teachers discovered independently in the past 150 years. These include close observation of children's current abilities, adjusting the curriculum to individual students' needs, allowing more time for learning, etc. "However, Western campaigners and exporters of modern educational integration, and now inclusion, have mostly been ignorant of the rich historical and cultural background in South Asian education" (Miles, 1997, p. 101). The greatest threat to the successful development of inclusive education practices in non-Northern countries, as proposed by its advocates, lies in the polarization of indigenous and Northern forms of education, in which the former is seen as primitive. It is important to take into consideration some of the enviable practices of the past (Kisanji, 1998) and mould the philosophy, methodology, and content of schooling to a large extent by indigenous perspectives. As explained by Sardar (1999, p. 57):

The non-Western cultures and civilizations have to reconstruct themselves, almost brick by brick, in accordance with their own world views and according to their own norms and values. This

means that the non-West has to create a whole new body of knowledge, rediscover its lost and suppressed heritage.

It is important to develop policies and education systems for inclusion rooted firmly in this rediscovery of suppressed heritage, while at the same time incorporating certain aspects of more Northern forms and structures of inclusive education more prevalent in current times. As explained by Mitchell (2005), inclusion should exist in both historical and current contexts wherein vestiges of older beliefs co-exist with newer ones taken from the field in which it is to operate. What is required for Bangladesh is the stringing together of a desirable, relevant, and contextually appropriate conceptual framework from the existing complicated IE scenario. However, in order to do so, one must answer the prior question concerning the aims or purposes of education—that is, what are the goals and purposes deemed to be most valuable and worth pursuing in Bangladesh? I contend that voices from the context can be the best source of information. Thus, I suggest that the IE framework for Bangladesh should not be defined only in global terms, but local ones as well. This allowance of contextually relevant voices in Southern countries, whether from the past or present, will add exceptional wealth to the movement for IE. As previously stated, in upcoming chapters of this dissertation, I draw on the teachings of indigenous scholar Rabindranath Tagore to suggest a way forward. Reflecting on the past, such as the ancient teachings of the *Vedic* period, and valuing more recent Southern educational philosophies, can shift stakeholders' focus from IE as prescribed in Northern parameters to IE being simply about the means of focusing on children's wellbeing. For the specific context of Bangladesh, Tagore's educational philosophy coupled with children's voices from the field, as my study will show, provide contextually relevant and practical tools to *enhance* and *realize* that process. In moving forward, I would like to end this chapter on the following note, eloquently summed up by Mitchell (2005, p. 19):

There is no one model of inclusive education that suits every country's circumstances. [Caution] must be exercised in exporting and importing a particular model. While countries can learn from others' experiences, it is important that they give due consideration to their own social-economic-political-cultural-historical singularities. The challenge to 'importers' of

inclusive philosophies and practices is to determine how far their country's indigenous philosophies, ideologies and practices should be encouraged, respected, challenged, over-thrown or blended with those from 'outside'. 'Exporters' of inclusive philosophies and practices have similar obligations to respect local values.

CHAPTER 3

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN IN INCLUSION AND BANGLADESH

Children's Voices and the Inclusive Debate

The dynamics of childhood are problematic. On the one hand, there is the historical image of the child as a non-agentic being who is merely in the process of becoming an actor in the future (Einarsdottir, 2005; White, 2002;). In this perspective, children are seen as unsophisticated and immature, lacking the capacity for abstract thinking, which they gain only much later in their adolescent/adult lives (Darbyshire, MacDougall, & Schillar, 2005). On the other hand, there is the recently-developed and more popular “new social studies of childhood” viewpoint (Barker & Weller, 2003, p. 208), which emphasizes the “ontological repositioning of the image of the child” (Cocks, 2006, p. 247). In this approach, “childhood is viewed as a social construction and children are deemed social actors instead of mere entities who are in the process of becoming such” (Einarsdottir, 2005, p. 198). Childhood and children “are seen as worthy of investigation in their own right, as they are considered experts on their lives, separate from their parents and caregivers” (Einarsdottir, 2005, p. 198).

When referred to as “experts” in this context, children are considered holders of insightful knowledge about their own lives and situations. Expert does not imply that children’s insight about their lives is absolute or authoritative, rather that they are active, engaged creators and users of the many meanings, themes, patterns, and differences that construct their social worlds (Beazley et. al, 2009). Their voices are of particular importance and relevancy in a social world where there is no one “true” order (Beazley et. al, 2009, p. 370). Along these lines, all stakeholders’ voices and versions of stories are of importance in a given society, and everyone is an expert on their own situation. Furthermore, when those stories are about issues that directly portray or impact a certain group, e.g. children, the stories can then potentially be considered to hold “expert insight.”

The new movement of the social studies of childhood, led by theorists in countries of the North and more recently spreading to countries of the South, has created a surge of research conducted with children across the fields of nursing, sociology, and education. More specifically, research with children has been emphasized as an important element of IE for over a decade (Booth & Ainscow 1998; Messiou, 2008). In line with this trend, I assume that in order for IE to be genuinely inclusive in its formulation, expression, and scope, it is essential that children have room to voice their perspectives and interpretations. Through systematic and ongoing research with children, more salient concerns can be brought to the surface. Research, albeit a slow process, is a vehicle that can be a positive force of change, highlighting, presenting, and preserving children's voices. In short, the idea is that inclusion is, and should be, about the experiences of children (Messiou, 2012).

At the same time, in this chapter I look more critically at the broader notions—as well as those specific to my research—as to *why* the involvement of children in debates on inclusive education is so important. As my research is essentially about children's role in IE, my guiding question is; “*Why is it important to include the voices of children in the study of inclusive education?*” As a follow-up question I ask, in adherence to the idea in the “new social studies of childhood” that if children are considered experts, what is the extent of their voice? Furthermore, I ask how can we productively and usefully incorporate children's voices in a study of IE in Bangladesh. Simply “surfacing” children's thoughts and voices is important and necessary, but it is insufficient. There is a need to interpret and critically analyze children's voices in relation to a variety of other dynamics, including political, economic, and cultural factors.

Chapter Structure

I start the chapter by reviewing the emergence of the “new social studies of childhood.” Then, in the following section, I scrutinize how the movement to work with child participants came about, especially in education. I unpack the importance of that type of research in IE in general, and more specifically in my research context. In the next part, I examine some salient issues relative to voice

that reveal important limitations of children's participation in my study. This is done to provide a more analytical viewpoint on the "in-betweenness" that resulted from children being viewed as both agentic and non-agentic beings. In other words, if children are experts, then are there any limitations to their "expertness"? The last part of this chapter presents an overview of the status of children in Bangladesh in order to highlight some of the challenges and obstacles of doing research with children in that country. Issues of rights, children's rights, and children's participation rights are points of discussion, as is child-led research.

Questions may arise herein as to the relevancy of what is largely a Northern-based corpus reviewed and engaged within a study designed for Bangladesh. This is for two reasons. First, there is a paucity of Southern-based researchers in Bangladesh that consult children. Second, most of the studies have been conducted by researchers of Southern origin, who, like myself, belong to Northern institutions. Regardless, I have tried to consult a wide array of academic material on children's rights and voices by both Bangladeshi and non-Bangladeshi scholars, some of which were co-written by a diverse range of researchers falling in different points of the spectrum. In addition, a lot of the Northern-based research has relevancy because thought rooted in the North, as the review will demonstrate, has impacted—albeit in complex ways—children and the debate on their participation rights in Bangladesh. Within cultural boundaries, children are coming forward to participate in research, showing interest in voicing issues related to health, education, sanitation, and family (West, 1997). This can be attributed to certain global, neoliberal forces and, even though research with children is scarce, it is not new to the Bangladeshi context. For example, in 1996 an innovative, participatory study was carried out in Bangladesh, whereby street children were involved in a research project from design through to analysis and recommendations (West, 1997). My study aims to contribute to this type of research in the country.

The New Social Studies of Childhood

Over the past decade, there has been a growing interest in the sociological

study of children's lives (Mayall, 2001). This is known as the "new social studies of childhood," in which children are seen as beings, not becomings (Qvortrup, 1994; Punch, 2002). The "new social studies of childhood," according to Tisdall (2012), views childhood as a socially constructed meaning that produces beings. The author further explains that this movement started in the 1980s and 1990s when scholars began to critique older theorizations, such as Parson's socialization theory and Piagetian's child development theory, because they presented children as "less than fully human, unfinished, or incomplete" (Jenks, 1996, p. 10, as cited in Tisdall, 2012, p. 182). From such constructions came arguments that children were not citizens and, further, they did not even have rights because they lacked rationality, lacked competence, needed protection rather than autonomy, and had to be socialized into good citizens (e.g. see Phillips, 1997; Purdy, 1992, as cited in Tisdall, 2012). Scholars started to identify a problem with that definition of childhood, as it kept children in the cycle of marginalization. They suggested theoretical and practical reconsiderations of conceptions such as normalcy, competency, independence and dependency (Tisdall & Davis, 2004). Therefore, "childhood studies positioned [themselves] as counter-paradigms, as severely critical of what had gone on before" (Tisdall, 2012, p. 184).

Scholars in childhood studies started problematizing and transforming the natural category of the child into the cultural (Jenks 1996, as cited in Barker & Weller, 2003), also pushing for the recognition of children as social actors who are able to competently contribute to and influence their own lives. Furthermore, this movement emphasized that childhood and children's own social relationships are worthy of investigation.

The ontological repositioning of the image of the child (Cocks, 2006) paralleled the growing visibility of the children's rights movement in the political arena, especially with the establishment of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). And in many ways, "the theoretical developments were deliberately harnessed to a political agenda of civil rights" (Tisdall, 2012, p. 184). Article 12 of the CRC argues:

State parties should ensure that a child who is capable of forming his or her own view should have the right to express these views freely on all

matters affecting the child, and those views should be given weight in accordance with age and maturity (United Nations 1989, as cited in Einarsdottir, 2005, p. 199).

The CRC, a global declaration ratified by countries across the world, was created as an extension for and reflection of the political and legal structures of international human rights law (Melton, 2005). International human rights law was established as an expression of the world's revulsion at the atrocities of fascist governments during World War II. As explained by Melton (2005, p. 918), "the success of the international human rights law ultimately rested on its effectiveness in creating political and legal structures that create and sustain everyday interaction consistent with the rule" According to the authors of the CRC:

Perhaps more than any other instrument, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989) offers the opportunity to use a global moral consensus to transform life at the neighborhood level in order to promote "the full and harmonious development of . . . [the child's] personality." (CRC, 1989, preamble, as cited in Melton, 2005, p. 918)

As a result of the establishment of the CRC, children are no longer seen merely as recipients of services or beneficiaries of protective measures, but rather as subjects of rights and participants in the actions affecting them (Biggeri, Libanora, Mariani, & Menchini, 2006). Children, therefore have the right to provide their opinions (article 12); have the freedom of expression using the medium of their choosing (article 13); the right to protection from forms of exploitation not specifically addressed in other articles (article 36); and the right to the highest possible standards used in working with children (article 3.3) (Beazley, Bessell, Ennew, & Waterson, 2009).

The two "paradigms"—old versus new understandings of childhood—have been framed as oppositional in much of the scholarly literature (in order to highlight the contrast between competing theoretical approaches). However, I would like to highlight that in applying the new paradigm to a research on IE such as this one, respect for children's autonomy and agency need not imply that issues of protection and socialization are irrelevant or harmful to their education. Indeed, policies of IE aiming to encourage the growth of capacities for autonomy

and civic agency will necessarily include protections and shape educational attempts to “socialize” in order to ensure that children’s agency and autonomy are nurtured and encouraged.

The CRC

The CRC has undoubtedly impacted countries across the world, as most nations have ratified and endorsed it, developing a plethora of acts, policies, and action plans in responses. The CRC realistically cannot and does not prevent all signatory countries and governments from committing crimes against children. However, it does criminalize such violations and provides potential tools for legal enforcement and moral condemnation. Further, it prioritizes for governments the issue of children’s rights as an urgent matter, transcending both international and academic boundaries (Punch, 2002).

Central to the conceptual framework of the CRC is the idea that “recognizing children’s rights means acknowledging human rights as a matter of entitlement and accepting the consummate responsibility to ensure their effective enjoyment” (Pais, as cited in Biggeri et al., 2006, p. 60). The CRC, therefore, legitimizes the idea that a child is not only a subject that has identifiable capabilities and can receive certain liberties, but is also a participant in the process of identifying his or her own core capabilities. Hence, as children have the “right” to “certain universal rights,” for example, access to proper healthcare or education, they also have the right to exercise their ability to partake in deciding what is most important in their lives. One of the most effective ways to find out what is most important to children is by utilizing Amartya Sen’s alternative view of human development, i.e. the capability approach.

Very briefly, as explained by Biggeri (2007), the capability approach provides an accurate theoretical underpinning for the measurement of children’s well-being and can be used as a conceptual framework and a normative tool in analysing children’s wants. Furthermore, the capability approach shifts the ontological viewpoint from the child as immature and incapable to mature and participative. It allows us to ask children what they think they should be able to do and to be because it views childhood and adolescence as periods of human life

during which interaction and reception within the social environment reach their highest levels. Childhood is in a certain sense the foundation for the development of human beings, having both personal and societal consequences (Biggeri et al., 2006). As Sen (1999) argues, “...capabilities that adults enjoy are deeply conditional on their experience as children” (p. 4).

As previously mentioned, through the capability approach one can discover what children are effectively able to *do* and to *be*. In that sense, capabilities are children’s potential functionings, and functionings are “achievements” and “outcomes” (Biggeri et al., 2006, p. 63). In this study, although I did not use the capability approach as a framework, my goal was similar, as in I gauged children’s roles in the inclusive classroom. Essentially, although my intention is not to discuss the literature in detail, the fundamental aims of my own research converge strongly with a capabilities approach in that both prioritize IE’s role in advancing children’s freedom and well-being through expanding their “capabilities.” As the study unfolds, it will become clear how particularly interested I was in finding out what children are able to *do* and to *be* in two inclusive classrooms and how they are able to articulate much of that themselves. Therefore, given the two schools’ inclusive atmosphere, how did children understand and interpret that atmosphere and, given these understandings, could they communicate that to me? Also, how was I as a researcher best able to provide a methodological platform that made it easy for them to express their opinions whilst remaining within their realms of protection and safety?

The Evolution of Research with Children

Influenced by the “new social studies of childhood” movement, researchers have used a number of different methodologies and techniques for conducting research with children (Barker & Weller, 2003). Nevertheless, the process of conducting research with young people has never been an easy one. As explained by Punch (2002), research with children differs from research with adults due to adults’ perceptions of children and children’s marginalized position

in adult society, as well as the fact that children are inherently different from adults. Traditional positivistic methodologies, with an emphasis on large-scale quantitative observations, surveys, and questionnaires, have been criticized for “seeing children as mere objects to be studied, carrying out research *on* rather than *with* them” (Barker & Weller, 2003). According to some scholars (Hill, Laybourn, & Borland, 1996; Mauthner, 1997) these types of positivistic investigations are underpinned by adult assumptions and hinged upon adult interests rather than the interests of children. Further, they do not give children the opportunity to speak for themselves. As a result, since the 1990s, in countries of the North, there has been a methodological shift involving the emergence of new participatory research methodologies that try to place children at the centre of the research process (West, 1997). These include the development of the multi-method approaches, such as the “mosaic approach” (Clark & Moss, 2001, p. 13) or the development of methods based upon children’s preferred ways of communication, such as drawing, photography, or song. Some of these methodologies have been adopted for use in countries of the South also. For example, Woodhead (2001) conducted a study for working with children in Bangladesh using several different drawing and mapping activities.

In addition, in recent years, in both countries of the North and South, children have started to become involved in various stages of the research process, including formulating research questions, planning methodology, collection and data analysis, or even disseminating findings (Fargas-Malet, McSherry, Larkin, & Robinson, 2010; West, 1997). As explained by Barker and Weller (2003), these newer forms of engagement with children shift the research process to being more about negotiation rather than imposition, endorsing children’s status as subjects rather than objects of research. It also brings to the surface, and makes more transparent, the several methodological and ethical issues of conducting research with children, such as access and consent, confidentiality, and child protection. Nevertheless, there may be a tendency, perhaps mainly ideological, in at least some of the literature to overstate the conflict between “traditional” and “new” research on childhood. In my study, I

have tried to avoid this “binary oppositional approach,” by bringing those tensions to the surface and problematizing the degree of children’s expertness.

My Internal Image of the Child

The particular internal image of childhood that a researcher holds will inform the researcher’s choice of the aforementioned methods, and influence ethical practice, analysis, and interpretation of data. As explained by Punch (2002), a researcher needs to have a clear understanding of his or her internal image of the child before embarking on research with children. She identifies three different approaches to researching with children:

- Children are practically the same as adults, therefore the same methods employed with adults can be used with them;
- Children are completely different from adults, hence ethnography (participant observation) is most effective in examining the child’s world or;
- Children are similar to adults but have different competencies, which allows for the development and use of a plethora of innovative and adapted techniques.

I approach my research in a way that is similar to Punch’s third option. The first reason is that I most closely identify with point three. Secondly, this approach allows me to more easily incorporate various methods of data collection—one of the aims of my study—as I am able to make use of photography, as well as a contextualized version of the more traditional methodology of focus groups.²⁵ Furthermore, I should mention that, in addition to Punch’s work, my research is also influenced by the work done on children’s voices and marginalization by Kyriaki Messiou (2002, 2008, 2012). Similar to Messiou, I also approach my research from a standpoint situated *in-between* the dichotomy of research involving children:

²⁵ The more contextualized version of the focus groups I mention herein draws on the Bengali concept of *adda* (or informal conversations). *Addas* have been explained in more detail in Chapter 5.

[On the one hand, there] is ‘research on children’ where the adult is superior to the child and therefore has the knowledge to document childhood. [On the other hand, there is] ‘research with children’ where emphasis is given to the fact that good information about childhood must start from children themselves. (Messiou, 2008, p. 27)

Messiou’s type of research treats children as active participants. I too consider my work to be: “research about children, which aims to allow all children’s voices to comprise an essential part on the identification” of their experiences of inclusive education at their respective primary schools (Messiou, 2008, p. 27). There are some forms of research that involve children more directly in the design and investigation itself. I drew some elements from those approaches, wherein some aspects of my research decision-making processes, were left up to the children. For example, in terms of which methods they preferred or how they chose to utilize the cameras. I did not embark on my research journey, however, framing children as research decision-makers or co-researchers.

Potential Contributions of Children’s Voices to IE

Until now, in this chapter I have illustrated the emergence of the changing views on childhood, and how the establishment of the CRC, children’s rights, and new methodological advancements have impacted the growing interest in children and child-centered research. I now want to explain some of the specific ways these developments impact research on IE, particularly in the present study.

Capturing “hidden voices” for IE improvement.

As explained by Rose and Shevlin (2004), who worked with groups of young people that experienced marginalization in educational settings, listening to children, “enables us to reflect upon how future developments of [education] may afford greater opportunities to those who have been previously denied” (p. 160). Therefore, as explained by Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson (1999), children have hidden voices that, if listened to, can assist in the development of more inclusive classrooms and schools. For example, Angelides and Michaelido (2009), claim that listening to children was essential in one Cyprus classroom

because:

Children's drawings and discussions with their creators revealed many *hidden* dimensions of children's school life. Playing with the sun which was an only friend, the lonely rabbits which saw the rest playing during breaks with the complaint: 'they don't play with me or they don't want me to be their friend', the ships that embarked for lonely, distant trips, shouted at the top of their voices and asked for some open ears to hear them. This amounted to, in our opinion, a deafening silence. (p. 43)

Angelides and Michaelido (2009) emphasize how important it was to directly engage with the children in order to just begin to scratch the surface of the hidden dimensions of children's experiences of marginalization at that specific school. According to both researchers, this is just one step towards better understanding marginalization by way of focusing on "hidden voices."

Seeing a different perspective through children.

Children's voices can also point us in directions that are invisible to the adult eye. As explained by Jones (2005), adults play a dominant role in the design of children's services, often to the detriment of children's perspectives. Stacey, an advocate of youth partnership, shares Jones's concerns:

In our society, it is adults who have most say about what happens to people. They make decisions about lots of things in young peoples' lives. Sometimes these are helpful decisions, sometimes they are not. Many times, adults make decisions without checking how young people feel or what they think about them. (Jones, 2005, p. 61)

It is not at all the case that the role of adults in educational decision-making processes is unimportant. However, adult decision-making cannot be done to the detriment of what children want, especially if adults are in a place to ensure children's wants and needs. For example, in her study with children, Messiou (2002) described a child as feeling excluded in the classroom, not because he had a hearing impairment, but because he wore a hat that signified that he had a different religion. In another study, previously unrecognized in that specific context in the UK, Phyllis Jones (2005) pinpointed that what is important for children in the practice of inclusive education is effective behaviour management and discipline in the classroom.

Empowering children is an objective of and for IE.

Children can contribute by providing a fresher perspective for the improvement of IE. However, children's contributions and interest is in itself a demonstration of the underlying philosophies of empowerment and engagement that outline IE. In other words, the conception of IE as an “all-encompassing” philosophy that values each member has been bolstered and solidified by an interest in children and child-centered research. This is a third way children contribute to IE, as engaging with them allows IE practitioners to illustrate in practice what IE is about, whether that be at the research, school, or policy level.

If inclusive education is understood as a cumulative social responsibility in which education is provided in a way that is best suited to the child, then the child's opinion in its formation is essential. If inclusion is about responding to diversity, listening to unfamiliar voices and providing tools for empowerment (Barton, 1988), then hidden voices are gems we must gather. In its most simplistic form, inclusive education calls for the inclusion of everyone. This means listening to every important stakeholder—including children—for suggestions, opinions, and preferences to developing school etiquette, practices, and curricula.

Specific Research Benefits of Engaging with Children

The relationship between children and IE is one of give and take. Children are essential stakeholders for whom, to begin with, education systems are in place. Therefore, they have the right to contribute to ongoing and future developments of IE in so that it continues to evolve in their favour in order to meet their educational needs over time. These contributors, although young, give a fresher, more nuanced, and previously hidden perspective on educational practices. Taking in this knowledge on IE, other stakeholders, such as authorities, decision makers, and teachers, can provide space to implement those contributions and gauge whether they have had a meaningful impact. In this way, the cycle of IE (as it is intended to work) self perpetuates as one of give and take, and engagement and empowerment, in which both sides are impacted varyingly and in great, nuanced complexity. That is the essence within which this

relationship is built and, as in most relationships, without one integral part the other would fail.

My research is an exploration of this relationship put into practice in the Bangladeshi context. Since I have gone over the importance of contributions of children's voices to IE, I would now like to examine why specifically my research benefitted from including children in my research project. As it is clear, not all research on IE needs to take into account children's voices and in Bangladesh it rarely does. However, I have *three* main reasons as to why it was necessary to connect with children, regardless of the fact that I believe it is their right to be heard and that IE crucially benefits from their input. These reasons are also different from my research purposes as outlined in Chapter 1.

Children give us examples of what we know (and don't know).

Firstly, while children point out hidden aspects of the classroom, in some cases they also provide us with concrete illustrations of things we already know. This means, in engaging with them, we can identify what is and is not working in the classroom. But even more importantly, as a contribution to IE, when finding out what is or is not working, we can get to know the stories of children that create the backdrop of their experience. This is highly valuable for IE in any given context, including mine, as with IE, schooling is not only about what happens in the classroom but also how education shapes a child as a whole.

Let us illustrate this point further through an example. BRAC's objective is not only to provide educational opportunities, but also meaningful ones. Although it is questionable as to what constitutes meaningful education and who defines those terms, we can consider that for IE's purposes meaningful education is shaped by children's ability to feel engaged and empowered in and out of the classroom. In that case, it is only by focusing on children's voices, which is rarely done at BRAC, can the organization retrace their steps whenever necessary in order to improve children's experiences so as not to fail in providing them meaningful educational experiences. One way this is hindered, which was outlined over a decade ago, is the mechanism through which extra-curricular activities are practiced at BRAC schools. For example, all these schools across the

country have the same mechanism for inserting extra-curricular activities in the curriculum and children are usually taught the same songs and dances. A previous study in 2006 (Ahuja & Ibrahim), which assessed the situation of IE in Bangladesh at that time, criticized this point:

Co-curricular activities are found to be important in the school curriculum and children are happily engaged. However, promoting creativity and enhancing self-expression of children needs special attention as the children in both the BRAC schools visited sang the same songs, recited the same poems and demonstrated the same dance sequences. (Ahuja & Ibrahim, 2006, p. 32)

Without even speaking to the children, the authors had identified that promoting creativity and enhancing self-expression needs special attention at BRAC schools. My survey of over ten BRAC schools in the 2013 came to a similar conclusion, whereby I also observed a certain “un-creativity” of children in their creative endeavours. This confirms that, in practice, BRAC’s goal of meaningful education through extra-curricular activities remains questionable even after a decade of it first being identified. Even if children are “happily engaged,” are they empowered by memorizing and reciting the same songs over and over again in different schools and throughout their four-year tenure studying there? This is not something the children need to point out that requires further reflection and perhaps a fresher perspective. We already know that.

However, what my findings in engaging with the children show and, in other words, contribute to IE—which is not possible by limiting engagement to adults—is the extent to which children themselves are able to articulate what needs to be changed in their respective school’s extra-curricular activities. The engagement with children also reveals the kinds of emotions they feel towards doing extra-curricular activities, also illustrating the kinds of back-stories they have from their lives that can penetrate their understanding and exercise of those activities. For example, one child at School “U,” loved singing a certain song (many times in a row) because she used to sing that same song with her cousins in the village. However, even if all the children in the different schools sing the same songs, the children at one school do feel happy doing something that does not require them to “keep their noses inside their books” (Jannat, School “U”

participant, age 12). This is a valuable contribution as it shows the limitations of BRAC's rigidity regarding extra-curricular activities, while at the same time points out that even within this rigidity there is success, if the situation is seen again with fresher eyes. I acknowledge and agree with Ahuja and Ibrahim (2006) that it is problematic that children memorize and recite the same songs across schools time and again throughout the years, thus indicating a change for BRAC to consider when laying out the objectives of their curricular activities. However, at the same time, engaging in the repetitive singing activity does not minimize the happiness quotient it provides for different participating children at any one particular school. Although it may not increase creativity, the happiness quotient they experience at each or most singing sessions, however, is not a negligible finding in itself. Without speaking to child participants, I would not have found that out.

Children are ready to contribute in Bangladesh.

Among the NGOs that work on poverty alleviation in Bangladesh, there is consensus that they should help facilitate the voices of the poor and vulnerable rather than trying to be a voice for the poor (DfID, 2000). This point is applicable not only to poor adults, but also to poor children. Also, this is especially relevant to IE, in which the nexus of the debate is on children themselves. Therefore, as the meaning of IE in Bangladesh evolves we need to ask how children can contribute to this debate. Even more importantly, we need to understand that when children are able to articulately express their views and perspectives they are also able to demand the same kind of space in research projects as adults. In the field of education, this space is essential for myriad reasons unpacked earlier. It is also the second most important contribution my specific engagement with children has made to IE. What I found out in engaging with children is the extent to which they are now "ready" to make direct contributions to IE, while we are still in the process of defining and inquiring as to what IE might mean for the Bangladeshi context. I would not have known how prepared they are, without any formal instruction, if I had not chosen to engage with them.

What I discovered through my engagement with BRAC students was that

children in Bangladesh, who are often perceived as naïve, incompetent, unreliable and incomplete (Fargas-Malet et al., 2010), are now raising their voices to let adults know that they are not. Children in Bangladesh have started to believe that they should be included in discussing issues that impact their lives. They are more aware now than ever before that they have a right to make important contributions. In addition, given the cultural context in which children's rights are not a priority, children feel a greater need to be included. Further, this point became clear in the 2004-2009 NPA officials' discussion and consultations with children across the country. As some studies have shown, the traditional culture in Bangladesh is on the move and people, including children, have caught on to the belief that they are not immature, and that childhood is not a transitional state to adulthood with little or no extrinsic and intrinsic value of its own (Holmes, 1998).

In 1997, West published a study highlighting the fact that it was surprising to adults how much children knew and were able to discuss and express about their lives on the streets of Bangladesh. West (1997) further commented that although he was not expecting it, he found striking similarities between his findings in Bangladesh and his research with children on the streets of different parts of Britain. What was most surprising from both his experiences, were the expertise children had on their own lives and how similarly, between the two contexts, they explained how they perceive the present and future. In another example, during the development of the 2004-2009 NPA, which is one of the most progressive documents from the Government of Bangladesh on child welfare, children's voices were included. Through consultations held nationally in districts and divisions, children had the opportunity to raise concerns, analyze, and prioritize issues that affect their lives (Ahuja & Ibrahim, 2006). The children listed twelve priority issues that they deemed most important in their lives, areas that needed particular attention for improvements, including "fulfilling basic needs," "security," "health," "education," and "participation." It is important to note that the children themselves were concerned about the fact that their opinions were not taken into account and that there was "no scope for participation in any aspect" (NPA, 2005, p. 19). As elucidated by White (2002, p.

1101) in Biggeri et al. (2006, p. 60):

We are aware that all too often children are vulnerable to claims being made on and about them...there is no problem with the idea that (outsider) adults should be able to determine the best interests of (insider) children...in practice, however, there are often difficulties in the assumptions of superior understanding on the part of self-styled benefactors.

The children I worked with at BRAC showed similar eagerness; later chapters will reveal just how much clarity and maturity they displayed in thought and speech, given the many contextual limitations. Therefore, when children are able to articulately express their views and perspectives they are also able to demand the same kind of space in research projects as adults. This is the second contribution my engagement with children specifically makes. If the school is supposed to be a haven where children live, grow, and learn, then it only makes sense that this haven involve, value, and respect what children want—if not more than adults, then at least at par.

Preserving and enriching the present.

The third and final way my research benefitted from including children has to do with the fact that it is through this engagement that the need for recording children's voices to protect, preserve, enrich, and expand their role in society (especially in school) was heightened. For example, when I started working with BRAC officials in September 2013, many were surprised I chose child participants. However, by the end of the six months most were hopeful that this engagement could help them in the very near future. Whether I mostly gathered stories of marginalization and failure at school, or stories of success, both hold valuable lessons for BRAC. Of course this information could have been gathered via other methods, however, in order to preserve the story from the perspective of children they had to be asked directly. Furthermore, a more concrete reason I had to ask children has to do with Tagore.

Tagore himself practiced preserving children's voices and if I wanted to do a study on Tagore and education I had to involve children. If one scours his writings, vast examples of what his students used to do have been preserved in his essays and lectures on Santiniketan and Sriniketan. Moreover, many of his

creative literary works (short stories, songs, dramas, and poems) were also inspired by his students (O'Connell, 2002). It is because those works were preserved that even today we can reflect on, study, and find relevancy in them for the evolution of education in Bengal. It will be valuable and worthwhile to continue this trend into the present and future, as, paradoxically, it was only through this engagement with children that I realized its potential for the field of IE in particular. Further, if children and their experiences from previous generations were found worthy of documenting by a Bengali educational scholar, it is clear that appreciating children's voices has been a part of Bengali scholastic culture and history. Those voices have been lost due to certain political, historical, and cultural shifts and pressures. Yet, the central question here is not to dwell on how they were lost, but to ask how can the interest in children's voices be revived in order to sustain and expand upon it, both echoing vestiges of the past and enriching the future with lessons for education, in this case, and so much more.

In short, asking children is the only way to preserve the diverse experiences of the individual child whilst at the same time promoting the fact that children are meaning-producing beings (Young & Barrett, 2003). As White (2002) explains, children's present situations, contexts, feelings, and ideas need to be protected and preserved, rather than disregarded, while placing hope in them for the future. What is more, giving children a chance to be part of research displays that we value their opinions and hold their thoughts and ideas in high regard. In Bangladesh, we need to value children as who they are *now* and give them room to contribute to the understanding of certain phenomena (later chapters will reveal more just how insightful their contributions can be). It would be a great contradiction to develop "solutions" to child welfare if the meanings that children produce are left missing or ignored (Darbyshire et al., 2005).

Complications Surrounding Children's Voices and Rights

I advocate throughout this chapter, and throughout my dissertation, for the value of listening to children, much like how some researchers and schools of thoughts present them as "experts" on their own lives. This does not mean that I

am not aware of the certain complications that riddle this process, in general and in a more context specific way, which I address in the sections below. However, before unpacking those complications, a distinction between some key concepts must to be reiterated. Although I have mentioned these concepts separately throughout the dissertation, a grouped re-iteration of the distinction between rights, children's rights, and participation rights, is required.

Rights can best be “seen as entitlements to certain specific freedoms, and that the correlate obligation to consider the associated duties must also be centred around what others can do to safeguard and expand these freedoms” (Sen, 2005, p.152).

Children's Rights can be seen as “[state parties ensuring] that a child who is capable of forming his or her own view should have the right to express these views freely on all matters affecting the child, and those views should be given weight in accordance with age and maturity” (Article 12 UNCRC 1989, as cited in Einarsdottir, 2005, p. 199).

Participation Rights can be seen as “children having the entitlement to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice” (Article 13.1 of the UNCRC 1989, as cited in Beazley et al., 2009, p. 370).

- Within participation rights, children have: the right to provide their opinions (article 12); the freedom of expression using the medium of their choosing (article 13); the right to protection from forms of exploitation not addressed in other articles (article 36); and the right to the highest possible standards used in working with children (article 3.3) (Beazley et al., 2009).

As explained by Sen (2005), the idea of human rights has tremendous appeal; however, it is a problematic notion, inconsistent in different contexts of colour, race, and age. My goal here is not to unpack the rights debate philosophically, but rather to link it to my research on children's voices in Bangladesh. For this I will first problematize the issue of children's voices, which are integrally central to child and participation rights, and then point out some of the debates on “expertness” itself. These debates question how capable a child exactly is of forming his or her own opinions. Then I will briefly discuss the problems associated with the vast escalation of studies on children in the Global South

using an UNCRC framework. Lastly, I will explore in more detail the tension in my own work of listening to children in Bangladesh, a context where meanings of childhood are very different from those framing it in Northern countries.

This latter tension has arisen in my work due to my perspectives being shaped and influenced by the “new social studies of childhood” and children’s rights framework. “Rights” as I previously mentioned, “can be seen as entitlements to certain specific freedoms, and that the correlate obligation to consider the associated duties must also be centred around what others can do to safeguard and expand these freedoms” (Sen, 2005, p.152). Within this framework, children should be guaranteed certain assurances, but in Bangladesh that is not necessarily the case. Therefore, I find some of the attitudes, traditions and norms on childhood within Bangladeshi culture as harmful to the child. This is not intended to devalue the cultural norms of Bangladesh in any way. Nor is the objective to view it as a deficit culture. I believe that every culture has certain norms and traditions that are harmful, and in Bangladesh particularly the plight of children needs improvement. This does not have to be done by imposing Northern notions and norms on what constitutes rights and who should be voicing themselves. Rather it implies, as I have suggested, mining resources within indigenous cultural norms such as those practiced by Tagore at his schools. Further, it is essential to treat the culture of Bangladesh as a composite, complex, and dynamic whole, only then can we revisit those lost lessons. In addition, the aim is to underscore the complexities that result in children’s rights not only from the local culture itself but also by viewing the interactions between the local and the global, more neoliberal terms that define the aims of education in the world today.

Negotiating voice: Questioning the “expert.”

When bringing children’s voices into the debate on inclusion, or any field for that matter, it is important to keep in mind several key issues. First is the issue of “expertness.” As pointed out by Tisdall (2012, p. 187):

The phrase is often used in childhood studies, that children are ‘expert in their own lives’, but this does not necessarily translate into expertise in

other children's lives. There is a risk that children are treated as a homogenous group, with a too-simplified dichotomy of childhood versus adulthood.

She explains that overall, the claim for expertise and its problems can arise from an implicit assumption that child participants are somehow *representative* of other children. According to Tisdall, this, however, is a nearly impossible goal to achieve in a research context, whether statistically or democratically—and one that adults are not typically required to meet. It ignores alternative means of assessing (qualitative) research, which favour criteria like credibility, dependability, and transferability, rather than validity and reliability (Guba & Lincoln, 1988). It ignores other forms of participative democracy, which may be more suitable, productive, and meaningful for those involved (Cairns, 2006).

Then there is the problem of children's non-normative and undomesticated voices (Komulainen, 2007). As highlighted by Tisdall (2012), simply presenting direct quotations of children gathered during fieldwork does not justify children's voice. She points out that the selection of the quotes, and the subsequent framing and analysis, are generally carried out by adult researchers. Researchers therefore are making the decision on what counts as "voice," often representing that "voice" textually, and interpreting the intentions behind the child's utterances (Tisdall, 2012). Focusing on this type of voice "privileges comprehensible verbal utterances over other forms of communication, which risks excluding children and young people who communicate little or not at all through speech" (Komulainen, 2007, as cited in Tisdall, 2012, p. 185). Mazzei (2009) explains that there is a problem with researchers simply stating that children's spoken voices, "elucidate, clarify, confirm, and pronounce meaning" (p. 157). She argues that when there is something "voiced" through verbalization, there is also something left "un-voiced" through silence. For example, what does the child not respond to; what does he or she omit; what is left unsaid? As Spyrou states:

This is the undomesticated voice, the non-normative voice, the voice in the crack, which calls for attention, precisely because it is hard to reach and interpret and requires that we acknowledge its performative character...for the researcher this is an opportunity to go beyond verbal to examine other

than surface meanings. (2011, p. 157)

Research on children's voices (or lack thereof) in inclusive education is a complex and multilayered process and, as researchers, we must be aware of the limits of children's voices and think more creatively of ways of accessing them (Spyrou, 2011). Making sense of what is verbalized, and also what is not (such as the non-normative voice), requires looking at voice and reflecting on it critically. It also requires the researcher to hear what is said but also to focus on irrelevancy, inconsistency, and non-verbal actions, as well as to be more rigorous with adopted methodologies and acknowledge their messiness and limitations in order to paint a transparent picture of children's lives.

In addition, what if the context in which a study is being carried out is one that is still transitioning away from seeing the child as a "being rather than becoming" (White, 2002, as cited in Ruwanpura & Roncolato, 2006, p. 363)? Protected and subsumed under families, cultures, and traditions, children in countries such as Bangladesh rarely have a voice. Therefore, the point of the "undomesticated voice" in a context where children's voices are often quieted was an important tension throughout my research.

In Chapter 5, I explain the myriad methodological and reflexive ways I adopted to counter the aforementioned tensions, but generally, as suggested by scholars in this field, I was open to the use of verbal, written and visual forms of communication. I was also sensitive to children's choice to non-verbalize or verbalize, integrating methods that allowed for a wide range of students with differing abilities and preferences to participate.

Using the UNCRC framework in the Global South?

As explained by Beazley, Bessell, Ennew, and Waterson (2009) the UNCRC provided a new impetus for research with children because state parties were faced with the necessity to report regularly on progress towards achieving the human rights of the child in their nation. However, when it comes to the Global South, some of this impetus for doing research with children has actually proven to be quite problematic. This is because there is a scarcity of ethnographic

studies that have been done on local forms of childhood, as childhood in that context is understood very differently. In addition, most constructions of childhood designed for children of the South are both essentialist and power-driven (Ahsan, 2009). For instance, children in the South have not and do not necessarily pass through Piagetian development stages at similar pace or in the same manner (Burman, 1994). Beazley et. al (2009) emphasize that somehow the “notion of the girl child,” for example, has been reified as if there is something essential about all female children regardless of wealth or ethnicity—something that makes them more vulnerable than boys in general. This does not always take context into consideration. Therefore, what happens is that “the diverse gazes of the South are deflected into uniformity by Northern terminology of international agencies” (Beazley et. al. 2009, p. 368). This paradox has also unfolded in Bangladesh.

Children’s rights in Bangladeshi culture.

The Government of Bangladesh (GOB) ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in August 1990. As previously stated, the UNCRC, a global declaration ratified by countries across the world, was created as an extension for and reflection of the political and legal structures of the international human rights law (Melton, 2005). However, over the past two decades the implementation of the UNCRC has been facing serious problems in Bangladesh. In the *Realization of Children’s Rights Index*, Bangladesh currently has the score of 5.02/10, codified with the color black, indicating that children’s rights are in a “very serious situation” (Humaniam, 2015). As revealed by Jensen in 2007, although nearly all government agencies and NGOs have moved to using a rights-based discourse on paper and in speech, but tangible on-the-ground realizations of rights inside homes, schools, and workplaces are still questionable.

Realization of the child’s rights agenda remains questionable in Bangladesh due to the convention’s complexities, which outline what it means to be a child. In this context, how successful can the rights agenda be, and is it even meant to be “successful” in the same terms as countries of the North? International policies are usually framed within economic constraints and global

pressures. Marked as signifiers of international development they are impossible to refuse for countries such as Bangladesh, which are highly dependent on donor aid and support (Kalyanpur, 2011). Frequently international policy initiatives, such as the UNCRC, conflict with local cultures, or may not even be in line with the government's own priorities, only ratifying it to remain on good terms with the international community.

Complex outlines of what it means to be a child.

Social anthropologists Sarah White (1992, 2002, 2007) and Kamal Siddiqui (2001) have written extensively about the web of contradictions that crop up when UNCRC ideologies are imposed upon a culture where children's rights still go largely unrecognized. White (2002) suggests, for example, that the first problem for the children's rights movement in Bangladesh is the fact that there isn't a single term for the word "child" in Bengali. Many NGOs use the word *shishu*, which means infant or young child, but distinctions beyond the infancy stage are often made in relation to the person's size, gender, capabilities, and levels of understanding. Other terms exist for older young children and younger young children, but age does not determine a term for that category of children as it does in English. Ruwanpura, and Roncolato (2006) further problematize the issue of childhood by stating that parenting and the expectations of how a person should mature differ across class lines in Bangladesh. In such a situation, the point at which a child "stops being a child" is rather vague. For example, a girl from a lower, poorer class may be expected to earn money, take care of her younger siblings and/or "act" more mature at an earlier age, whereas a girl from a higher, more privileged class will experience life as a "child," dependent and sheltered, until perhaps she is married.

The maze of the somaj.

Another impediment to implementing UNCRC's paradigm in the rights agenda in Bangladesh has to do with the maze of responsibilities, social pressures, and conventions that define Bangladeshi social culture. The social culture, at the very least, can be considered hostile to rights, especially children's

rights. As identified by White (2007), this is because “guardianship” is a key social institution that governs children’s lives in Bangladesh. In Bengali, the term for guardianship is *obhibabhok*. In its simplest form, the idea of guardianship is that older male members of a household must protect and support children (and always women) within their families and larger community, the *somaj*.

Somaj, if translated literally from Bengali into English, equates to large community or society. However, within the larger community or aggregate of people living together, lie many distinct factions of society in much smaller communities, such as those linked to villages, worshipping assemblies, mosques, and particular patron-lead family groups (Banks, 2007). Families and individuals within families living in almost all contexts throughout Bangladesh belong to and identify with these smaller local communities, and are *accountable* to them. Even circumstantially displaced people have groups with which they identify and to which they belong. The families, belonging to a certain *somaj beboshta* or social community, can be from varying economic realities.

However, within the largely homogenous Bangladeshi population—with ethnic and religious minorities living mostly in the margins—diversity of creed and ethnicity within communities is limited. Rather, each community, or *somaj* is unique in its own way and differentiates from others by characteristics not singularly based on creed and ethnicity, but rather on customs, village origin, dialect, family name and even food habits. It is up to the heads of each *somaj* to maintain the boundaries of his community. While in village communities the protection of such boundaries is more resolute, and the role of heads more active, within more urbanized communities, where members display far more transient activity, the boundaries are liable to blur and often communities adopt from and adapt to one another. In urban areas, families and individuals usually always identify with more than one community simultaneously, at both a larger and smaller scale. For example, as a member of my family, I am answerable to my family patron, my grandfathers from both my paternal and maternal sides. At the same time, I am also remotely answerable to the larger Muslim community to which my family belongs. In my case, as in most cases, the immediate *somaj beboshta*, with which the male family head identifies, has the most influence in

an individual's life. In this chapter, when referring to *somaj*, I am alluding to the local, smaller sense of the word, not as society as a whole.

In each local community, membership in the *somaj* for children and women is not a right, but rather derived through birth or marriage to a male member. As such, they are never “full members” (White, 2007, p. 512) of the *somaj*, rather dependent members, faced at once with the duality of subordination and adoration. However, let us look at the case of children in more detail.

Children play an important role of obedience and duty in the *somaj* system as they are considered young representations, “on-display,” of the kept and broken boundaries of any given *somaj*. Children are always discouraged from breaking these boundaries, as such it is the mothers' and fathers' moral and material obligation to “make their child,” or *manush korano*. The process of *manush korano* is determined by older male members, and if the children falter it is not only their dignity that is at stake but also that of their parents who failed in some way in their moral duty to raise “proper” children. Furthermore, the idea of “making” is to transform an unformed infant into the next stage of life as a fully socialized human who is respectful and dignified as long as he or she remains within the *somaj*'s established parameters. As argued by White (2007), in light of the previous sociological discussion, the child in Bangladesh is seen as “becoming,” rather than “being.” Childhood is celebrated insofar as it remains within the boundaries of the child's *somaj*, for which having a voice is discouraged, especially if it threatens those boundaries. In Bangladesh, having the right to speech is usually not more important than protecting one's family name, dignity, and position in society.

As Siddiqui pointed out (2001), moreover, within Bangladeshi culture, there is a general belief that not everyone is entitled to everything. There is a differentiated belief of entitlement depending on the gender, class and birthplace of a person. This is again related to the idea of the *somaj* and upholding the uniqueness and privilege of each one. Privileged families who employ child workers, for instance, genuinely do not believe in that child having the same educational or participation rights as their own children. This is because that

child belongs to “another” *somaj*. In her study of child workers, White (2002, p. 733), interviewed an employer who quoted, “If I gave her all rights then the reason for keeping her would be lost.” Therefore, this hegemonic cynicism in which child “deserves” certain rights, based on his or her place in a classist society, counters the entire logic of the UN’s right of the child, particularly in regard to participation. In practice, young people working as domestic help in Bangladesh rarely have any control or say over their working hours, place, condition, or pay.

Both of these points, although not monolithic, potentially represent the case for a majority of young people in Bangladesh in the past and present times. Changes are always happening within and beyond the system and also, as illustrated elsewhere in this chapter, children are becoming more aware of their rights and government is endorsing participation in research and educational policy. Nevertheless, this development is recent and does not negate the fact that at the very least there is a serious clash between the emphasis on children’s rights and voices as expressed in the UN declaration, and as it actually stands in Bangladeshi culture. In the former, children’s access to certain specific freedoms, especially those that give them a sense of happiness and fulfillment and keep them safe and protected, are guaranteed no matter what. In the latter, those aspects are intended to be guaranteed, but not all of them and not as rights, especially ones relative to participation as they are seen as a challenge to certain *somajic* social parameters.

More specifically, when it comes to the questions of children’s participation rights, some view it as only as a minor, more marginal issue within the rights movement (Siddiqui, 2001). Hence, it is not important enough to be integrated into the assurances of other forms of rights, mainly rights to protection. Others categorically reject its importance and state that children having some form of voice is an indication of disobedience or *beyadobi*. For example, Siddiqui (2001), and White and Choudhury (2007), confirm that severe punishments, including beating with sticks, are still inflicted upon children at home and at school for speaking up or disobeying elders. Moreover, the elusive “voice” is a point of inconsistency in children’s lives, as merely between home and school, or the city

and the village, adults' expectations change. Lastly, children do not necessarily see "voice" as a right because the need to belong to a *somaj* and obey its rules, which generally do not support being outspoken, are very deeply engrained. Therefore, children may feel confused or frustrated when asked to conceptually understand the issue of their "right to voice." Some might find it easier to state that they have "never been asked!"

Crucial questions in regard to using UNCRC.

Complexities exist in the understanding of childhood and children's rights in Bangladesh. Hence, it is essential to question whether the universality of rights accepted as a moral norm, especially in regard to the significance of children's voices in my research, is a sufficient basis for advancing and promoting children's interests in Bangladesh. In summary of my previous discussions, children's participation and engagement decision-making is tightly bound to their relationships with adults and to the secure nexus of inter-generational authority, dominance, and power, which characterizes child-adult relations in Bangladesh that have been established and kept in place by each *somaj*. Its mould is not easily broken. As articulated by Ahsan (2009, p. 401), in this context:

...might our attempts to have children and young people join [have active voices in research] eventually increase their vulnerability, robbing them of protection in the name of their participation? Unless all...factors are taken into consideration, any romantic notion of applying the idea of rights-based research with children and young people will remain mere rhetoric rather than reality.

Therefore:

- Are Northern notions of children's rights and participation sufficient for the Bangladeshi context?
- If not, how can we move towards promoting children's interests whilst protecting communal values?
- What role can inclusive education play in this move?

In response to my first two questions, the aforementioned scholars, White and Siddiqui, have come up with some solutions. White (2007, p. 511) suggests:

Who decides whose ‘rights’ prevail when different children have conflicting demands? How do ‘child rights’ relate to wider social divisions, such as those by class, or gender, or ethnicity, or age? All such questions point again to the argument...that there is a need to develop further an approach which can connect better with the realities of Bangladesh on the one hand, and is more grounded in social and political analysis on the other.

To this I would add that the question is not just who decides but what are the factual and standard contextual considerations that ought to be normatively determinate in adjudicating such conflicts.

Further, Siddiqui (2001, p. 69) suggests:

It is very much possible to find common grounds between most provisions of the UNCRC and the religious and cultural tradition that prevails in Bangladesh. Conversely, it would be most undesirable to present the UNCRC as a Western imposition on the Bangladeshi society.

Although there is distinct difference in the way children and their entitlements are codified in Bangladesh, I agree with the authors, and for several good reasons, that a completely new approach is not necessary. It would not be fruitful to completely abandon the discourse, firstly because a vast, rights-based rhetoric already exists in government and non-governmental agencies. Secondly, given that children are more aware of their entitlements, a rights-based approach is actually quite necessary at this time. What it needs, however, is a creative and thorough reformation (Jensen, 2007; Siddiqui, 2001). In that sense, the rhetoric needs to be interpreted more positively, implemented stringently, rehabilitated, and mainstreamed. Some suggestions for participation rights, for example, could entail:

- A theorizing of “Southern Theory on participation rights,” wherein examples from the South (i.e. Tagore) can exemplify how child participation and leadership is a valuable tool to institute not only in individual schools but also on a larger scale.
- A reformulation of participation rights as not posing a threat to the *somaj*. The *somaj* does not necessarily have to be disturbed by children’s participation, if participation is done in a way that aids the progress of

“manush korano.” If *manush korano* is vitally important for Bangladeshi families, perhaps the focus of rights discourse on legal rights needs to shift more broadly towards moral rights. In Bangladesh, moral rights need to have greater centrality in the discourse (Pogge, 2002). Moral rights can be understood as any right an individual possesses that is moral in nature, such as the right to an opinion, to practice fairness, or to give charity. These rights do not depend on governments only and have not always been endorsed by the legal and judicial system (Robeyns, 2006). These rights can be safeguarded by community and *somaj* members—and, if communal stakeholders are encouraged, through awareness building programs, role-modeling, and positive examples—thus broadening their vision on children’s right to voice as a moral obligation so that participation and the ability for children to be more vocal can hold a position of greater value.

The right’s approach, although questionable, is therefore not completely unsuitable for Bangladesh. In spite of the complexities that surround it, the right’s approach is significant because rights allow us to have an ethical instrument to reach a given goal and protect the ethically fundamental interests of children (Brighouse, 2003). The rights discourse, in viewing humans as possessing moral and political purpose, provides the *raison d’être* of why we should educate, protect, value, and empower children in any given context.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter was dedicated to unpacking the place and significance of children’s voices in inclusive education in general and more specifically in my research. IE, which is about the overall improvement of children’s educational experiences, needs to include children in its debates. This is because children can make contributions towards solving many of the dilemmas IE faces, while IE itself can be a place where children’s roles as engaged and empowered individuals can be forwarded. My research specifically benefitted from having chosen this path, and I illustrated how children contributed to it by showing me more

concretely what I perhaps already knew about BRAC. In practice, they also showed me their readiness to participate, which demands that they get a platform on par with adult participants. I am well aware of the complexities of carrying out such an endeavour in a context like that of Bangladesh, wherein we not only have to consider the complexities that surround the issues of expertness, undomesticated voices, and silence, but also the *somaj*, and the altered meanings of children's rights and participation. Regardless, it is essential for me to reiterate the importance of continuing on this complex journey of involving children in research and, as articulated by Tisdall (2012, p. 186), support and reinforce that:

The critique of childhood studies, and its promotion of agency, does not negate the valuable role that research or consultative activities, facilitated by adults, can play in raising children's issues and views to a broad audience. 'Children's voices' has been closely linked with the children's rights agenda, with both its flaws and benefits: certainly, it has been powerful politically to gain attention to children's issues.

The next chapter reviews the context of primary and NGO education in Bangladesh as a backdrop to my methodological chapter in which I illustrate how I practically engaged with children in the field.

CHAPTER 4

A CONTEXTUAL OVERVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL INCLUSIVITY IN BANGLADESH AND SETTING THE STAGE FOR TAGORE

Bangladesh and Inclusive Education: An Opening

In 2001, in collaboration with different stakeholders (school principals, teachers, policy makers, consultants, and experts), the UNESCO-Dhaka office generated a working definition of inclusive education for the Bangladeshi context:

Inclusive education is an approach to improve the education system by limiting and removing barriers to learning and acknowledging individual children's needs and potential. The goal of this approach is to make a significant impact on the educational opportunities of those: who attend school but who for different reasons do not achieve adequately and those who are not attending but who could attend if families, communities, schools and education systems were more responsive to their requirements. (Ahuja & Ibrahim, 2006, as cited in Ahsan, 2013, p. 16)

This working definition of inclusive education for Bangladesh, at the very least, raises some key questions. My goal here is not to criticize it, nor suggest a better definition, but rather to discuss some potential ways in which this definition needs further reflection. First of all, even if this definition was developed in collaboration with the UNESCO-Dhaka office and local stakeholders, what were the power dynamics between those two parties and who had more voice in the development of this definition? Secondly, this definition is perhaps a bit outdated, as recent developments in the field will help underline that “acknowledging” is no longer enough in inclusive education. The term “acknowledging” limits the possibilities of what IE intends to achieve in the education system, and in order to better reflect current debates, terms such as “promoting” or “facilitating” are needed. Furthermore, “needs” are different from promoting “interests” and “capabilities”; the latter outline a very basic goal of IE. In other words, why IE if the basic goal of IE is merely to fulfill students' needs? IE requires going a few steps further. In addition, “potential” is a vague term. Everyone has potentialities that are never developed or fulfilled, and no school is

expected to do *everything* they can for a child to reach his or her “full” potential. So the question arises on just how much effort and resources are expected to be devoted to ensuring at least partial development of children’s potential, and which aspects of that potential are to be prioritized for an inclusive educational system in Bangladesh. Further, the idea that the goal of IE is to make a significant impact on the education “opportunities” is potentially anaemic. Again, providing opportunities only outline the very first step of IE. The last part of the definition seems to focus on children “who do not achieve adequately” or are “not attending,” which seems to exclusively focus on certain individuals rather than whole-school development. The focus here needs to shift in order to better reflect the fact that the goals of IE are much more expansive and capacious than what this definition indicates. However, why has it not been possible, as of yet, to develop this more nuanced and deeper level of understanding for IE in Bangladesh? For this we need to trace, engage and contend with some of the most salient contextual realities of inclusive education in the country, which is the focus of this chapter.

Chapter Structure

In relation to my topic on children’s experiences at two NGO schools, specifically primary schools, in this chapter I address: 1) inclusive development in the primary sector; 2) inclusive education as an agenda of the non-formal NGO sector; 3) attitudes towards children with disabilities; 4) challenges and barriers to inclusion; and finally 5) reinforcing the idea of developing a Southern, more contextualized inclusive vision through a discussion on Rabindranath Tagore’s educational teachings. Point five is especially important because, therein, I refer to scholars such as Bhattacharya (2010), Connell (2007), Mignolo (1993) and Mukerjee (2014) who argue that special attention must be paid to indigenous intellectuals of colonized societies that have generated theories on their own culture and history. This is particularly important for IE. And for the purpose of this study, I specifically refer to Rabindranath Tagore, the most prominent literary figure of Bengal, who wrote on and experimented extensively with

alternative and inclusive educational practices during his lifetime. As explained by Mukherjee (2014, p. 8):

Tagore offers the possibility of bridging the gap in Southern theoretical understanding of inclusive education within the colonial and postcolonial Indian [in this case, Bangladeshi] context for analytical (ideological), as well as hermeneutic (affective historical) engagement with issues of exclusion and inclusive education...[His] educational ideas and experiments provide fertile ground for “Southern Theorising” of inclusive education.

In Bangladesh, Tagore is revered as a cultural icon and poetic genius, yet his pedagogical experiments and their application to education systems remain obscure (Ghosh, 2015). For inclusion, however, his teachings and practices as developed in Santinketan²⁶ are very useful.

Primary Educational History

According to Chowdhury, Nath, and Choudhury (2003), Bangladesh has a pluralist system of primary education. Educational responsibilities are shared by the government, NGOs, other private organizations, and religious bodies. The history of primary education in Bangladesh can be divided into three main periods (Unterhalter, Ross, & Alam, 2003):

- 1971-1991 as the first period of *aspiration*, linked to the creation of Bangladesh as a nation state independent from Pakistan, during which initiatives to expand primary education were local and small-scale;
- 1991-1997 as the second period of *legal enactments and major policy developments*, which focused on establishing compulsory primary education and improving access to schooling in all divisions and subdivisions of the country;
- 1998-present as the third period dedicated to *reaching “hard to reach children,”* by both the government and NGOs, with a focus on policy and practical commitments to quality and inclusive

²⁶ This is a town in India where Tagore conducted his educational experiments.

education regarding issues such as curriculum, pedagogy, and management.

According to the authors, each of these periods has been impacted (in various degrees) by great social and political upheaval and catastrophic natural disasters. For example, during the first period, Bangladesh was recovering from a bloody war of liberation in December 1971, battling a severe famine in 1974, and was hit by a massive cyclone in 1991 that killed approximately 138 000 people (Ikeda, 1995). In 1981 there was a military coup, which was accompanied by several years of political repression (Unterhalter et al., 2003). The suspension of political parties set the stage for mostly undemocratic decision making processes, resulting in NGOs undertaking the provision of primary education in Bangladesh. Until today, “NGO’s [constitute] almost a parallel structure to the state primary education system” (Unterhalter et al., 2003, p. 90). Nevertheless, during this phase, Bangladesh did lay the foundation for equal rights to education for its citizens (Ahsan, 2013). As stated in the 1972 Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh:

Article 28 (3): No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth be subjected to any disability, liability, restriction, or condition with regard to access to any place of public entertainment or resort, or admission to any educational institution. (Ministry of Law Justice and Parliament, 2000, as cited in Ahsan, 2013, p. 17)

By the second phase (1991-1997), in which political parties had once again been legalized under General Ershad, several initiatives had been taken to attain universal primary education (UPE). Detailed plans had also been drawn up in order to achieve UPE. However, due to the resignation of General Ershad, the country was again marred by political unrest, to such an extent that a 22-month bitter impasse resulted in a political non-cooperation movement in 1994 (Rashiduzzaman, 1997). At this time, advances to and delivery of primary education in the government were largely aided by international donations.

It was during this phase, that Bangladesh also started to pledge its allegiance to the many international declarations and policies that promised

inclusive education. These included the World Declaration on Education for All, EFA, UNESCO (1990), and the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994). In 1990, after signing the EFA, Bangladesh passed the Compulsory Primary Education Act (CPEA) officially implemented in 1992. Through the CPEA, educational institutions were introduced into all districts of the country (Sadiqal Haq, 1997, as cited in Unterhalter et al., 2003). Further, the number of teachers employed in primary schools nearly doubled from 190 000 to 310 000 (Alam & Hussain, 1999). However, the CPEA promotes a medical model of inclusive education, describing children with disabilities with discriminatory language. Moreover, even with the CPEA, NGOs continued to run large educational programs throughout the period. (Unterhalter et al., 2003, p. 90)

The third period (1998-present), has seen the most progress in terms of sustainable and inclusive forms of educational development in Bangladesh. This period has been impacted by the country's pledge to the Dakar Framework for Action, the Millennium Development Goals, and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Ahsan, 2013). As a result, it has been characterized by policy development in which some key documents have been produced targeting inclusion in primary school education. Furthermore, government policy has been focused on both quantitative expansion and qualitative improvement in classrooms and management systems (Unterhalter et al., 2003). The three major innovations aimed towards bringing sustainable (including inclusive) change in primary education are: the National Education Policy (NEP, 2000, 2010), the Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP I, 2000; PEDP II, 2003-2008, PEDP III, 2011-2016), and the National Plan of Action on Education for All-I and II (NPA, 2003-2015). In the Table below, the aims of each of these three initiatives are given.

Table 4.1. Inclusive Development in Primary Education Acts

NEP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Emphasizes nation building considerably. -Extends the range of universal coverage of basic education from five to eight years. -Commits to increasing the percentage of expenditures on primary and mass education within the GOB's budget (i.e. from 2.8% to 4% in 1997-
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	1998)
PEDP I, II, III	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Seeks to prioritize aspects of quality improvement. -Focuses on translating resources into improved learning outcomes for all children. -Emphasizes the need for initial teacher training, in-service provision, improvement of management, and community involvement. -Accepts Inclusive education as a strategy to achieve EFA. Sets out plans for IE at central, district, and school levels. -Targets four groups: children with special needs, children of ethnic minorities, gender, and vulnerable groups (i.e. refugees, orphans etc.) -Aims to establish an efficient, inclusive, and equitable primary education system, delivering effective and relevant child-friendly learning to all Bangladeshi children from pre-primary through Grade V primary. -Aims to “reduce disparities” -Emphasizes the need for a variety of curricular, teacher training, administrative, and infrastructural reforms.
NPA I, II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Ties the national policy in with the PEDP, in that preparatory work for the NPA was launched with the expectation of utilizing research generated from PEDP projects for its implementation.

Adapted from (Unterhalter et al., pp. 87-92, 2003; Ahsan, 2013, 17-29)

From the Table it is clear that initiatives for primary educational have developed over the past forty years, and that the government has sought to strengthen inclusion in the primary sector in Bangladesh. Other related initiatives that aim to decentralize the PEDP II include the SLIP (School-Level Improvement Plan) and the UPEP (Upazila²⁷ Primary Education Plan) (Ahsan, 2013). These initiatives aim to encourage community participation in schools in sub-districts by involving relevant stakeholders, such as community members, teachers, and parents, to later take ownership of their schools and improve school administration (Ahsan & Mullick, 2013). In addition, there is the Primary Education Stipend Plan (PES), officially launched in 2002, which aims to provide cash assistance to 5 million disadvantaged, hard to reach primary school students provided that they receive 40% marks on their year-end examinations and attend 85% of classes each month (Ahsan & Mullick, 2013).

Nevertheless, this evolution has taken time to develop. Even after the signing of the UNESCO EFA Declaration in 1990, acts and provisions, including

²⁷ This term refers to the sub-unit of a district. A district is known as the “zila.”

the PEDPs, have reflected confusion and limitations regarding children with disabilities, sometimes even advocating for separatist learning. Some selective quotes illustrate this inclination (Ahsan, 2013).

From the CPEA, 1990:

27.3.3 (e) the decision of the primary education officer that it is not desirable to enter a child in primary education institute on account of its being mentally retarded (MOPME, 1990, as cited in Ahsan, 2013, p. 18).

From the PEDP II, 2008

...a special needs task force would be established to devise strategies to mainstream special needs children into primary schools. (Ahuja and Ibrahim, 2006, p. 21).

From the PEDP III, 2011

Inclusive refers to groups of children underrepresented in schools such as: children with mild to moderate physical disabilities or learning disabilities, ethnic minorities, urban street children, tribal children, extremely poor children (DPE, 2011, as cited in Ahsan, 2013, p. 29).

These three quotes, from different documents, written at different points in time spanning over two decades, demonstrate the struggle and confusion in government documents in relation to degrees and types of disabilities and minorities. For example, the first quote clearly illustrates certain limitations for children with disabilities, as it is not clear whether the primary education officers who would conduct the “inspection” would be as knowledgeable as experts with experience and tools to conduct such inspections (Ahsan, 2013). The second quote is also problematic because it goes against the very idea of inclusion, which advocates that the system changes to accommodate the needs of each child and not vice versa. Lastly, the PEDP III quote illustrates the lack of sensitivity towards children with severe disabilities and does not answer the question of whether or not these children who have differing types and degrees of disability have the same right as others to be included in the pre-primary or primary education program and, if not, then why (Ahsan, 2013).

NGO and GOB Debate

In Bangladesh, NGOs, or “non governmental organizations” play an integral role in educational provision. BRAC, in addition to actively serving

various sectors of society, such as of agriculture, health, sanitation, migration, runs as an education service parallel to the state, providing education to over 1.1 million children. The growth of a myriad of NGOs directly providing services in Bangladesh and other South Asian countries can be attributed to several factors, explained by Maslyukivska (1999, p. 5) drawing from Garilao 1987:

- First, the existence of “societal conflicts and tensions.”
- Second, the tendency for people “to take things in their own hands” when there is a crisis situation and formal systems fail.
- Third, the frequent arising of “ideological and value differences” while implementing developmental work.
- Fourth, the “realization that neither the government nor the private sector has the will, means or capacity to deal with all immediate and lingering social problems.”

Therefore, the shift to NGO provision has been inevitable because advocacy and raising awareness lead to action. This shift is quite positive when viewed in relation to education, especially in terms of vulnerable children, as in the case of BRAC’s work on IE. To that end, the current achievements and facts regarding the BRAC Education Program (BEP) current are given in Appendix II.

Regardless of the widespread work of NGOs, as pointed out by White (1999), the position of NGOs in relation to the state in Bangladesh is a highly contested and complex field. For example, tensions between the state and the NGOs²⁸ are often heightened by objections made by local communities, teachers’ unions, various civil society organizations, and academics, many of whom believe it is the sole and constitutional responsibility of the government to provide primary education to all children. In addition, unresolved tensions linger on due to a combination of vested interests, overtly partisan politics, a bureaucratic

²⁸ I refer to NGOs and the state as two separate entities to keep the discussion streamlined. However, it should be clear that neither are simple, homogenous entities. NGOs differ tremendously in scale, structure, and orientation. They differ in external and internal hierarchies. The state too is far from being a simple structure. It is steeped in a web of tensions and competitiveness at both the local and national level. This creates further, layered levels of conflict between the two. Moreover, there are many other forms of primary education in Bangladesh, as previously mentioned: private, religious, and communal. All of these function in complicated webs of positive and negative interrelations in Bangladesh.

culture, and a lack of transparency and openness in the dialogue among stakeholders from both sides (Zia-Us-Sabur & Ahmed, 2010). However, the most crucial aspect of the debate on NGO-state relations in Bangladesh is that the donors' advocacy of NGOs has challenged the state's monopoly on development (White, 1999). This advocacy has far-reaching implications for the state, especially regarding its sovereignty and internal legitimacy, but most of all it has cemented the idea that Bangladesh is a weak state in a strong society.

Consequently, the government acknowledges the role of the NGOs, but at times views them as a “competitive” or “alternative” parallel structure (Zia-Us-Sabur & Ahmed, 2010). Therefore, even if NGO non-formal education programmes, under which most inclusive schools operate, have been relatively successful in targeting vulnerable populations, they continue to be “paradoxically viewed as a second-best *alternative* to government provision”:

While NGOs in Bangladesh [most notably BRAC] themselves increasingly *see their* role in terms of mainstreaming children from their centers into government schools (and so views their provision as complementary)...[and are making] efforts ...to move in this direction...the invisibility of NGO provision in government plans [i.e. PEDP II] and lack of clear mechanisms for children to transfer from NGO to government provision means that, in reality, it remains *an alternative* to the mainstream. (Rose 2009, p. 228, 231)

By remaining an “alternative” system, although widespread and effective, the non-formal educational system continues to get pigeonholed into being viewed as a second option, or an option when all else fails.

NGOs in Bangladesh recognize this roadblock and have therefore, in recent years, started to invest extensive efforts towards improving their relationship with the GOB, with which they have engaged in dialogue and initiated projects. NGOs also want to ensure that children can transition from one system to another smoothly. In other words, NGOs are now gearing towards providing a form of “accelerated learning” that complements and supplements the government provisions, in which graduates gain access to the formal schooling. However, despite efforts made by BRAC and other NGOs to serve as a more of a complementary system, it remains unclear whether they are able to

achieve this goal.²⁹ This is due to the problems affecting the NGO-GOB relationship as well as the gaps that exist between formal and non-formal forms of education. Some of these gaps include: different class sizes, curricula, lesson planning, approaches to teaching, levels of teacher motivation, and types of student leadership. In short, government systems have not sufficiently adapted to students graduating from non-formal schools, resulting in high dropout rates (Rose, 2009).

Currently, therefore, there is an urgent need to address the tensions and issues in the relationship between the GOB and NGOs. To start this conversation, first stakeholders must problematize previously held notions of “non” formal and “alternative.” Second, as advocated by White (1999), there needs to be much more critical analysis of relationship between the two, which includes an unpacking specifically of the role donors play in that context. Also, there needs to be a re-evaluation of the common interests and contentions between the state, civil society, and NGOs, in which intricately detailed analysis is carried out across different contexts in Bangladesh in order to determine how to move forward. Finally, stakeholders must comprehend the essential need to collaborate at every level, be it theoretical, political, or practical, and work on overcoming their personal and professional differences.

Children with Disabilities

Another issue that requires urgent attention in Bangladesh is the status of children with disabilities. Several different perspectives on inclusive education were presented in the previous chapter, and I believe in and endorse the one that is not limited to being *only* about children with disabilities. However, for contextual reasons, it is essential to specifically address this group of children. This is because, in Bangladesh, children with disabilities and special needs continue to remain the most marginalized amongst the “hard-to-reach” group. If we do not unpack their situation and address challenges they face, the picture of IE in Bangladesh will remain incomplete

²⁹ As the largest and most widespread NGO in Bangladesh, one of BRAC’s key aims is to effect constructive, visible, and long lasting changes in the lives of the most vulnerable and poor.

The World Health Organization (WHO) suggests that 21% of children in Bangladesh, aged 2-9 have some form of disability, including but not limited to, cognitive, motor, visual, hearing and communicative (UN Enable, 2008, as cited in Ahsan, 2013). Over a decade ago in 2002, a joint study conducted by DPE (Directorate of Primary Education) and CSID (Centre for Services and Information Disability) reported that only 11% of disabled children have access to some form of education in Bangladesh. This trend continues as not only are these children discriminated against socially—by parents, teachers, and community members—but also in the policy documents there is still clear bias against the disabled and confusion regarding their provision of education. A cooperative and collaborative approach between inclusion and special education, and a better understanding of the types and degrees of disability as well as how those children will be accommodated in inclusive schools is urgently required. In the table below, I have provided some selected quotes from a study conducted by PLAN International³⁰ Bangladesh on the stigmatizing attitudes and superstition that continue to affect disabled children.

³⁰ Founded in 1937, PLAN International is one of the world's oldest and largest international development agencies. Their branch in Bangladesh has been in operation since 1994. (Plan International, 2015)

Table 4.2. Stigmas and Superstitions Affecting Children with Disabilities

<div> <p>Social Stigma & Superstition: "If anyone does anything in ill-motive, it can cause disability" (PW-1101).</p> </div> <div> <p>"Sometimes disability is caused from birth. It is absolutely almighty's wish" (HT-5101).</p> </div> <div> <p>"Doctor cannot do anything for a disability condition. This condition is treatable by local traditional healers (Fokir)" (CW-1106).</p> </div> <div> <p>Negative attitudes:</p> </div> <div> <p>"Some people around us show sympathy when they are in front of us. But actually they do not like us" (CW-3101).</p> </div> <div> <p>"Everybody considers me as mentally ill and they said that I do not need to go to school" (CW2101).</p> </div> <div> <p>"Community people do not accept us as an equal member; some even do not recognise us as humans" (PW1102).</p> </div> <div> <p>"Some commented to our parents that there is no benefit to send a child with hearing impairment to school...they will not become a judge or barrister. So this is a total wastage of money" (PW3101).</p> </div> <div> <p>"Some people in our society tease our children by calling them 'Kana', 'Khora', 'Lengra' (Local slang about disability). This hurts us as well as our children a lot" (PC-5102).</p> </div>
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(Adapted from Ahsan, Haq, Johora, & Siddik, 2013, p. 21)

It is clear, therefore, that in Bangladesh, people with disabilities are often stigmatized, isolated, and shunned. At the same time there is a strong sense of care and charity. However, this does not abate the stigmatization. In fact, the culture and attitude of charity is often one of pity, labeling disabled children and others as "less than" themselves. It does not allow them break out of the cycle of stigmatization, and, even if done with the best of intentions, ends up being harmful. Many NGOs see helping the disabled as an issue of charity and, as such according to Alur (2001), the "concentration on the delivery of services moves the issue away from the public domain, making it an individual responsibility" (p. 290). This focus on the individual comes through even in policy documents. For example, the Persons with Disability Welfare Act 2001, emphasizes "integration"

into the “usual-set-up” of “regular normal schools.” This undermines the very idea of inclusive education, and also does little to change the attitudes of others towards people with disabilities. It continues to keep the culture and practice of schools at the level of fitting square pegs into round holes.

Additional Barriers and Challenges

Inclusive education is a multifaceted concept, and implementation of it needs to be addressed on many different levels: philosophical, cultural, political, and practical. In Bangladesh, this is especially true, not to mention the difficulties that plague NGO-GOB relations and children with disabilities. I have outlined those barriers and challenges in more detail in Table 4.3.

Table 4.4 incorporates material not only from this chapter, but also from previous chapters such as chapter 2 and 3. Furthermore, each “major and minor theme” does not always neatly fall under one group, often overlapping. Regardless, the aim is to show the different types of barriers and challenges that surround IE implementation from differing levels and angles. In my study, as previously mentioned, I aim to offer some solutions for overcoming the current philosophical and practical barriers.

Table 4.3. Barriers and Challenges to IE in Bangladesh

UMBRELLA THEME	MAJOR THEME	MINOR THEME	CAUSES
Philosophical	-The Global context of IE -Neo liberalism -Neo Imperialism	-Knowledge Transfer of IE without “proper” contextualization mostly through the work of IGOs. -Confusion in understanding and implementing IE on the level of government policy. -The purpose of education is to produce competent, economically beneficial individuals.	-Much of the theoretical debates within inclusive education have emerged in developed economics of the North. IE is considered a “ <i>Northern concept</i> .” -Education is predicated on a financial model.
Cultural	Family support	-Attitudes towards disabled family members.	- Family members’ negative attitudes, abuse, neglect, “hiding” from outsiders, limiting interactions,

			not giving permission
	Gender, disability, and education	-Barrier for girl children (with/without disabilities) to gain access to education	-Negative attitude towards girl children and “double negativity” towards female disabled children. -Abuse and violence (verbal/emotional/sexual)
	School non-cooperation	School curriculum	-Traditional teaching-learning methods and assessment. -Parents’ and teachers’ negative attitudes towards “difference” (ability, class, gender) resulting in discriminatory policies and lack of resources for training.
	The <i>Bhadrolok</i> Class	Hegemonic construction of an “alternative capitalism” by social elites (Dirlik, 1997)	Entrenched beliefs of Bengali <i>Bhadrolok</i> subculture continue to pose huge barriers against social inclusion in schools because a large part of the society (especially in cities) uphold values of elite “social aesthetics.” Thus, exclusion becomes part of the larger social structure in Bangladeshi society; the exclusion of large masses of underprivileged children from the school system based on disadvantaged socioeconomic and family backgrounds is a reality.
Policy Oriented	Policy level challenges	Policies as a barrier to inclusion	-Confusing and contradictory policies that support both inclusion and segregation at the same time. -Lack of inter-ministerial coordination. - Discriminatory policies towards children with severe disabilities. -Policies that lack sufficient data and others that are still based on the medical model of disability. -Lack of policies and funds in place (at national, district, and local levels) to <i>practically</i> guide institutions and people on the priorities of IE. Even if some of the policies are there (i.e. teacher development), implementation remains mostly incomplete due to pre-service and service teachers’ attitudes as well as the curricula.
	GOB-NGO uneasy relationship	Non-recognition of NGOs by GOB is a barrier to IE	-Ignoring of NGO provision of IE in major GOB policy documents. -GOB’s view of NGO’s as a parallel

			<p>“competitive” system rather than a parallel “supplementary” system.</p> <p>-Lack of NGO-government school inter-coordination in terms of info sharing, curriculum development and enrolment.</p>
Practical	Resource Manage-ment	Insufficient resources and lack of community involvement	-Lack of funding, teaching and educational materials, assistive devices for children with disabilities, therapeutic services etc.
	Screening	Lack of identification (especially regarding disability)	-Lack of awareness, screening tools and resources
	Enrolment Barriers	School admissions policies	<p>-Negative attitudes</p> <p>-Non-cooperation</p> <p>-Lack of teacher confidence due to not having received proper training or being provided with skills and resources.</p>
	Accessibility in schools	<p>-School environments remain inaccessible to children with physical and visual impairments</p> <p>-Schools are located far from children’s homes</p>	<p>-Lack of awareness and resources</p> <p>-Local resources not utilized to their full potential</p> <p>-Lack of creative thinking on the part of school administrators.</p>
	Leadership Challenges	-Head teachers are non-supportive and lack proper training in IE	<p>-Lack of authority among school leaders.</p> <p>-Lack of acceptance from students</p> <p>-Disapproval from parents and community</p> <p>- Resistance from school teachers’</p> <p>-Limited professional development goals</p> <p>-Bureaucratic systems of administration</p>
	Teacher Development	-Pre-service teacher education curricula	<p>-Rote-learning mechanisms used in teacher training</p> <p>-Traditional teaching and learning assessment systems</p> <p>-Insufficient time dedicated to teacher education</p> <p>-Short courses</p> <p>-Non-cooperation of schools where teacher practicums are carried out, as those schools are non-inclusive</p> <p>-Lack of university-school cooperation</p> <p>-Absence of opportunities for alternative communication.</p>

	Dropping out	Dropping out of school after being admitted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Negative attitudes -Large class size -Non cooperation of school authorities -Stringent rules -Lack of teacher training, confidence, and knowledge.
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(Adapted from Ahsan, 2013, p. 50-51)

Holding a “Southern Inclusive Vision” for IE

It is therefore clear from the previous discussion that inclusive education is riddled with barriers and challenges in Bangladesh. How can IE, in that sense, still remain a major force through which marginalized children can gain access to schooling? Scholars across the world agree that in order to overcome the challenges IE faces in Southern contexts, the conversation towards developing a more localized version of IE needs to be prioritized. In her article, Mukherjee (2014) conceptualizes and suggests the possibility of developing a “Southern Theory of Inclusive Education.” Drawing from Raewyen Connells’s (2007) sociological term “Southern Theory,” she articulates the necessity to contextualize the meanings of inclusive education for developing postcolonial countries by utilizing indigenous knowledge. She explains how this can curb hegemonic knowledge transfer of inclusive policies from countries of the North to the South. Mukherjee (2014) further suggests that one possible way forward is theorizing inclusive education in a Southern tongue by using the work of Southern philosophers. She utilizes Tagore for the context of India.

Tracing movements of IE, Mukherjee (2014) explains how two waves/generations of academic and policy-level debates on inclusive education took place on a global scale. The first of these waves originated in the US, Canada, England, and Scandinavian counties, which are considered the pioneers of IE. The “second generation” wave (p. 1) followed in the formerly colonized nations of South Asia, Africa, and Latin America, amidst a different set of historical trajectories. As previously explained in Chapter 2, several global forces have shaped the face of IE today in such a way that movements in, from, of, and belonging to the “first generation,” inevitably impact the “second.” Further,

global policies mandate that developing countries such as India and Bangladesh first be prepared for IE. However, similar to the arguments made in the previous chapter, Mukherjee (2014) argues that there is a problem associated with this type of knowledge transfer. Drawing on Edward Said, her argument is that theories lose their impact and meaning through transfers. She quotes Said and highlights how later versions of theories (i.e. those in place in Southern countries on IE for example):

cannot replicate its original power; because the situation has quieted down and changed, the theory is degraded and subdued, made into a relatively tame academic substitute for the real thing, whose purpose in the work I analyzed was political change. (Said 2000, as cited in Mukherjee, 2014, p.2)

The previous discussion on the anaemic definition of IE echoes this dilemma, wherein IE has not been sufficiently formulated and theorized for the Bangladeshi context.

Another problem associated with the transfer, as explained by Mukherjee (2014), is related to my previous discussion on Gross Stein's work. Here, both in countries of the North and South, the push for IE is not necessarily something that is fuelled by issues of identity, recognition, and redistribution, but rather by market discourses of "competition" and "selection" to see which countries are able to implement IE in their schools at "lightening speed." This has resulted in a blurred and often competing understanding of IE, because of which we must question, "Who is thought to be in need of inclusion and why," and "...by what criteria should successes be judged?" (Armstrong, Armstrong, & Spandagou, 2010, p. 5).

Mukherjee (2014), therefore, suggests that the blurring of this definition is a good thing. Rather than the theory being diluted or misappropriated, what this does is create space and opportunity for the contextual meaning making and theorizing of inclusive education. She explains that since what is meant by "inclusion," and "who," is to be included "where" and "how is context specific" (p.1), and since even economically developed, western nations are struggling to successfully implement this abstract philosophical ideal, we can start searching

for the “possibility that such thinking and practices of social inclusion might have been thought about and practiced in an ‘other’ language/tongue” (p. 6).

I fully agree with Mukherjee’s (2014) arguments that the existing linear theorizing of the historical trajectory and development of IE does not take into account the indigenous philosophical traditions or voices of scholars belonging to the Global South. In order to fill in some of the gaps left by this linear theorizing and to build a theoretical understanding of inclusive education within the colonial and postcolonial context of the Indian subcontinent, it is necessary to address both the ideological and affective historical engagement with issues of inclusion and exclusion. She suggests, as do I, that Rabindranath Tagore’s educational vision provides this fertile ground, articulating that:

Rabindranath Tagore’s educational project sought to free the minds of the people...his ideas and experiments were born out of the colonial experience and sought to connect education with the experiences of people within their local community...Tagore’s philosophical vision of education also aimed for reconciliation across colonial, racial, and cultural barriers through education. (Mukherjee, 2014, p. 8)

In the next section of this chapter, I go over in more detail Tagore’s life and address how his teachings can bridge the gaps within the inclusive movement in present-day Bangladesh. As his teachings are presented, a salient point to keep in mind, as pointed out by Ghosh and Naseem (2003, p. 1), is that:

Tagore’s educational philosophy cannot be discussed or examined in isolation. His educational beliefs were as much a part of the overall Indian political, intellectual and socio-cultural history as they were a part of his Bengali milieu and personal background.

Rabindranath Tagore

Setting the scene.

The most eminent philosopher of Bengal, Rabindranath Tagore was a poet, novelist, nationalist, educationalist, and literary giant. A man way ahead of his time, Tagore was born into one of the most illustrious, influential, and wealthy land-owning families of Bengal in 1861. He was the fourteenth child of Sarada Devi and Debendranath Tagore.

As explained by Ghosh and Naseem (2003), the period in which Tagore was born was a remarkably revolutionary period in the history of Bengal. It was the period of the Indian Renaissance, in which Kolkata (then referred to as Calcutta) was the political, commercial, and intellectual capital of India. The British had just taken over from the East India Company, and, while they were pushing to establish themselves in India, revolutionary currents started to take shape across the country. According to Ghosh and Naseem (2003, p. 2), these “distinct currents characterized the renaissance.” One of these was religious revivalism as embodied under the *Brahmo Samaj* movement, in which Tagore’s grandfather was a prominent leader. The second was the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny.³¹ Other parallel movements also gained haste in India during this time, such as the *Arya Samaj* movement in Punjab and the *Prarthana Samaj* movement in Western and Southern provinces (Salkar 1990, as cited in Ghosh & Naseem, 2003). These types of struggles between the British Raj and Indian renaissance informed and engaged Tagore’s young mind, later influencing his overall worldview on life and education.

The major influence on education at that time, through which the colonial government intended to manage India, were the mechanisms of divide and rule which simultaneously classified the locals into “surrogate native elite[s] and an administrative cadre” (Ghosh & Naseem, 2003, p. 3) and destroyed native knowledge and educational structures. The authors further explain that the colonial power aimed to create a class of natives that was “Indian in blood and colour; but English in *talent*, in *opinion*, in *moral* and in *intellect*” (Macaulay, 1995. Emphasis added). At the same time, the colonial government, actively discredited native educational institutions and forms calling them traditional, archaic, and irrational, and replaced them with colonial educational structures by force, design, and policy. These means of “subtle” (Ghosh & Naseem, 2003, p. 4) educational division were successful in producing a helpful class of Indian-bred-English surrogates. However, at the same time, what the colonial forces failed to foresee was the emergence of disgruntled masses and intellectual leaders who

³¹ A rebellion of sepoys (or soldiers) in India against the rule of the British East India Company.

rejected “the colonial monopoly over the construction of meaning and reality” (Ghosh & Naseem, 2003, p. 4). Swami Dayanand (1824-1883), Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), Sri Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950), Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) and Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) were such leaders. Although neither homogenous nor consensual in their aims, frameworks, and methods, they all sought to bring back the Indian voice to India (Ghosh & Naseem, 2003).

Tagore’s life briefly.

As explained by Ghosh, Naseem, and Vijn (2012, p. 61), Tagore’s upbringing was unique in India of those times. He can be considered a “renaissance Indian” with the “richest possible social and cultural capital for an Indian of his times” who grew up in a talented household of leaders, actors, civil servants, poets, and novelists. Profoundly impacted by his father, a leader of the Hindu Renaissance, Tagore wanted to widen the social scopes of Hindu teachings to better fit his ideas of universalism and multiple perspectives. His siblings—his brother Satyendra, the first native member of the Indian Civil Service (ICS), his other brother Jyotindranath, a renowned playwright, and his sister Swarnakumari, the first woman novelist of India—all had a tremendous impact on Tagore’s upbringing as a man moulded in a rich literary and profoundly “forward thinking” household (O’Connell, 2002).

Tagore was largely homeschooled and, although some attempts were made for him to attend formal schooling, he never had an amicable relationship with the formal system. Some authors (Mukherjee, 2014; Pridmore, 2009) have identified his relationship with formal schooling being as one that is close to a nightmare; when returning home from school, Tagore would often work off his repressed rage by beating the wooden railings of the veranda with a cane. At the age of seventeen, he was again sent to formal schooling to England; however, he did not complete his studies there (Ghosh, Naseem, & Vijn, 2012). In returning to India in 1880, he started producing the creative, literary pieces that would lay the foundation of his later reputation as the greatest poet and thinker of Bengal. The most famous of these is *Nirjharer Swapnabhanga* (The Awakening of the

Waterfall). This poem symbolized the beginning of his career as a poet and a thinker.

In 1898, Tagore moved his family from Calcutta to Shelaidaha and took their education into his own hands. He had already written much on the fundamentals of teaching and, by now, had started to put those principles in practice. This took its full form in 1901 with the inauguration of his *Brahmacharya Ashram* school in Santiniketan (Pridmore, 2010). It was in Santiniketan (meaning “Abode of Peace”) that Tagore’s educational experimentations began. Tagore spent forty years of his life developing his mode of education at Santiniketan, which aimed to facilitate and foster the uniqueness of each child. Schooling took place in harmonious settings with an approach to children as functional, creative beings who were both in touch with their own cultural histories and able to identify with people from other classes, strata, races and cultures (O’Connell, 2010). Most of his educational experiments were conducted at his next two fundamental projects: the founding of the Visva-Bharati University and the village reconstruction project at Sriniketan. Although discussion in this dissertation has mostly been drawn from Tagore’s experiments at Santiniketan, in relation to the development of his *ashram schools*, I acknowledge and understand that his experiments in his later projects could just as well inform current debates on inclusion.

Tagore’s Thoughts on Education

Several authors have written extensively on Tagore’s educational thought. As explained by Ghosh, Naseem and Vijn (2012), Tagore’s educational vision is a complex web of ideas, which he did not only write about separately, but rather infused it in the bulk of his literary works: his poems, novels, and plays. They explain (p. 6), “Apart from his formal treatise on education, his literary work reflects his philosophy of education.” As an internationalist, highly influenced by his contacts and time abroad (a total of seventeen trips on a steamboat) to every continent except Oceania, Tagore wanted to bridge the East-West divide. He glorified India’s traditions and cultures but was a fervent critic of its social practices and religious beliefs, which continuously perpetuated mechanisms such

as the caste system. He believed that science was the West's greatest gift to the East, yet at the same time argued that the "colonial education system was neither conducive to the formation of aesthetic senses nor independent thinking" (Ghosh et al., 2012, p. 63). Western philosophers Froebel and Rousseau seem to have had the most direct impact on his thought, however, he usually drew upon and synthesized aspects in accordance to what he felt was the best for India at the time.

Many scholars in India and other parts of the world have studied Tagore's educational philosophy in great detail, including Mukherjee (2014); Ghosh, Naseem, and Vijn (2012); O'Connell (2002 and 2010); Pridmore (2009); Gupta (2005); and Bhattacharya (2013). Each of these authors have discussed, broken down and explained Tagore's educational thought in both divergent and convergent ways. What they all share, however, is that they lay the foundation for an understanding of his educational teachings more or less through the discussion of prevalent themes. For example, Ghosh, Naseem, and Vijn (2012, p. 59) state that:

The four pillars of his concept of education were: nationalist traditions; syntheses of Western and Eastern strands of philosophy; science and rationality in approach; and an international and cosmopolitan outlook.

Tagore scholar Kathleen O'Connell (2010), states that Tagore's educational experiments can be summarized through three central themes—creativity, mutuality, and survival—defining his "Education for Creative Unity" (O'Connell, 2010, p. 65). In another instance, Pridmore (2009), states that Tagore's educational curriculum rested upon valuing childhood as a time of intense learning when one could light the fire of knowledge by cultivating children's interest in living harmoniously and in proximity to nature, and participating in music and poetry. He also states how Tagore strove for "global education," in which he deliberately sought the best of both worlds. That is: "When the streams of ideals that flow from the East and the West mingle their murmur in some profound harmony of meaning it delights my soul" (*The Religion of Man*, 1931, p. 88, as cited in Pridmore, 2010, p. 363).

Due to the vast amount of scholarship already produced on Tagore's

educational thought, authors have interpreted Tagore's educational ideals in many different ways, according to their respective perspectives and objectives. However, it is not the case that each interpretation points out intrinsically different themes. Rather, all of these streams exist and at times overlap in Tagore's educational thought, and have been thematically summarized by scholars in relation to whether they are arguing for international education, post-colonial education, or simply educational development utilizing Tagorean frameworks. As my goal is to advocate for inclusive education in a Tagorean framework, I have focused specifically on his teachings that are most applicable, relevant, and closely aligned to the inclusive philosophy. Also very importantly, as I distil his educational thoughts, it must be kept in mind that his ideas were always changing and developing throughout his lifetime as Tagore himself stated:

Because the growth of this school was the growth of my life and not that of a mere carrying out of my doctrines, its ideals changed with its maturity like a ripening fruit that not only grows in bulk and deepens in its color, but undergoes change in the very quality of its inner pulp (Tagore, 1916, as cited in O'Connell, 2002, p. 126).

Cultivating interconnectivity.

According to Tagore, education has one main purpose: to cultivate the interconnectivity between kinship and individuality. Basing his writing on the experience and example his *ashram* schools, he advised that it is only through understanding the value of kinship and the ability to live with others that one can reach individual essentiality, or a surplus in their being. The purpose of education is to light the way to individual essentiality by teaching people to be relationally functional. A person could be considered "total" only when he or she is able to understand that he or she must be freed from the constraints of individual separateness and discover a wholeness larger than his or her own personal well-being, through which he or she will be able to live in harmony with nature, with others, and with the world (Pridmore, 2009). This is the only way to build an identity as "a total man [or woman]." And everyone, Tagore advocated, irrespective of his or her socio-economic state, caste, creed, or religion, deserved to be educated so as to become a "total man" (Gupta, 2005).

It is important to mention that when Tagore wrote of his pupils at the *ashrams*, he referred largely to boys. His *ashram* schools did not differentiate based on caste, creed, or class but the mention of girls' education only surfaced later on, after 1909, when two women were admitted for the first time. Females had very little access to education in the Indian context at the time, and Tagore sought to bridge the gender gap by giving life to strong female characters in his plays and stories. Furthermore, he invited them to be a part of his plays. Through dance and drama, for the first time in Bengal, women were empowered by expressing themselves with their bodies. In his 1915 essay titled *Strisiksa*, meaning "Woman's Education," he wrote, "Whatever is worth knowing is knowledge. It should be known equally by men and women, not for the sake of practical utility but for the sake of knowing" (Mukherjee, 2015, p. 53).

The process of education, Tagore emphasized, should illuminate how to respect and feel kinship towards others—be they people or others from nature. It should set an example from which individuals can learn. At Tagore's *ashram* for example, children were required to walk barefoot, which not only instilled a sense of respect for the earth, but also because the earth provided education to the children "free of cost," and "the soles of children's feet should not be deprived of [such] education" (Tagore 1917, as cited in Pridmore, 2009, p. 361). Tagore writes, "The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence" (1971, as cited in Pridmore, 2009, p. 361). Further, he explains "Our true relationship with the world is that of personal love, not that of the mechanical law of causation." Therefore, education should function to instill a strong sense of kinship and respect with nature and with one another—regardless of caste or creed—and ultimately with the world. Only a person who understands this is truly educated; an educated person has a true sense of being human, as he or she has a "surplus" in his or her spiritual make-up (Gupta, 2005, p. 29-30). This surplus is not regulated by self-interest, but rather by man's absolute goal of seeking union with others, transcending egotistic impulses, and living meaningfully vis-à-vis the people around him (Bhattacharya, 2013). Children were expected to have sympathy and respect

towards one another, and always treat each other with equality, but at these schools Tagore exemplified this as a very crucial factor:

One thing that stood out in [Gurudeva's] treatment of pupils was that he had respect for them. He would not brook any one slighting them, and measures based on a notion of their inferiority he always rejected...[Gurudeva] did not work for any particular individual, or class. He rejected none. He invited others to share with him in his *Tapasya* and works for all. This indeed was his aim—to work for all. (A. Sen, personal communication, February 10, 2014)

The essential environment.

The interconnectivity between the natural world and learning was exceptionally important to Tagore. As explained by Gupta (2005), Tagore suggested that “no mind can grow properly without living in intimate communion with nature” (p. 34). The gentle breezes, sunshine, green trees, and plants can all help nourish children physically and mentally. Children’s minds need to blossom, and this blossoming can only effectively take place in a spontaneous atmosphere, where learning is a matter of joy and the surroundings sustain the learner’s interests. For Tagore, the best place for education would be within nature, under open skies, amongst lush green trees, enjoying gentle breeze and the sweet melodies of songbirds. Classrooms, doors, and buildings were viewed as restrictions for the children. A child’s mind should not be bound by such restrictions, but rather should be broadened and exposed to ideas of freedom, the divine, and equity. And this was possible through education that was connected to nature.

At Tagore’s *ashram* the first principle he adopted was that pupils must have freedom. Being in nature lead the students to freedom, as what can be freer than the open air and more inspiring than the open sky? Under the free and inspiring sky, freedom was also advocated in the ways teaching was conducted at the *ashram*. Pridmore (2009, p. 359) quotes an incident recorded by Pearson and Dey (1916) in which:

In the middle of one class I was suddenly interrupted in my teaching by one of the boys calling my attention to the song of a bird in the branches overhead. We stopped the teaching and listened till the bird had finished. It was springtime and the boy who has called my attention to the song said

to me, 'I don't know why, but somehow I can't explain what I feel when I hear that bird singing.'

Tagore explained that childhood is a time blessed by intense moments of awareness. Why impede these intense moments of learning and awareness by placing restrictions to “education,” when the nature itself is an educator on belongingness and on the “simple and intimate communion with [oneself]” (Pridmore, 2009, p. 359)? Through the awe and inspiration of nature, children can even connect to the divine, as nature is not there to simply meet our needs. We as humans are actually a part of the natural world, and by letting ourselves be one with nature, we are able to relinquish the central roles we have assigned ourselves in the larger scheme of things. Moreover, being in nature children can understand that nature does not discriminate between rich and poor, aristocrat and subaltern, abled and disabled. A banyan tree that gives shade to a *zamindar's* mansion will do the same for a disabled beggar on the street. Children can, therefore, take lessons from nature when striving to transcend the boundaries that distance them from others (Gupta, 2005). In nature, not only can a child can take leisure in the processes of their learning, but also nature itself can provide for the growth of a liberal attitude in young learners' minds.

The curriculum and teachers.

Tagore advocated that education should not be something that is filled with dry ideas. Rather, it should be directed to the development of our awareness of how to cope with life and how to enrich it. Tagore wanted to bring education closer to the situations of daily life and disapproved of the education system, which emphasized theoretical learning in closed-door schools. For example, he stated that Biology may give one an understanding of hormones and glands, but it does not provide an understanding of “my experience of sexual pleasure, the place it has in my marriage, the reaction I should have when age reduces it” (Gupta, 2005, p. 32). Therefore, he suggested that education should be a way of instilling a sense of being; it should provide knowledge on how we conceive certain situations in our lives, and how we organize and respond to our lived

experiences. With his educational work having been situated in Bengal, Tagore always advocated that instruction be in the local vernacular—Bengali. This he regarded as extremely important, for the purpose of education is not fulfilled if the language in which learners are instructed is not synchronized with their ideas and life (Gupta, 2005). Often a foreign language is not aligned with the same points of reference as a local language. This makes learning in another language to be an act of drudgery and futility, and also takes the learners further away from thinking and “being” in their own tongue. Furthermore, this does not allow them to develop their thinking and imagination in the language that they speak at home—that they are most familiar with—taking them further away from having an education grounded in their lived experiences.

In his curriculum, Tagore also exemplified the ideas of harmony and fullness (Samuel, 2010). He encouraged an open, wide, and full curriculum, which took into consideration students’ individual, social, and universal needs. This meant that it permitted initiation, experimentation, and originality, in which teachers and students were encouraged to get involved in the process of building an ever-evolving curriculum together. In Tagorean education, the *guru-sishya* or teacher-student relation was one of deep connection; they could work together on something as essential as the curriculum. Just like in the classical Indian tradition, teachers and students were deeply bonded, where the “teacher was like a gardener who gave tender care to the plant so that it might slowly and steadily grow, flourish, and fructify” (Samuel, 2010, p. 350). The teacher, for Tagore, was like an artist who sparked initiation and creativity in the pupil. The teacher was present to facilitate and guide, to be a role model, but never to impose or direct. Teaching for Tagore was a “labour of love.” The teacher must be willing to give oneself 100 per cent to the task in order to achieve the fulfillment of knowledge for the pupil and him or herself, as an evolving, transforming, growing, and ever-changing act. Teaching should never be treated as stagnant or routine.

Child-centered pedagogy.

Tagore believed in a child-centered pedagogy. He rejected the “one-size-fits-all” system of formal education, calling it rather ineffective. Instead, children

should have an active role in deciding what they were learning in order to suit their needs. This is because each individual student has a distinctive character of his or her own, and education systems should attend to it carefully, enabling each individual to blossom in his or her own way (Lal, 1978). Therefore, at Tagore's *ashram* school there was a lot of room for children to go in the "direction their mind would take them." He said that young children's minds are "free" from discipline and "in love" with learning, nature, and the world (Samuel, 2010). Education should not do anything to stifle this free and loving mind. Rather education should let it grow at its own pace and on its own path. As mentioned by Aronson (1943, p.35),

[Tagore explained] that children have their active sub-conscious mind which, like a tree has the power to gather its food from the surrounding atmosphere. For them the atmosphere is a great deal more important than rules and methods, buildings, appliances, class-teachings and text-books.

Further, Tagore believed that children are born with a natural inquisitiveness and a desire for congenial company. This is often illustrated in what adults have labeled as "child's play." However, playing is a rather serious matter in a child's consciousness. Through play, a child is not only able to later see purpose in their actions in life, but also build a sense of kinship with his or her fellow playmates—both of which are vital in the child's survival as a social being. At the *ashram* school, children were free to play as much as they wanted; they could choose the pace of their learning, and also their hobbies and occupations. Children were encouraged to be "one" with the outside environment, to sit on tree branches and read if they so pleased, and also take walks through the field if their heart so desired.

Tagore was strictly against rote memorization. Instead, he espoused the discovery method (Samuel, 2010). Tagore took his children on field trips and excursions as part of their educative process. Alongside the academic subjects of language, science, mathematics, history, and social studies, art, music, social work, gardening and crafts were greatly encouraged at his *ashram* school. Tagore wrote, "[children can] sing songs in [their] leisure hours, sitting in groups, under

the open sky on moonlight nights, in the shadows of impending rain in July” (Tagore, 1917, as cited in Pridmore, 2009, p. 362).

Final Thoughts

It is clear that Tagore believed education to be deeply rooted in the experience of the child and the environment. As a result, his educational approach was based on sympathy, harmony, fullness, and learning through experience. The children at his school were taught the value of interconnectivity with the space outside themselves through a spontaneous, relevant, and child-friendly curriculum. For the Bangladeshi context, Tagore’s educational vision on the relevance and purpose of, access to, and curriculum for education provides *tools* on how to tackle this *process* of education and, in turn, shows pathways of how to get to the end result of empowerment. Tagore’s vision, I argue, can for the most part provide small, but definitive and meaningful changes at the local school level. In a more concrete manner, Chapter 7 is dedicated to bringing together the teachings of Tagore with the voices of children from this study for the context of both BRAC and Bangladesh. For present-day Bangladesh, this is a timely and indispensable inquiry in order to not only gauge school efficacy, but at the same time bring to the forefront children’s voices in IE whilst advocating to build a “Southern Inclusive Vision” (Mukherjee, 2014) aided by recovering past, relevant educational lessons.

CHAPTER 5

THE FIELD RESEARCH: METHODS, ANALYSIS, AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

In the spaces between research methodologies, ethical principles, institutional regulations, and human subjects as individuals and as socially organized actors and communities is tricky ground. The ground is tricky because it is complicated and changeable, and it is tricky also because it can play tricks on research and researchers. Qualitative researchers generally learn to recognize and negotiate this ground in a number of ways, such as through their graduate studies, their acquisition of deep theoretical and methodological understandings, apprenticeships, experiences and practices, conversations with colleagues, peer reviews, their teaching of others. The epistemological challenges to research—to its paradigms, practices, and impacts—play a significant role in making those spaces richly nuanced in terms of the diverse interests that occupy such spaces and at the same time much more dangerous for the unsuspecting qualitative traveler.
-Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 2005, p.113

Launching In

Academic research is always conducted within certain contexts bound to a given time and space. Through the works of scholars across the fields of sociology, anthropology, and education, the impact, significance, and relativity of research contexts have proved to be crucial time and time again. No two contexts are the same, hence no two research projects are identical either. Context in research is defined by many boundaries. Two of those tend to be national/cultural and physical boundaries. The context of a research project is defined by the physical reality of where a certain study is taking place: for example, at a school, community center, or a child's home (Punch, 2002). Similarly, it is defined by the culture within which the study occurs: for example, a country's norms, practices, and traditions. Depending on the context in which research is conducted, the results or findings will vary, as will the existing relationships and ethical dimensions of investigators and participants (Riessman, 2005). My experience as a diasporic researcher affiliated with a research-intensive University of the global North returning to my native country to conduct research in the Global South posed subjective challenges as to how I

engaged with research participants in my given context: that is, Bangladesh (Mukherjee & Mahbub, 2015).

As a native of Bangladesh who has been living abroad for many years, my transnational spatial location and “double consciousness”—to use the term employed by W.E.B. Du Bois, as a native and an alien acculturated within a western academic environment—posed unique subjective challenges when I worked within my national and cultural space (Mukherjee & Mahbub, 2015). In this Chapter, in which I unpack my methodology and the many decisions that marked the different steps of this process, the issue of context is highly significant; it has impacted every aspect of this project. Context, for example, was the driving factor that allowed me to explore my position, with my “double consciousness,” through reflexivity. As this Chapter unfolds, the issue of context is ubiquitous and my navigation of it constant, as a researcher “launching herself in” with an acculturated Western consciousness placed both “comfortably” and “uncomfortably” at varying junctures with her native Bangladeshi mind. I claim this uneasy position in my dissertation, and from that position explain my experiences in the field. I start this chapter first with a discussion on what I mean by reflexivity, and then introduce the worldview, design, methodology, methods analysis process, trustworthiness, and ethical parameters of my research.

Reflexivity

The practice of reflexivity is a process that allows for “detachment, internal dialogue, and constant scrutiny of the process through which the researcher constructs and questions his/her interpretations of field experiences” (Ahsan, 2009, p. 398). In other words, reflexivity involves the researcher being honest about contemplating the researcher’s own feelings, assumptions, biases, and experiences and allowing him or herself the space to navigate those in relation to the research process. Ahsan (2009) states that reflexivity is not only useful, but a methodological necessity when conducting research in Southern contexts; she used reflexivity as a methodological tool in her study of resistance to child participation in Tangail, Bangladesh.

Several different types of researcher reflexivity can be found in qualitative research. Dowling (2006, p. 7) states that “reflexivity is a curious term with various meanings.” First, there is “epistemological reflexivity,” in which the researcher asks questions about his or her methodological decision-making processes in reflective or identity memos and short statements questioning why a certain question is asked, a method applied, or reaction triggered (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Then there is the practice of reflexivity that aims to attain objectivity (Dowling, 2006). This approach often involves the usage of “bracketing” “pre,” “in,” and “on” research action to maintain objectivity in qualitative research (Koch & Harrington, 1998). However, some researchers do not consider bracketing realistic (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Another form of reflexivity is associated with self-critique and an openness to the possibility of accounting for many different voices in the research process (Dowling, 2006). This form of reflexivity has a strong personal element and requires that the researcher is “keeping herself open to what is other and embracing more universal points of view” (Turner, 2003, as cited in Dowling, 2006, p. 12). A fourth type, known as critical standpoint reflexivity, is informed by the diverse field of representations and ideas associated with the “politics of location” (Dowling, 2006, p. 12). The final type of reflexivity, as explained by Dowling (2006), is reflexivity from a feminist standpoint. This form is also concerned with the politics of location; however, it focuses more on the power differentials within the various stages of research.

Specifically, when working reflexively with children, it becomes essential for researchers to make sense of what children are telling them through their own semantics (Spyrou, 2011). In order to do so, researchers must be aware that language and voices are social, ideological, and representative of the interests, assumptions, and values of particular groups (Alldred, 1998). As a result, when children speak they do so by “drawing from the repertoire of their inherited social languages and speech genres which constrain to some extent what they can say” (Spyrou, 2011, p. 159). To understand those constraints in speech, a researcher, therefore, needs to be well versed in the discourses informing the voices of a specific group of children. In addition, researchers “need to be aware of the

discourses that informed their own analyses and interpretations of children's experiences" (Mitchell, 2009, p. 93). Other considerations for a reflexive approach to take into account include reflecting on and sifting through the analyses to consider where and how certain voices emerge. It requires the researcher to ask whether he or she should present his or her question alongside the participant's answer in a report, rather than taking bits and pieces of what a participant says to represent the whole. It requires the researcher to acknowledge the often cyclical and sporadic processes of data collection in which there is much repositioning and renegotiating, rather than a seamless process in which data naturally occurs in a particular configuration (Spyrou, 2011). In short, as explained by Alldred and Birman (2005, p. 189), "a willingness to be reflexive and transparent can help question dominant ideological and cultural meanings and to de-reify particular interpretations which are often taken for granted when examining children's lives." It can even highlight the complexities related to the messiness of ideas taken for granted, such as "ethics," and show researchers that it is essential to ask what gets researched, when, how, and why in order to uncover the messiness, ambiguity, polyvocality, non-factuality, and multilayered nature of endeavours in contextually-driven research fields (Spyrou, 2011).

In my work, I use reflexivity as a form of methodological scrutiny, especially in sections where I unpack my research methods, methodological tools, ethics, and analysis. I used reflexivity mostly as a form of discussion between what happened in the field and what I did in my position as the researcher in order to question, resolve or challenge that occurrence. Therefore, my stance has always been one of a critique, and my work has been informed mostly by the critical standpoint of reflexivity. I have taken a step back to examine the political and social constructions of my context to unpack how that has informed my research process. I have also acknowledged my unavoidable position as an participant throughout the process and creation of this inquiry (Muecke, 1994) and have been transparent with my research hurdles, challenges, and limitations. I have also attempted to be as transparent as possible in the dialogue I have created between the positioning of my worldview and the various approaches to qualitative research used in my study.

Research Worldview(s)

“Every enquiry is located within a belief system, which carries with it a distinctive view of the world and the place of the individual within it” (Singal, 2004, p. 88). The belief system with which a researcher starts his or her journey is most often impacted by his or her ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions. Creswell (2007) argues that ontology refers to the investigator’s stance towards the nature of reality; epistemology is his or her scope and concept of how knowledge is acquired, while axiology refers to the role of values in the research. Together, these three assumptions define the question(s), characteristics, and implications of a study. In short, they build the paradigm, worldview or basic set of beliefs that [will] guide the researcher’s action in any given inquiry.

According to Creswell (2007), there are four worldviews: post-positivism, social constructivism, advocacy/participatory, and pragmatism. As defined by Butler-Kisber (2010, p. 5):

- Post-positivism is a scientific and reductionist type approach, wherein researchers seek cause and effect in their findings from the empirical data.
- Social constructivism is based on the idea that lived experience is socially constructed and that researchers can access participants’ worlds through organic, open means of research dependent on close relationships built with the people experiencing the phenomenon in question.
- The advocacy/participatory worldview focuses on making changes for marginalized groups and creating spaces for those voices to be heard.
- Pragmatism is based on researchers utilizing a variety of tools that best fit the inquiry at hand because pragmatists give importance to conducting research that best addresses the research problem.

Nevertheless, there are debates in the literature that posit that worldviews cannot so easily be categorized. Beyond than the categories themselves, as explained by Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), researchers must not see these worldviews as rigid classifications but rather as a means of organizing frameworks with which they can view different stances. Worldviews can be mixed

and a type of inquiry does not always directly delineate a distinct worldview. For example, a participant observation study can have a post-positive stance, a constructivist stance, or a pragmatic stance (Hatch, 2002). What is important to understand is the epistemology and the ontology behind each worldview and whether they have a clear link to the chosen methodology.

My study, which explores children's understanding of inclusive education, drew on three epistemologies: constructivism, phenomenology, and advocacy/participation. Echoing constructivism, I believe that meaning is not discovered, but rather constructed, and that phenomena come into meaning only when consciousness engages with that particular singularity (Crotty, 1998). Meaning, or truth, cannot simply be understood as "objective;" it is constructed; in other words, "the world and the objects in the world may be in themselves meaningless; yet they are partners in the generation of meaning and need to be taken seriously" (Crotty, 1998, p. 44). I adhere to the belief that lived experience is "socially constructed, understood in context, and influenced by the historical and cultural experiences known to individuals" (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 5). I also believe that in order to co-create the constructed meanings, we must engage the self and the participants fully in the research process. Drawing on a phenomenologist worldview, I agree that "nothing can be accomplished without subjectivity, so its elimination is not the solution [for phenomenologists]. Rather *how* the subject is present is what matters, and objectivity itself is an achievement of subjectivity" (Giorgi, 1994, p. 205). Understanding this results from "a dialectic between the researcher's pre-understandings and the research process, between the self-interpreted constructions of the researcher and those of the participant" (Finlay, 2002, p. 534). Through my methodological journey, therefore, the enmeshment of myself as an integral part of this research endeavour has been explored and transparently presented. In addition to this, influenced by the advocacy and participant worldview, I worked closely with participants, taking children's input as collaborators in some aspects of the study. In order to focus on the participants, I not only need to "get close" to them but actively involve them as decision making entities within the research process. Only then can some form of positive change be initiated in their lives.

In this sense, as stated previously, I drew overall from three worldviews in my work—the constructivist, phenomenologist, and advocacy/participatory worldviews. In Table 5.1 below, I outline in further detail how each of the worldviews impacted my research process and impacted my study. One salient point to make, however, is that regardless of the ontological status of experience (objective or not), what matters for the purposes of a study like mine are mainly the ways in which meaning is socially constructed in a particular manner. But even this does not imply that “particularity” is everything in the research process. General principles, such as those embedded in the “worldviews” above, are also necessary in order to make meaningful sense of the ways in which “specific consciousness” interacts with “phenomena.”

Table 5.1. Worldview(s) Assumptions and Implications

<p>RESEARCH QUESTIONS:</p> <p>What do children in nominally inclusive primary schools operated by the NGO BRAC express when asked what they like and dislike about their school?</p> <p><i>Sub-question 1.</i> What central motifs, with regard to IE, emerge from children’s pictorial, spoken, and written perspectives?</p> <p><i>Sub-question 2.</i> If the children’s voices (derived through data collection) are distilled through Rabindranath Tagore’s philosophy of education, how can lessons be offered to better contextualize IE in Bangladesh and, more specifically, in BRAC?</p>	
Core research aspects	Implications for my study
<p>Ontology: What is my belief on the nature of reality?</p>	<p>Social Constructivism angle: multiple realities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Different children’s views on their school experiences are presented through photos, quotes, narratives, and excerpts. <p>Phenomenologist angle</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do <i>my</i> perceptions of reality frame the phenomenon in question? I am bringing my own lived experiences, specific understandings, and historical background to this study. This is my way of being-in-the-world and I cannot help but involve that in my research process and in my prior understanding of children’s experiences at BRAC schools. <p>Political reality angle</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children are given the chance to reflect on their findings, especially photographic findings, and relay their experiences of school to me

	via the photos. The children's photos "show" rather than tell and "speak for themselves."
Epistemology: What is my relationship with that/whom I am "researching"?	<p>Closeness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I spent close to 7 months at the school(s). • I observed children at two different schools for a total of 44 hours. • I gained rapport with the children. <p>Subjectively exploring the self</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is my position and how does that impact the topic, the participants, and the data? • What is my "self-framework" that impacts key research decisions? <p>Collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children were given choices regarding the use of certain methodological tools or aspects (i.e. cameras, paragraph writing etc.).
Axiology: What is the role of values in my work?	<p>Biased</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I engage with my biases throughout my research journey. • I reflexively criticize and highlight my decision-making processes and how they impacted my study. <p>Biases and negotiation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I highlight bias present in the field from participants/contextual realities and how that impacted my research and brought multi-vocality to it. • Children are asked through multiple methods of triangulation about their interpretations and understandings of inclusion/exclusion at school. Their reasons behind their views are also gauged and their bias measured. • The role of the self is explored in ethical negotiations throughout the study.
Methodology: What is my strategy/plan of action/process of research?	<p>Inductive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I start with participants' views and build up to patterns and themes from there. • These themes are produced through "member checks" and triangulation of various qualitative methodologies conducted both consecutively and simultaneously in my study. • Methodologies that inform my study are: visual, phenomenological, and narrative-based. • These methodologies do not all inform my study in an equal and balanced manner. Rather, I draw from each one at different stages of my research. <p>Participatory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I involve participants in some or at all stages of inquiry. Results are verified through "member-checks" and discussion of themes with participants. • I involve my participants in multiple instances of negotiation and re-negotiation regarding the use of tools/methods.
Methods: What are the	<p>Methods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation • Photovoice

techniques and procedures I use to gather and analyze the data?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaire • <i>Addas</i> (informal focus groups) • Paragraphing/free associative writing and questioning while sitting side by side <p>Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phenomenological analysis of visual, written, and spoken data • Questionnaire (numeric analysis) • Reflexive and subjective self-analysis throughout
Rhetoric: What kind of language do I use to present my research?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My language is largely informal and reflexive, dotted with some limited elements of advocacy. Self-analysis is performed openly throughout the research process, making transparent the presence of self if explored at every key point.

(Adapted from Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007, p. 24-25)

Research Design

Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993) state that the research worldview has important implications for the research design. As explained by Denzin and Lincoln (2005), the research design situates the researcher in the empirical world and connects him or her to specific sites, persons, groups, institutions and bodies of relevant interpretive material. It also connects the theoretical paradigms to the strategies of inquiry. Sometimes one theoretical paradigm can clearly lead the researcher to a specific, like strategy of inquiry. However, sometimes a theoretical paradigm prompts the researcher to use a *mélange* of strategies to sufficiently address his or her worldview and seek answers to the research questions. In my case, the latter is what best applied. In short, I conducted a “qualitative inquiry,” drawing from three different worldviews, informed by related but different research strategies embedded in practices of visual arts-informed and phenomenological inquiry supported with tools of reflexivity. I also chose these methods because I had to make methodological decisions that best suited the study of young children. Later on in this chapter, that point is discussed in greater detail.

Issues in Qualitative Inquiry

As explained by two eminent scholars of qualitative inquiry, Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 3):

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

The theoretical underpinning of qualitative research, therefore, is the idea that phenomena can be best understood from the ground up in a natural setting, by utilizing methods that are sensitive to the people and places under study. Creswell (2007) has outlined nine characteristics of qualitative research, which help explain the core values of this craft and include essential characteristics such as the researcher as a key instrument, multiple sources of data, inductive data analysis, participants' meanings and holistic accounts. Stemming from the works of social scientist and anthropologist Franz Boas, the qualitative research movement had to pass through eight "historical moments" (Hatch, 2002, p. 3), starting from the *traditional phase* (1900-1942) to the current most rapidly transforming phase or "eighth moment" in which qualitative researchers are still having to confront conservative measures trying to reign supreme in the field, pushing creativity to align more closely with positivistic orientations (Butler-Kisber, 2010). This has happened because even as the field has evolved, the development of new perspectives and methods has not meant the abandonment of older ones (Hatch, 2002). It has usually only been a slight transition or add-on from what had existed in the past, and, as Denzin and Lincoln (1994) point out, "each of the earlier historical moments is still operating in the present, either as a legacy or as a set of practices that researchers still follow or argue against" (p. 11).

I chose a qualitative research approach for the very specific qualities that this form of inquiry possesses. My research questions, which explore the habitual and lived experiences of children at two BRAC schools is closely aligned to the

goal of qualitative research methodologies, which attempt to help researchers and others make sense of the conditions that define daily life in this century (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). However, even more importantly, what defined my choice of this form of research is that it allowed me the flexibility to make creative choices regarding methods and, at the same time, became a therapeutic project (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This is because in the process of doing this project, having dedicating almost six years of my life to it, I have become more aware and well connected to my complex identity as a Bangladeshi woman doing research in Bangladesh. My stream of “double consciousness” (Du Bois, 2007), developed through my long tenure in Northern educational institutions—first in Bangladesh and later on at universities in the USA, UK, and Canada—providing me a unique, yet challenging position in terms of my research topic, questions, and participants. Therefore, as an individual, I always carried the sensation of feeling as though my identity was divided into several parts, making it difficult or impossible to have one unified sense of self in my project. This stream of “double consciousness,” for example, allowed me to relate to my project at one level because I too grew up in Bangladesh and faced many of the challenges that children there face. However, at the same time, my education and acculturation within western academic environments revealed a certain linguistic, cultural power gap from my participants. For example, I struggled with speaking entirely in Bengali in the field, often unconsciously utilizing English words in talking with the children and parents, and even in some of my daily banter with participants. I instantly caught myself and translated the word used into Bengali. However, as a reflexive thinker, I must question how that may have had an impact on my position and relationship with my participants. It may have caused a moment of discomfort or even utter incomprehension, which may have affected participants’s thought. Ahsan (2009) also struggled with a similar issue in her work in Tangail, Bangladesh, wherein a child was trying to follow her way of speaking Bengali, which limited his participation. She suggested that in such a scenario, the researcher could limit his or her use of language and invite the children to speak, or use more non-verbal forms of expressions. As it will become

clearer later on, non-verbal and written forms of expression were used in this study.

A further more direct reason I chose a qualitative approach is due to the fact that it is highly suited to working with children. Children prefer flexible, interactive and engaging methods, which qualitative research allows. Furthermore, children as individuals and as a social group are often powerless and vulnerable in relation to adults (McDowell, 2001). Adult researchers with their physical presence, institutional positioning, social standing, and life experiences possess a great deal of power in contrast to their child participants (Valentine, 1999). Qualitative methodologies allow researchers to at least partially bridge this gap, because in qualitative work researchers have the flexibility to be emergent rather than predetermined, participant driven rather than researcher driven, and open and accommodating rather than imposing. Creswell (2007) explains that power can be de-emphasized by collaborating directly with participants, by having them suggest methods of data collection or help with the research questions, and by facilitating during the data analysis process. In the case of children, it allows for multiple realities and voices to be represented in a complex, thick, in-depth description.

Taking Qualitative Approaches Further: Visuals and Phenomenology

My research was informed by two other popular approaches that were developed in the qualitative research movement at the turn of the 20th century. These are image-based art and phenomenological inquiries. The first mostly impacted my data collection, while the second influenced my data analysis. These approaches both share certain elements in common with qualitative research, but at the same time expand it to fit certain, more specific research criteria. In the sections below, I first discuss image-based arts inquiries, my reasons behind choosing them, and how they informed my study. Later I will do the same with phenomenology.

Images in art inquiry.

Research that includes images, such as pictures, drawings, photographs, collages, or paintings, belongs to the family of artistic forms of inquiry. Using the arts in research was a movement started by health care researchers in the 1970s in the US, which reformed and furthered qualitative work. Leavy (2009) explains that it was through the expansion and disruption of the theoretical advancements of qualitative methodologies that arts-based and arts-informed³² research approaches took flight and by the 1990s constituted a new methodological genre. She writes that:

It is within the politically, theoretically, and methodologically diverse paradigm of qualitative research that, in recent decades, arts-based/[informed] practices have emerged as an alternative methodological genre...[in some ways] both artistic practice and the practice of qualitative research can be viewed as *crafts*.” (p. 8, 10).

Qualitative research and artistic inquiries therefore share certain approaches to knowing, in which both are holistic and dynamic involving reflection, description, problem solving, and re-examination in order to create new meanings and persuasion. (Leavy, 2009; Janesick, 2001). What differentiates the two however, is the way in which the “meaning making process” unfolds; artistic practices push the meaning making process already used in qualitative research even further. In qualitative research, as Hunter, Lusardi, Zucker, Jacelon, and Chandler (2002) explain, meaning making is an iterative and holistic process in which meaning emerges through labeling, identifying, and classifying emerging and interrelating concepts, testing hypotheses, finding patterns, and generating theories. With the use of arts, these processes are made even more explicit, and meaning making is drawn out and brought to the forefront. The arts have also moved the world of research to more subjective forms of knowing in which critical conversations and debates have challenged the parameters of “accepted” forms of research, thus creating a larger, more inclusive, permeable border around the repository of methods. When it comes to use of the arts in research,

³² The difference between the two approaches and my reasoning for choosing the latter will later be discussed.

two options are available to researchers: art-based inquiry or arts-informed inquiry:

Art-based research can be defined as the systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people they involve in their studies (McNiff, 2008, p. 29).

Arts-informed research is a mode and form of qualitative research in the social sciences that is influenced by, but not based in, the arts broadly conceived...the methodology infuses the languages, processes, and forms of literacy, visual, and performing arts with the expansive possibilities of scholarly inquiry for purposes of advancing knowledge (Cole & Knowles, 2002, as cited in Knowles & Cole, 2008, p. 59).

My work is closer to arts-informed techniques than arts-based ones, as images (specifically photography) were part of a group of methods used. I chose images from the pool of art forms available for my inquiry at BRAC schools. I agree with Weber (2008, p. 41), when she writes that we are born into a world of visual images, “projected onto our retinas, clamouring for the attention of perceptual processes.” What is really unique about the image is the fact that—whether it represents a captured moment, is created or drawn, is a copy of an original presented digitally, virtually, or materially, or produced by a lens, brush or pen—all images are constantly subject to reconstruction and reinterpretation, and “the meanings of each image are multiple, created each time it is viewed” (Cartwright & Sturken, 2001, p. 25). Furthermore, and specifically pertinent to my work, images have four specific aspects: they can capture the ineffable, can be produced anew by participants or researchers (and through the use of images even non-professionals and young people can project credible and authentic data), and can facilitate reflexivity in research design (Weber, 2008).

In my work, children were able to capture the ineffable through the use of images. For example, when one child took a photo of a picture of a bumblebee, the most important aspect of that photo for him was the idea of “flight.” He liked that photo because in it bees were illustrated as being able to fly anywhere and everywhere. He told me how his intention of coming to school was to learn what

could enable him to “fly” far, far away, and become a police officer one day. However, the ideas of freedom and flight would have been very difficult to unearth only through writing and questioning. The idea of flight and the independence associated with it, is not something that is necessarily related to inclusive education, nor is it a topic of study at BRAC. In other words, the use of images not only allowed the adult researcher (me) to get closer to the children, but its creative and imaginative practice opened up greater spaces, places, and roles children could play. In my research, images enabled those who were considered “non-professionals” (in the realm of academic research) to make meaningful and authentic contributions.

Phenomenology.

Denscombe (2010) describes phenomenology as a research style that is subjective, descriptive, and interpretive vis-à-vis agency. He further explains that it is focused on understanding the “phenomenon,” that is, something known to us through our senses that can be seen, heard, touched, smelled, or tasted. It is not concerned with explaining the causes of things, but attempts, instead, to provide a description of how things are experienced first hand by those involved.

With a longstanding history in nursing before moving into other fields, phenomenological research dates back to as far as the 1950’s, gradually becoming more popular in the 1970s and 1980s (Bulter-Kisber, 2010). Two main schools of phenomenological thought permeate the academic literature: European and North American. The European school is based upon the works of Edmund Husserl’s “transcendental phenomenology,” Jean-Paul Sartre’s “existential phenomenology,” and Martin Heidegger’s “hermeneutic phenomenology,” all of which focused on investigating the essence of the human experience (Denscombe, 2003, p. 104). The North American school is based on the works of Alfred Schutz who was less concerned with capturing the essence of the human experience and more interested in describing the ways humans give meaning to their experiences. He was interested in seeing the world through “typifications,” or categories that explain the ways in which people interpret social phenomena (Denscombe, 2003, p. 105)

Denscombe (2003) summarizes eight salient aspects of phenomenological research, which have been given a label and explicatory quotes related to that specific idea in the table below. After the table, I outline how phenomenology specifically informed my inquiry.

Table 5.2. What is Phenomenology?

Phenomenology is about...	Quote
1. Experience	"...concentrate efforts on getting a clear picture of the things in themselves-the things as directly experienced by people" (p. 98)
2. Everyday world	"...particular interest in the basics of social existence...questions how people manage to do the everyday things on which social life depends" (p. 98)
3. Seeing through the eyes of the others	"not to interpret the experiences...not to analyze...or repackage...[the] task is to present the experiences...through the eyes of the others" (p. 98)
5. The social construction of reality	"Phenomenology deals with the ways people interpret events and, make sense of their personal experiences" (p. 99) "Phenomenology focuses on how the processes of interpretation are shared and socially constructed" (p. 100)
5. Multiple realities	"...phenomenology rejects the notion that there is one universal reality and accepts, instead, that things can be seen in different ways by different people at different times in different circumstances, and each alternative version needs to be recognized as valid in its one right" (p. 100)
6. Description	"...provides a description that adequately covers the complexity of the situation...does not try to gloss over the subtleties and complications that are

	essential parts of many-possibly most-aspects of human experience” (p. 101)
7. The suspension of common-sense beliefs	“From a phenomenological perspective researchers are part and parcel of the social world they seek to investigate. [Therefore, in the research process], they need to stand back from their ordinary, every beliefs and question them...” (102)
8. Participants’ accounts	“Data collection by phenomenology tends to rely on tape-recorded interviews” (103)

My inquiry was informed by phenomenology in several different ways. I was first attracted to phenomenology due the words authors have used in academic texts to describe the specific aims of this inquiry. They directly fit the words I used in order to envision how I would answer my research questions. Such words included: exploration, experience, themes, and perspectives. As my goal was to glean children’s perspectives through the use of images and substantiate them by another form of inquiry that leant itself to thematic meaning-making through methods of exploring children’s lived experiences, I turned my attention to phenomenology. As explained by Butler-Kisber (2010, p. 52):

Phenomenological inquiry...[focuses] on reducing field texts to reveal some common features of shared understanding across experiences. It can be considered a categorizing approach to inquiry.

Hence, for me phenomenological inquiry was that which equipped me with the tools I needed to concentrate my efforts on seeing things as directly seen by the children—not to “repackage” those experiences, but rather draw common features from my field texts and present them thematically in my project. Along with representing the photographs taken as well as the non-photographable things, it was important for me to generate an understanding of common or shared experiences of the phenomenon at hand: practices of inclusive education

at their BRAC school. Further, it was important to gain a deeper understanding of the features of the phenomenon as they appeared in the time-and-space-bound context of my research (Butler-Kisber, 2010). That is, in terms of my research, the role played by categorizing, deriving meaning from these categories, clustering, and thematically organizing meanings.

Furthermore, and quite importantly, phenomenology is a method of inquiry that allows researchers to distil the multiplicities of perspectives from any given situation. For example, one of my methodological steps involved groups of children creating albums of their photographs. In reflecting back on the activity, I discovered that the perspectives of the group leaders varied significantly from the shy, reserved group members. While the group leaders commented on the fun, communal, and inclusive aspects of the project, some of the introverted children mentioned how the task made them feel unnoticed, especially when their leader preferred to list her picture and name *first* in the album. Each of these alternative interpretations of the same incident is valid in its own right; it is up to the phenomenologist to recognize these differences and acknowledge the tangled messiness of multiplicity pervading social research.

Important Considerations in the Field

Once I decided on my research design and approach, I embarked on my field study. There were several issues that I had to consider very carefully in the field. In the following section, I outline the steps and considerations that had to be undertaken before I could implement the research methods at the schools. The steps also involved gaining consent and assent from the guardians and participants, however, as those are ethical considerations, those topics will be addressed later on in the ethics section of this chapter. The methods I used were: *1) unstructured observations 2) photo-voice and reflections 3) questionnaire, 4) informal focus groups or addas, 5) free-associative writing and 6) memos.*

Negotiating access.

In conducting research of primary schools operated by one of the largest organizations in the world, with a plethora of departments, procedures and formalities, I had to negotiate access at various points of the study. In early October 2012, my application for a research internship at BRAC was finalized. The letter has been attached in Appendix III. I was given a flexible start-time, which allowed me to conduct my research at BRAC for a period of 6-8 months starting anytime between March and August of the following year; I started my work in August 2013. I was able to receive such an “open” invitation from BRAC as I had previously interned with their Education Programme (BEP), worked at BRAC University’s Institute of Educational Development (IED), and over several years have developed professional links with managers and heads of the organization.

Once accepted as an intern, I had to negotiate access to the schools. I had previous professional contacts with the Inclusive Education Senior Manager at BRAC, who introduced me to the program officers in-charge of the schools. They organized my visits to several of them.

Once I chose my two specific schools, I had to re-negotiate access with the Senior Manager and the officers in-charge, explaining my reasons and intentions for choosing those particular schools. The consent form provided by the Senior Manager of Inclusive Education, who gave permission on behalf of herself and her subsidiaries, is attached in Appendix IV.

However, even after the official “signing,” as Delamont (2002) explains, I was always aware that access is not negotiated once and then settled for the whole of the study. It is negotiated at every step of the way. For example, some mornings when I would call the programme officer of a given school, I would be politely asked to come the next day. As a result, my time, and therefore observations, at the schools varied. I also had to gain consent from the teachers to work at their particular school and be given the time and space to conduct the research. The consent form used for the teachers has been attached in Appendix V.

Translating.

Before entering the field in August 2013, all the data collection and consent forms were translated into Bengali. Hence, the photo-voice handout, *adda* session protocol, questionnaire, and various consent forms³³ were all translated. Some of those forms are provided in the Appendices. Although I have a relatively good grasp of written and spoken Bengali and English, I used the assistance of a fluent bi-lingual speaker to help me complete the translations. She also helped translate all the data which was collected in Bengali back into English. This person was approved to be a part of my study by the McGill Ethic's Board.

Piloting.

According to Krueger (1998), piloting is a cardinal rule of research when working with young children. Hence, I piloted some of the methodological tools. For example, the questionnaire was piloted on six non-BRAC children, aged 10-14. The children attend schools that follow the governmental curriculum, which is similar to the curriculum adopted by BRAC. They also live in an urban area known as Khilkhet, which is similar to the Tongi area.

However, the *adda* protocol, which guided the informal focus groups, was not piloted. According to Krueger (1998), it is difficult to pilot focus group questions because there are so many factors that play a role in the dynamics of focus groups, such as the questions, moderator, room, relationships between participants, etc. Similarly, the photo-voice hand out was also not piloted. It was difficult to recreate a scenario at another third BRAC school where I could discuss my handout "for practice" and ask children to take pictures safely. However, at both schools "U" and "M," the children had the chance to take one practice photograph. This, to a certain extent, can be considered their "trial" photo and offset the need to pilot the actual method.

³³ Please see the section above where I briefly mention each method conducted in the field. Each of the methods had various forms (also mentioned here). These needed to be piloted before they could be utilized with the participants.

Sampling.

A purposive sampling procedure was used to choose schools “U” and “M.” Purposive sampling, as defined by Denscombe (2003), takes place when the researcher already knows something about the specific people or events, and deliberately selects [a] particular one(s), because it is seen as likely to produce the most valuable data. There are several reasons why I purposefully chose these two particular schools after having visited a total of ten BRAC schools located in and out of Dhaka. These factors were: time considerations, location, value of data, and mixed school populations.

Time considerations.

From the end of August 2013 till the end of December 2013, I had allocated myself four months in the field. I wanted to spend close to a semester-long time period at my school(s) in order to get a clearer picture of the practice of inclusion, and also develop a deeper relationship with the participants. I was able to do both; however, it took me close to seven months in the field, as my last contact with participants was made at the end of March 2014. The reason why it took me almost double the amount of time in the field time has to do with the political turmoil³⁴ rampaging through Bangladesh from mid October 2013 to mid January 2014.

Location of schools.

My schools were located in or near the capital city Dhaka. I did not set out to only do research in the capital before entering the field. However, once in Bangladesh and with the impending political crisis, my local advisor, BRAC officials, and I myself felt that it would be safer for me to remain closer to my home and family. Further, as Crossley and Watson (2003) point out, one of the main barriers to research in developing countries is a lack of infrastructure, such as inaccessible roads and limited access to computers and other technology. Lack

³⁴ During the months of August 2013-March 2014, due to unrest regarding the general elections, Bangladesh, as a nation, experienced one of the worst episodes of political turmoil, which included daily bombings, vehicle burning, and curfews. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

of infrastructure coupled with the political violence could have put me in a dangerous or isolated situation. For that reason, even after sampling broadly, I chose two schools in Dhaka. I chose the first school, “U,” located in central Dhaka near the bustling, densely crowded area of Mohammadpur. The second school, “M,” was located close to the semi-urban suburb of Tongi, approximately 13 kilometers north of Dhaka.

Value of data.

The value of the data, or the possibility of gaining rich, detailed information, was determined by two factors: children’s ability to complete the research activities I had planned, and the attitudes of participants and gatekeepers towards my research. In doing a survey of ten BRAC schools, I got a general idea that I could not target Grade 1 and Grade 5 schools. This was because Grade 1 students had not spent adequate years in their respective schools. Fifth graders, although they constituted mature participants, could not take part, as they were graduating in November 2013 and would be unavailable for the duration of my study. Hence, I had to choose between Grades 2 and 4. From the schools visited, I found schools “U” and “M” to be the most conducive to my research goals.

What really stood out and helped me purposefully choose these two schools over the others had to do with my second criterion for data value: people’s attitudes. I got a general idea of the attitudes of various teachers, program officers, and children towards my research during the sampling process. I found that at both of these schools, all the people who played different but vital roles, at varying degrees, were generally open, approachable, and excited about my project.

Mixed populations.

The last but most important criterion—mixed populations—was more difficult to meet, since there were no children belonging to ethnic minorities at the chosen schools. Large concentrations of tribal children are only found in coastal and northern areas of Bangladesh (Dewan, personal communication,

October 10, 2013) and I was not able to access those schools due to the political hostilities. Nevertheless, the two schools' student populations were mixed on several other accounts. Those points have been outlined in the table below.

Table 5.3. Students at Schools "U" and "M"

Aspect	School "U" Grade 3	School "M" Grade 2
School Location	Mohammadpur vicinity: Urban	Tongi vicinity: Semi-Urban
Age	8-14	7-12
Gender	12 boys 24 girls	10 boys 20 girls
Disability	1 physically disabled girl, age 10	2 visually impaired children girl, age 12 boy, age 9
Religion	36 Muslims	3 Hindus 27 Muslims

A possible criticism of the choice of the schools can be that they are both located in urbanized areas and do not represent ethnic minority populations or rural children. This, to some extent, is offset by the school population being mixed in other important ways, as demonstrated in the list above. Furthermore, since the focus of this study is each school's inclusive practices from children's perspectives, which are elements bound within the context of each specific school, the difference in school location (urban versus rural) did not matter.

Collecting Data from the Field

Once I chose the schools, I was ready to spend time with the children in each one, in order to conduct the planned research methods. In the next sections, each method is discussed briefly, followed by what I actually did in the field. Again, the methods are presented in a linear fashion, but as most research journeys, the path was not always linear. Rather, it was at times recursive and simultaneous.

Unstructured observations.

As Greig and Taylor (1999) explain, if the purpose of the research is to improve our understanding of a particular social group or culture, then that knowledge begins with observation. One of the major benefits of observations is that they allow the researcher to directly “see what is going on” and in a study that sought to explore schools this is key. Since children are particularly reactive to strangers (Greig & Taylor, 1999), observations can also be a stepping-stone into the field. More specifically, unstructured observations are a method commonly used in the interpretivist/constructivist paradigm, in which they are used to understand cultural behaviour. They are not observations based on taxonomies developed from known theory; rather, this method is a process that acknowledges the importance of context and the co-construction of knowledge between researcher and researched (Mulhall, 2003).

When doing unstructured observations, a researcher can enter the field with one role and then switch to another. For example, he or she can enter as complete participant and then switch to complete observer depending on the requirements of the field (Mulhall, 2003). What is important in this approach, however is to remember that it is impossible to separate the researcher from the “researched.”

Field proceedings.

I entered the field as a participant observer. The classic definition of participant observation is:

The method in which the observer participates in the daily life of the people under study, either openly in the role of the researcher or covertly

in some disguised role, observing things that happen, listening to what is said, and questioning people, over some length of time (Becker & Geer, 1957, as cited in Denscombe, 2010, p. 206)

Hence, I was able to enter each school and establish close relationships with the children and teacher(s) allowing them to recognize my role as a researcher (Robson, 1993; Denscombe, 2003). Establishing close relationships were necessary for this inquiry as it dealt primarily with children, with whom building rapport became essential (Lewis & Lindsay, 2000). After a couple of days, however, especially at school “U,” my role changed in which I was observing but at times also helping the children with some of their lessons. In other words, my role as a participant observer, as explained by Mulhall (2003), started to shift and I found myself checking children’s math answers, writing English spellings on the board or helping with art. In this sense, I fell in and out of my role as a participant-observer and, at times, participated more than I observed. This helped me further develop my rapport with the children, which was necessary for the lengthy amount of time I was to spend at that school.

I observed for a total of 28 hours covering seven full class sessions at school “U,” and 16 hours covering four full class sessions at school “M.” I had plans to observe much more but as Wragg (1999) mentions, it is not easy to say exactly how things might change during observations, depending on the contextual realities and the researcher’s position in the field. In my case, ongoing political turmoil did not allow me to access the schools for long intervals. Additionally, at school “M,” for example, observations were sometimes difficult to conduct. Often when the program officer was present, she would ask what my “activity” for the day was. Just observations were not always seen as “being productive,” as she would say, “*Apa* you have come from so far just to observe? Please, do something else.” The children also expected me to engage them in some “fun activity” whenever I was there. Hence, for some days in which I had planned to go and observe, I had to cut short or abandon the observations to do some rapport building exercises.

As I observed, I did “not follow the approach of strictly checking a list of predetermined behaviours such as would occur in structured observation”

(Mulhall, 2003, p. 307). Instead, I used unstructured methods in the field with no preconceived notions as to the discrete behaviours that I might observe. I picked up what was important and determined how to focus on those aspects as “the field” unfolded in front of me.

And as the field unfolded, I adopted a rather descriptive approach with the aim of developing a portrait (as much possible) and providing a narrative account of the events that went on each day. Here Spradley’s (1980) nine aspects of observation were important. The observation schedule and resulting notes from one day of fieldwork have been provided in Appendix VI to show how that was done.

Even if my goal was to capture the essence of the organically flowing classroom as an outsider, I must question the extent to which this was possible. For example, at times the students and teachers would behave in prescribed ways. At school “U,” the teacher would discipline her students often. At both schools, children were admonished quickly for bad behaviour. This hinted to me that the school staff, although involved and excited, may have felt a sense of discomfort at times owing to my presence.

Photovoice.

Increasingly, qualitative researchers have embraced visual methods, especially photography, as a means to create, represent, and disseminate knowledge (Schell, Ferguson, Hamoline, Shea, & Thomas-Maclean, 2009). Riley and Manias (2003, p. 89) explain that “photography is a powerful research tool,” and that it is possible to approach any sociological inquiry through images. Images can be used in research as documentation, and in analysis as a catalyst to create knowledge and develop understanding, to track data, or as data itself. The choice of how to use images in research depends on the nature and focus of each particular inquiry. However, when using images, it is always important to keep in mind three issues: who has produced the image, who is the intended audience, and what the image will be used for (Schell, et al., 2009). There are various photographic methodologies that are currently being used in research, including photovoice, photo elicitation, videos, photo-novellas, and family photographs,

which all use visual imagery as the tool to represent the daily lives of participants, including those of children.

In my research, I used photovoice. Photovoice is a form of visual inquiry that emphasizes the role of participants, which are usually people with little money, power or status, to take and use photographic images to engender collaborative reflection on local phenomena. Participants do this in order to facilitate social change at grassroots and policy levels (Wang, 1999; Butler-Kisber 2010). Built on the fundamental tenets of documentary photography, feminist research theory, and Freirian empowerment theory, photovoice was developed in the 1990s with specific reference to women's involvement in the public health conversation (Wang & Burris, 1997).

Over the years, photovoice has gained popularity in different fields of research, including educational inquiry. Due to its success as a method and its applicability to a range of different populations, it has also been propelled into the field of research with children (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Specifically, when working with children, the methodology of photovoice must undergo slight shifts. Often, social constructivists working with children utilize photovoice to emphasize the role of participants in taking and using photographic images to engender collaborative reflection on local phenomena. However, it is not always clear whether those types of research can directly result in facilitating social change at grassroots and policy levels. For example, Butler-Kisber (2010) gives the example of Michael Whatling, who used an adapted version of photovoice for a qualitative inquiry in which he asked children to walk around their school and take pictures of things they thought were important. This later created a focus for Michael's discussions with the children, helping him probe and delve further into children's understandings. In my research, I approached photovoice in this manner, giving children cameras to take pictures, at their school, which were later reflected upon and discussed in informal focus groups known as *addas*.

Giving children the responsibility of a camera has proved to be powerful in research, because it helps forge a relationship of trust and partnership between the child and the researcher (Darbyshire, MacDougall, & Schillar, 2005). Cameras do not require the presence of researchers when photographs are taken,

minimizing the risk of researcher dynamics altering the space being captured on film (Young and Barrett, 2001). Further, cameras and the process of taking photographs have the potential to empower children, as in this activity there are no spatial and temporal restrictions on children's participation in a project (Barker & Weller, 2003).

Field proceedings.

I conducted a photovoice project within one week at each school. During this task, my goal was twofold. The first was to discover what pupils considered important aspects in enjoying their school life and feeling included in their environment (Cook & Hess, 2007). The second was to discover what pupils considered unimportant in enjoying their school life and what makes them feel excluded from their environment. As this was an inquiry into inclusive education, I did not exclude any pupil out of the photovoice project (unless it was his or her own choice to be excluded). However, soon into the project, I realized that children did not want to take photos of things they disliked. In order to gather knowledge on children's dislikes, I therefore, had to adjust my methodological plan, and adopt free-associative writing methods. This process is described later on, but first, "like" photos were taken according to the following chronology.

1. The children were asked to remain in their usual 5 or 6-pupil, small groups.
2. They were instructed on *how* to take photos using the photovoice handout. The handout has been attached in Appendix VII.
3. They were directed on *what* to photograph. Each student was instructed to photograph an item or activity at school that they liked. They could take one photo as practice and one to discuss. They were instructed that they had to choose between the two regarding which one they wanted to discuss.
4. Each group was given time to take photos with my Samsung S3 mobile phone or iPod digital camera. As the cameras went around, each member

took his or her turn. All the members of each group took pictures on the same day.³⁵

5. After the pictures were taken, I developed two copies of each child's chosen "like" photo and brought them back to the school. One was used for research purposes while the other was given to the children as a keepsake.
6. With their chosen photo in hand, and now in the larger group, each child was then asked individually to write down three reasons why they took that photo and what they liked about it.
7. After that, the children got back in their usual smaller groups while I went around each group and discussed each child's response with their chosen "like" photo. That gave me a chance to clarify each response and make sure what the child wrote best represented what they wanted to say.

The photography sessions lasted one week at each school and were monitored closely by the teacher and myself. Further into the project, some "experts" emerged amongst the groups of children and the pupils were helping one another to take the photos.

At each school, although similar steps were followed, the photovoice experiences were different, and I faced a few challenges along the way. For example, in the small, approximately 336 square foot room, it was not possible for the children not to impact one another's work. Therefore, as each group took photos on the same day, some stark similarities were noticed between the children's photographs. Thus, the relative independence in each child's thought process during the photovoice project at school "U" is questionable. Whether the photo truly depicted a child's personal choice is not clear. For example, when one participant, from Group *Surjo Mukhi* (Sunflower) took the first picture of his favourite item at school—a lesson he liked called "*Mou Macchhi*" (Bumble Bee)—almost all his group members felt compelled to take similar photos of lessons they liked. Hence, during the photographing process, even when requested to focus on items outside the lesson books, it was not possible for the children of

³⁵ School "U" had a total of 36 students and six groups. It took three days to complete the photovoice project with two groups per day taking photos. It took the same amount of time at school "M," with 30 children, as that school had six groups of five.

this group to do so. To overcome this obstacle, during the reflections, together we focused on thrashing out the reasons, meanings, or application of the photo to their school's experience. I asked the children if their photo meant something in relation to their school experience and as the children wrote in their reflections and explained later on; often it did. The children mentioned how the lessons they photographed, inspired and impacted their behaviour both in and out of school. Furthermore, to overcome some of the shortcomings resulting from this method, I followed up on the photovoice sessions with the remaining methods. In addition, once the data was collected from the photos, I did a pre-phenomenological analysis of the photos to identify trends and disparities.

One criticism that could be made here is the question of why I decided to stay with the photovoice method if I was facing several critical obstacles to it in the field. While I agree that qualitative research is about rigor, knowledge-production, internal validity, and consistency, it is also about engagement, processes, and participant involvement. The fact that children did not want to take dislike photos did not negate their enthusiasm and excitement towards using cameras for the photos they did want to take about their school, which was for all of them a novel experience. Further, creating space within the research process, wherein children's choices and voices could have value and direction in the research was a paramount, epistemological issue for me. Lastly, the information on dislikes could be accessed in other measures relative to the expression of a form of communication (albeit what is communicated has the potential of slight alteration). Regardless, reflexivity was used to create enough transparency through that process. These are the reasons why photos were still utilized regardless of the obstacles I faced.

Questionnaire.

I also used a questionnaire in the field. Robson (1993) suggests, that when carrying out an enquiry involving humans, the researcher can take advantage of a natural tendency for people to respond to questions by getting them to respond to a set of questions, i.e. a questionnaire. The questionnaire was considered a good methodological addition for getting specific answers for my research questions

because, as Denscombe (2003, p. 159) notes, it would be “fitting in a range of options offered the researcher,” in this case, by me. The questionnaire was developed on three points: 1) a pre-phenomenological analysis of the photographs of children’s likes; 2) a reflection on the themes considered necessary in inclusive schools as outlined in the *Index for Inclusion: Developing learning and participation in schools* (Booth, Ainscow, Black-Hawkins, Vaughan, & Shaw, 2000); and 3) my previous experience of having worked with BRAC students. The questionnaire, therefore, directly asked the children to reflect more coherently and specifically on thematic issues relevant to inclusive education, such as their peer relations, classroom organization, and their teacher’s behaviours.

Regarding the use of the *Index*, I must clarify here, that it is a set of materials developed by the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE) to help schools in their move towards inclusive education. In brief, it offers schools an option to “work around a cycle of activities which guide them through the stages of preparation, investigation, development and review [of inclusion] in order to build supportive communities and foster high achievement for all staff and students” (CSIE, 2015, p. 1). Over the last fifteen years, the *Index* has proven to be a highly popular guide used widely in schools across a number of countries to develop and implement inclusive education. There are several components to the *Index*, with sample questionnaires for students being a very small part of it.










The *Index* had been influenced from the start by a collaborative research project titled: “Developing sustainable inclusion policy and practice: India, South Africa, Brazil and England.” This project, at that time, had come to be called “The Four Nations Project” in which a shared approach to inclusion—applicable both to countries of the North and South—was developed. In addition, the *Index* has been translated in over 40 different languages and used successfully in the Indian subcontinent previously. Due to the fact that it was developed with Southern school contexts in mind, I deemed it appropriate to draw from a questionnaire sample in the *Index*.

Field proceedings.

In looking at the inclusive meanings that were emerging from the data in conjunction with important attributes of inclusive schools as determined by the *Index*, I administered a total of 50 questions for the questionnaire. The questionnaire was conducted over the course of two days at each school, as 50 questions were a lot for the children to concentrate on in one sitting. In school “U” 34 out of the 36 students completed the questionnaire and in school “M” 27 out of the 30 students did so as well.

I administered the questionnaires in the larger group setting inside each schoolhouse. The classroom teacher at each school, familiar with the children’s reading and writing level, facilitated the session. In looking at the questions beforehand, she informed me that they would not be difficult for her pupils. Before starting the questionnaire, I assured the children that there were no right or wrong answers and they did not have to answer all the questions. A snapshot of the questionnaire is provided below.

Table 5.4. Questionnaire Snapshot

Questions		I Agree	I Don't Know	I Disagree
1	I am happy at school.			
2	I look forward to coming to school.			
3	I feel part of a big community.			

After handing out the sheets, I went over the directions and the response columns, exploring the meanings behind each facial expression. At both schools, the children were excited to see “the face” as it helped them relate to their emotions or thoughts with regard to the question asked. When some of the students did not understand, even before I needed to step in, the group leaders or proactive students, especially at school “U” were very dynamic in explaining the relationship between the facial expression

and the response key. After the explanation, we got started with the questionnaire. I did ask the children to put their names on their respective sheets, but just so I could return it to them for our second session the following day. It is essential to consider the fact that the children included their names on the questionnaire and the impact that may have had on the results. Other issues that may have impacted the results include my presence, the teacher's presence, the wording of the questions, the children's tendencies to show conformity regarding answers, peer discussions, and the overall classroom setting.

Informal focus groups: Addas.

I followed up the questionnaire session with informal focus groups or addas. According to Litosseliti (2003), focus groups are small structured groups, involving a small number of selected participants led by a moderator who seeks to gain the participants' insight on a given topic or a range of topics. Focus group research is a powerful tool for school improvement purposes, in addition to being an untapped opportunity and resource in the educational arena (Latess, 2008). Hennessy and Heary (2005) explain that focus groups have several advantages over other methods, especially when working with children. These advantages include: creating a safe peer environment and replicating the type of small group settings that children are familiar with in the classroom; redressing the power imbalance between adults and children that exists in one-to-one interviews; providing an encouraging environment for the children; and jogging their memory as they hear the contributions of others (Hill, Laybourn, & Borland, 1996; Mauthner, 1997). An important advantage of using focus groups with children is that the method acknowledges the participants as experts (Levine & Zimmerman, 1996, as cited in Hennessy & Heary, 2005). Although the adult researcher may be asking the questions, the strategy should be for the adult to facilitate and encourage discussion, rather than lead the group discussion.

For the specific context of Bangladesh, focus groups were especially effective because they resonate with one of the most widely practiced trends of information exchange in Bengal—the *adda* (pronounced “uddah”). *Addas* can be defined as long, informal conversations held between friends—popular amongst people of all classes, ages, and places, including schools and colleges (Chakrabarty, 1999). Framed as an *adda* or friendly banter, and not as a simple

“Q and A” information session, my goal was to allow group conversations to flow in a more fun, relevant and interactive manner. Further, it worked to contextualize and make more relevant a foreign methodology, while at the same time balancing out the power relationships between the participants and me, the researcher. Regardless, this method too had some drawbacks, such as groupthink and the overshadowing of shy children. To overcome these obstacles, written methods were used.

Field proceedings.

Two large *adda* sessions were carried out at each school. At school “U,” 34 of the 36 students were present on the day of the first *adda* and 33 out of 36 on the second. At school “M,” 28 out of 30 participated on the first day, and 29 out of 30 on the second. In each school, two days and a total of 3 hours were dedicated to the *adda* sessions. During the sessions, each questionnaire question was addressed in more detail. I reminded the students to also think back on their photographs during the sessions.

During the *addas*, in order to get the children to speak and have a fruitful and engaging conversation about their school, I had to keep the conversational space safe. With the teacher’s help, I had to minimize any incipient arguments. I also had to keep the group on task, working to eliminate power imbalances and personal biases, and brought the conversations to a close properly. I also made sure that I allowed enough silent time and space for children to take the time they needed to respond; when they could not answer a specific topic or question, I encouraged them to make spontaneous contributions.

One limitation, which must be mentioned here, is the location of the *addas*. The *addas*, unlike in my original plan, had to be conducted at the schools. Often school is the most convenient place for the researcher; however, as pointed out by Scott (2000) and Green and Hart (1999), school interviews tend to be more formal as they evoke test-taking mentalities, and facilitators can end up being viewed as “honorary” teachers. For an *adda* between friends, neither of those factors would be most appropriate, so I had planned to hold the *addas* outside school.

However, when I was ready to conduct the *addas*, the political turmoil was at its height. Meeting at the school was challenging in itself, therefore meeting elsewhere with a large group of young children was not considered safe. Furthermore, school administrative staff was generally not comfortable with leaving the children alone with me. Therefore, I carried out the *addas*, at times in close proximity and at other times at a distance from the teacher. At school “U,” the teacher’s presence was minimal and sporadic while in school “M,” where the children were younger, the teacher had a closer presence.

Each of the *adda* sessions was voice recorded. Some of the sessions resulted in having great amounts of background noise, which made the sometimes short, curt monosyllabic words of the younger children difficult to understand. I had to go back and re-question those children on several occasions. Therefore, throughout the *addas* and even afterwards as I was working with children, I had to probe and ask for clarification several times in order to elicit detailed and relevant answers. Further, the children’s responses often went on in tangents, which had nothing to do with the topic of discussion. Therefore, throughout the process I had to reflect and patiently weigh not only the given responses, but also be aware of group dynamics, tensions, and sensitive moments in the activity.

Communicating through writing.

As I conducted my research methods, it began to surface more and more, during the photo sessions as well as the *addas*, that children wanted to have a more private and individualized method of communicating. All the children present participated in the photography activity, however, when it came to speak about their photos or questionnaire responses, especially in large groups, some chose to stay silent. As previously mentioned, children also did not want to take photos of their dislikes. Therefore, writing had to be incorporated in the research procedures.

According to Freeman and Mathison (2009), for the purpose of research with children, writing should not be defined in narrow terms. They explain that communicating through writing in research can entail responding to prompts in conventional paragraph or essay form, or expressive forms of journaling,

sketches, cartoons, free associative writing, poetry and responses to questions while sitting side by side. They further elaborate that writing can be a group or individual activity, and that the reason it is useful, especially with children in schools, is that not only does it foster a sense of ownership and control over the data created about the children, but can be easily integrated into children's school routines. Children by a certain age in school are familiar with several forms of writing, as previously mentioned, and due to having had some previous practice in completing similar tasks, when left with a writing task for research purposes, children often feel a sense of calm and ease. Furthermore, for the children who are shy and do not like to speak up, writing can prove to be a most wanted and needed tool for them to communicate their thoughts. Freeman and Mathison (2009) also add that writing is a data collection activity that children and adolescents can do on their own during or subsequent to other activities, such as group interviews. As a follow-up to group interviews, writing can be used to focus or elaborate on certain specific topics discussed (Hipple, 1985). What is essential while using whatever form of writing the researcher may choose to apply, is to understand that it is a way to convey meaning through "1) developing one's thinking in detail and in a coherent manner and 2) organizing one's statements so as to anticipate the readers' need to know where one is coming from and going to" (Farrell, 1978, as cited in Freeman & Mathison, 2009, p. 135). Elbow (1985), also cited in Freeman and Mathison (2009), takes writing even further, arguing that it is a form of promoting reflection, organization and thought. However, it is not distinctly characterizable from speech; rather the two can refer to, draw from, and alter each other's conventionalities, strengths, and weaknesses, especially when used for research purposes with children. Hence, speaking and writing used in conjunction as research methods can prove to be a happy marriage. In the following section, I unpack in further detail how the participants communicated through writing in this inquiry.

Field proceedings.

In the schools, the children produced different variations of pieces of writing.³⁶ In school “U” where I spent more time and the children were older, a greater number of pieces were produced. Moreover, the children depended more on writing in that school. In the table below, I have summarized the written documents produced at each school.

Table 5.5. Written Documents

School “U”	School “M”
A. Explanation of photos with reasons why.	A. Explanation of photos with reasons why.
B. Detailed list of dislikes at school with reasons why.	B. Summarized list of dislikes at school.
C. My best friend and why.	C. My best friend and why.
D. If we had “X” at school it would have been good, and reasons why.	D. --
E. Poems and/or paragraphs about school, and benefits of coming to school.	E. --

These above-mentioned free associative processes—A through E—gave the children time to stop and think about their responses individually before answering. This was an effective mechanism, as the decorum of privacy from the two adults, myself and the teacher, and from the rest of the peers was not always easy to maintain. Further, the shy students were not comfortable speaking up. Writing allowed them to participate and contribute more comfortably and effectively. In addition, since it was given as “classwork” on a tangible piece of paper that the children could write on, it was an affective way to get their attention and keep it there. For example, when it came to writing poems and paragraphs about school (which again was suggested and chosen by the participants), the children displayed exceptional openness and creativity.

³⁶ The order in which the “written documents” were carried out is something that needs to be considered. They are presented at a certain juncture in the thesis, but in the actual research process, they were conducted as and when gaps came up. Fieldwork is rarely a linear process. For example, soon after the children’s preference to not take photos of their dislikes was identified, I asked them to write about it before moving on to other activities. Even after the *adda* sessions, children wrote about who their best friend was and why. At each school, the order in which the written “assignments” appeared also differed, this Table 5.5 does not indicate a particular chronology, but rather summarizes the topics children wrote about.

Children could also write more openly about who they considered their best friends and why, as well as which items they wanted more of and why—issues that surfaced from the previous data and needed further probing, but in a more private manner. Moreover, many themes of inclusion deemed expressively important in their daily lives, such as participation, respect, and positive teacher-student relations, were revealed through free writing sessions.

Memos.

As explained by Arora (2012), memoing is a practice that helps the researcher clarify thoughts about the research. Originally used in grounded theory approaches, memos can help document the researcher's journey by creating a space where the researcher can reflect on his or her reactions following a certain methodological endeavour, expose personal thoughts and feelings, toil with their biases, and reflect on prior or present experience (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008). Memoing is also an activity that can allow the researcher to build a relationship with his or her data (Arora, 2012). It can contribute to the transparency factor in a researcher's journey and build the trustworthiness of the collected data (Arora, 2012).

Field proceedings.

While in the field, I kept a reflective journal. This was not a method I conducted “with” participants, but rather as a practice of reflexivity throughout my research process, rather singularly during the writing phase. In this journal, I recorded *reflective memos* regularly. As I wrote memos, usually after each methodological endeavour or classroom observation, they became a rich source of information, especially if I needed to double check and cross-reference information or emerging themes, refresh my memory on how I felt about certain situations, understand my reactions to quotes and words participants had stated, or question certain incidents and what they meant for my research. For example, in one memo below, I recorded my reactions to the PO officer's actions one day in school “M”. Later, I used this same memo to help me reflect in depth on my own bias in my research process.

Table 5.6. Reflective Memo Sample

<p><i>Today I arrived at school “M” at 10:10 am. I was surprised to see the Program Officer (PO) present. Usually she is not but I had informed her I would be coming in today. <u>Wonder if that had anything to do it?</u> Anyhow, as I was entering today she told me I should wait until after the school hours to conduct my work with the children. Usually I did not have to but today I believe she had some other plans. So I just sat down at the corner and started noting down what I saw.</i></p> <p><i>Maybe my interpretations are biased but do I see her <u>interrupting the teacher</u> and suddenly out of nowhere testing the students on their math skills. My observation notes indicate they were finishing a lesson on Environment. <u>Why is the PO doing this?</u> Does her job entail switching gears in the classroom whenever she wants to? The children swiftly switch gears to the math problems as required by the PO. They do not seem to have any say. I would not expect it in this type of a situation either, as it would become one of <u>disobedience</u> if they were to interrupt her. But this I know, is not the only time I observe that adults have <u>most</u> power in BRAC’s “child centered schoolhouses.”</i></p> <p><i>Once done with the children, she starts <u>admonishing</u> the teacher that she cannot keep her class in control and does not always maintain protocol as she is supposed to. She is not impressed that several (5/6) did not understand the multiplications table properly. Then she looks at me, and smiles nervously. <u>I have to question what her purpose was today.</u> Who is she trying to please and why so much bossiness is being displayed today?</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(Memo Entry, recorded on January 13, 2014)</i></p>
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In writing several memos like the one above, I was able to question certain situations, which later on informed my conversations with gatekeepers in the field. This helped me grasp a fuller, richer, and more wholesome picture of the BRAC schools, whilst always being aware of my own role and bias in this research process.

The Resulting Data

At the end of my collection phase, I had all the following data, as listed in the table below. This data was analysed in two phenomenological steps alongside some numerical analysis, which is explained in the next section.

Table 5.7. Resulting Data

W= WRITTEN DATA	S= SPOKEN DATA	V=VISUAL DATA
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<u>DATA TYPE</u>	School “U” /out of 36 students	School “M” /out of 30 students	TRANSCRIPTIONS/RESULT ING DATA
V: Photographs	36	29	V 65 photos
W and S: Reflections on Photographs Why did I take this photo and why do I like it?	36 Written Reflections (Each reflection was between four to six sentences long)	29 Written Reflections (Each reflection was between four to six sentences long)	S Transcriptions 32 pages
W: List of dislikes at school with reasons	34 Written Free Associative Writing	28 Written Free Associative Writing	S Transcriptions 62 pages
W: My best friend	34 Written Free Associative Writing	26 Written Free Associative Writing	W Children’s writings in Bengali were translated verbatim into English (as required). 60 pages (1 page per child) of verbatim translations from Bengali to English
W: If we had “X” at school it would have been ideal	33 Written Free Associative Writing	--	W Children’s writings in Bengali were translated verbatim into English (as required). 33 pages (1 page per child) of verbatim translations from Bengali to English
W: Poems and paragraphs about school	36 Written Free Associative Writing	--	W Children’s writings in Bengali were translated verbatim into English (as required). 36 pages (1 page per child) of verbatim translations from

			Bengali to English
W: Questionnaire	34 completed	27 completed	W Graph and Table 61 Questionnaires Completed
S: Addas	34 participated on the first day 33 on second day	28 participated on the first day 29 on second day	S Transcriptions 28 pages of transcriptions from voice recordings
W: Observations/ Methods Followed with Reflective Memos	28 hours	16 hours	W 52 pages of observations 57 pages of memos
		TOTAL NUMBER OF <i>TEXTUAL DATA</i> SHEETS ANALYZED	360 Pages ³⁷

Phenomenological Data Analysis

The research questions guiding my data analysis were the following:

What do children in nominally inclusive primary schools operated by the NGO BRAC express when asked what they like and dislike about their school?

Sub-question 1. What central motifs, with regard to IE, emerge from children's pictorial, spoken, and written perspectives?

To answer these questions, phenomenological analysis was deemed most suitable because this type of analysis allows for the generation of “common or shared experiences of a phenomenon” and a “deeper understanding of the features of a phenomenon” (Butler-Kisber, p. 53). As clearly outlined in my research questions, I wanted to reach such an understanding of children's

³⁷ There were a total of 360 pages of data. Although some of these were half sheets as given to the children, they were later counted as one page. Further, when the data was compiled, there was a lot of repetitive information, concepts, and statements, which impacted the overall number of significant statements.

experiences of inclusive education at their respective schools. Therefore, the goal through the process of analysis was to uncover the essential characteristics of the children's liked and disliked experiences of inclusive education at the two schools. The characteristics of their experiences of inclusive education, as expressed through pictorial, spoken, and written perspectives, was to be better understood by reducing the field data into certain themes generated through a phenomenological analysis. However, it should be noted that although I have listed my steps below as linear transitory phases, the analysis process was actually iterative and reflective, and included various continual, recursive, and cyclical stages.

My phenomenological data analysis process had two major stages. First, I conducted a phenomenological analysis solely on the photos and photo reflections. I had 65 photos and 65 photo reflections from the two schools. Second, I conducted another, more in-depth phenomenological analysis (discussed below) on all the data produced across the two schools compiled into one unit. This compilation included the variety of data, which is outlined in Table 5.7. These included the observations, memos, children's photo reflections, and children's written and spoken (transcribed) data. This included a total of 360 pages of *textual data*. This analysis did not include the questionnaire results.

I will explain the photo-analysis steps first, before the second more in-depth analysis process. Then, I will then explain how I utilized the questionnaire and other numeric data in my research findings.

Data Set 1: Photos and photo reflections only.

1. Reading.

First, I read the entire set of the pictorial data and texts accompanying each image.³⁸ The first step involved looking very carefully at the 65 visuals and

³⁸ In terms of the order in which the data was collected, the children took the photos first. It must be reiterated that only photos of liked activities/items were taken.

accompanying reflections written by the children. Examining both side by side, I scanned the photos and then focused on extracting children's words and reasons for liking that particular photo. My initial reading only involved mining out "liked" aspects of the picture. It did not involve framing or categorizing the data. I first highlighted those statements directly on the student's files and then typed them up in a single word document. Therefore, I made one Word document listing all the assembled statements from all 65 photos.

During this reading process, I identified issues as well as photos that were repeated. When I identified that some photos were repeated, I still kept the written reflection of each photo, because each child's reasoning could have been different and had to be considered in the data. For example, at School "U," one image was particularly popular. It was called, "The flute has started to play." Two children at differing times captured that same image from their text but gave varying reasons for liking the photo. Below I have given that photo and the highlighted text of each child.

Table 5.8. Reading and Highlighting Photos to Identify Reasons for Liking School

I have taken a picture of the lesson “The flute has started to play”
My reasons are:

1. All the children **are going together with the flag.**
2. All the children have raised **their hands together.**
3. They **are all friends marching together happily** for our country.
4. It reminds me of 16 December
5. It also reminds me of when **we** sing or dance or **do things together** (in a group) and work together (for memorizing).

(Karim, 11, School “U”)

1. I have taken a picture of “The flute has started to play”
My reasons are:

1. As the poem [next to the image] says, all the children in the picture are reciting the national anthem **together and I really like that. Makes me happy.**
2. I wish we could do that on December 16 outside our school.
3. **In school we learn songs like this together and march our feet when we dance together. As a group we can do it with strength and courage, its better?, *ekshathe amra pari* (together we can), *shahosh pai, bhalo hoi.***

(Aisha, 12, School “U”)



2. Significant statements from participants.

Once all 65 photos were reviewed and statements from the photos were compiled into one Word document (with highlighting), I started grouping statements and pictures based on their similarities and writing summary statements. For example, using the example of Aisha and Karim’s photos of the same image, the groupings of their text came together as shown in Table 5.9

below, in which I compiled students speaking about similar issues in the same photo focusing on key words (e.g. together, happily). In another set of pictures—where the pictures/items were dissimilar, but the use of that item, the words used to describe the item, and reasons for liking it were similar (e.g. organized, pretty, tidy)—I grouped those under one theme and extracted significant statement summaries from it. This is shown in Table 5.10.

Table 5.9. Generating Significant Statement Summaries from Grouping Statements of “Liked” Photos

Statements assembled from the photo “The flute has started to play”

- [Children] are going together with the flag
- Their hands together
- All friends marching together happily
- [We] do things together
- Together and I really like that. Makes me happy.
- We learn songs like this together
- As a group we can do it with strength and courage
- Together we can
- My school...we too can be like these boys and girls big and small together.

Significant Statement Summary: children like doing activities together and enjoy seeing examples of togetherness visually.

Table 5.10. Grouping Similar Photos and Generating Significant Statement Summaries



Two children photographed this item

I have taken a picture of "our school's burlap rug." My reasons are:

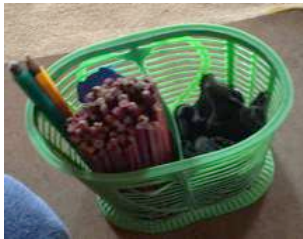
1. The burlap **keeps us warm** on winter [mornings] like today.
2. **I love the flowers on it.** So beautiful!
3. When we first came to school, *Apa* made it. She did the *alpona* (designs) with paint. **Some of us helped.** While others watched.
4. **We all sit on it. Apa does. PO sir does. It is always there for us all in this school. We play games on it and have small group sitting on it.**
5. **I like the way it feels [on my feet] when I step on it from outside.**

(Mitali, 10, School "M")

I have taken a picture of "our school's burlap rug." My reasons are:

1. We **all sit on it and play on it.**
2. **Every school has one but our one is special.** It is more beautiful.
3. It **keeps our school clean.**
4. We **take care of it together.**

(Sheuli, 10, School "M")



One child photographed this item

I have taken a picture of the "pencil basket" at our school. My reasons are:

1. I like that **everyone has one.**
2. Keeps **the items at our school tidier.**
3. It makes **our school pretty.**
4. At the end of the day, **we help each other organize our pencils and counting sticks in the basket.** I help Abir who often forgets to put his pencils back.

(Ricky, 10, School "M")



Two children photographed this item

I have taken a photograph of the blackboard. My reasons are:

1. I like the blackboard because **the blackboard is a place where we learn.**
2. *Apa* writes on it and **we copy it from the blackboard.**
3. **I like standing in front of the class** and writing on the blackboard to help my friends. **I am team leader. I like helping.**

(Aryan, 11, School "M")

I have taken a photograph of the blackboard. My reasons are:

1. **The wall in the front of the room is my favourite place at the school.**
2. The blackboard hangs there. **The teacher stands there.**
3. **Without blackboard I can't learn. Teacher cannot write math problems.**

(Zubin 10, School "M")

Statements assembled from the Burlap photo	Statements assembled from the pencil basket photo	Statements assembled from the blackboard photo
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Keeps us warm -I love the flowers on it. -Some of us helped. -We all sit on it. <i>Apa</i> does. <i>PO</i> sir does. It is always there for us all in this school. -We play games on it and have small group sitting on it. -I like the way it feels [on my feet] when I step on it. -All sit on it and play on it. -Every school has one but our one is special. -It keeps our school clean. -Take care of it together. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Everyone has one. -Keeps the items at our school tidier. -It makes our school pretty. -We help each other organize our pencils and counting sticks in the basket. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The blackboard is a place where we learn. -We copy it from the blackboard. -I like standing in front of the class -I am team leader. I like helping. -The wall in the front of the room is my favourite place at the school. -The teacher stands there. -Without blackboard I can't learn. Teacher cannot write math problems.
<p><u>Significant Statement Summary:</u> children enjoy the items in their school and appreciate the opportunity to use the items together. They use the items for academic, beautification, and organizational purposes. The items give them opportunities for engagement, which they appreciate.</p>		

After this close reading and grouping exercise of the 65 photos from both schools, there were a total number of *12 significant statement summaries*, which were then translated into *12 preliminary inclusive meanings*. The inclusive meanings are given in Table 5.11 below, followed by a description of how they were generated and how I have come to understand them in my work.

Table 5.11. List of Inclusive Meanings from Photos

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The children understand the importance of taking care of that which they belong to, including their home and school. 2. The children value being treated equally and appreciate that the teacher and program officers sit with them on the floor and that there are no tables and chairs at the school. 3. Children like that their lessons develop an understanding of similarities and differences between people. 4. The children feel that the teacher is their confidante and protector. 5. The children value creative thinking. 6. Children respect each other and want to belong together as a team. They feel good that they

- have efficient and helpful team leaders.
7. At school, children like working together because it makes them happy
 8. The children feel that their learning material supports their learning and beautifies their school
 9. Children value and have respect for the integrity of planet earth. One of their most favourite lessons in the books is on the “village” where everything is green.
 10. Children understand the importance of receiving study support from home and want to receive more.
 11. The children do not appreciate peers who bully or make noise in the classroom.
 12. The children feel that bad behaviour such as lying and quarrelling is not favourable to their school community.

3. Formulated meanings from like photos.

The *12 inclusive meanings* were identified from the significant statement summaries. They were generated from distilling the data against my previous experience of having worked at BRAC schools, and drawing comparisons between what the children were saying and whether those reflected characteristics of what defines inclusion in the inclusive literature. However, I had to constantly move back and forth from the original data to the themes that emerged in order to check that they were really grounded in the data. Hence, herein I defined the *inclusive meanings* as statements of experiences of inclusion as expressed by the children in *terms* related to inclusion, such as equal treatment, happiness derived from work, feeling valued, etc. Through this procedure, however, I had some points that contradicted each other, while others did not seem related to inclusive education very closely. To confirm what I was finding, essentially, at this point I had to note the discrepancies and rely on my participants. Therefore, after I formulated the *12 inclusive meanings*, I attempted to write an exhaustive description of the phenomenon in conversation with the children. This was one of the most difficult steps for me.

4. Exhaustive description based on photos.

Rieman (1998) explains that this exhaustive description is “as unequivocal a statement of the essential structure of the phenomenon as possible” (p. 280).

Writing it was a difficult step for me, so I basically tried to re-write it in consultation with the children in simple, present tense language. Before the *adda* sessions began, I first read out the fourteen overall meanings I had derived from their pictures to confirm whether those statements accurately reflected their experiences at the school. Some of the statements were reflected across both schools, while some were not. However, the goal here was not to decipher the difference between the schools, but get an overall feel of whether the pictures the children had taken accurately reflected their thoughts. Therefore, together as a group, the children and I came to a greater understanding of children's experiences of likes (or not³⁹).

For the children school is a vast place. They are proud of their school because it gives them an opportunity to learn. They love their books, lessons, and teaching supplies. They like the lessons in their books that outline how they should behave, treat one other, and how they should value the environment. They feel supported and loved by their parents, teachers, peers, and administrative staff, and appreciate seeing visual signifiers of that support around them. Sometimes they want to be able to engage more in class discussions and have a greater chance to be creative. They dislike quarrelling with each other.

Data Set 2: Analysis of Overall Data.

1. Reading

After completing the analysis on the photos, I re-grouped the typed Word file with compilations of the photo-reflections with the rest of the remaining textual data. Here, as previously mentioned, I had 360 pages of data, including the photo-reflections, my observations, memos, children's free associative writings, poems, and *adda* transcriptions. Please refer to Table 5.7 to see more details on each type of data collected. Again I did a very close reading and re-reading of all

³⁹ Although the pictures captured likes, some dislikes were captured when children referred to photos, such as children quarreling or lying, pointing out that they liked this photo because it taught them lessons of things they should not be doing.

the data. At this point, I made two copies of the textual data set. In one of the sets, I kept the numeric indicators, which signified what type of data was compiled and how I had collected it. This was kept in order to have access to the original, which I could refer to for examples later on. In the second copy, I removed those indicators, thus keeping the text intact. I looked at that second compilation with a fresh set of eyes one week later, as the goal was to phenomenologically analyse the mass of compiled data.

During the overall process of analysis, the ideas formed through the photographic analysis impacted me. However, since this conception was thoroughly grounded in the data, the notions I had were closely related to what the children were experiencing. In addition, what the children shared in terms of the ideas on their experiences at school altered in only a limited manner, as in most cases the same issues surfaced and re-surfaced regardless of the method with which that information was collected.

2. Significant statements from participants.

From the 360 pages of data, 472 significant statements were extracted. My observations and memos only served as supplementary data at this point, as I realized that much of the observation notes were laced with my positioning and opinion on certain issues. While those were important in the overall understanding of the data, they were not as crucial in generating significant statements, which I wanted to be generated by the voices of the children. Also, I wanted to stay grounded in the data, which was grounded in what the children said. The grounded data was by this time, also signifying the similarities between what the children were stating regardless of whether that was through writing, photos, or speech.

Table 5.12 includes examples of *100 significant statements* with their formulated meanings. The first twenty are given here while the remaining eighty are attached in Appendix VIII. Due to the large mass of data collected, I have only provided selected examples of the significant statements, to show the methodology involved in the analysis process, which entailed going from significant statements to the formulated meanings of those statements. Each

formulated meaning is closely related to what the children expressed through the various data collection methods.

Table 5.12. Significant Statements and Meanings

<i>Selected examples of significant statements from children's perspectives on Inclusive education at their BRAC schoolhouse and Related Formulated Meanings</i>		
Significant Statements from Schools U and M on children's experiences of what they like or dislike in their BRAC school	Formulated Meaning (What could this mean for IE?)	CLUSTERS/ KEY WORDS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I have taken a picture of "Talking about my friend and me" from our English book. I love this photo because the two girls are going to school together. 2. The boys are around playing but the girls are going to school. 3. Just like the girls in the photo, my best friend at school is Nururnahar. We like playing and studying together. This photo reminds me of friendship and study. 4. When I come to school, I like my school because I can see the happy faces of my friends and teacher here. My friend is Rehana. We come to school together, play together, and study together. I can play with my friends if I come to school. 5. Aside from studying, I can dance and sing too. These are the things I look forward to at school. The person who helps me is my friend. 	<p>The children see <i>friendship</i> as one of the key factors that draws them to their school. They feel that <i>belonging</i> with a friend helps them study even better. Helpers are seen as friends.</p>	<p>FRIENDSHIP COLLABORATION BELONGINGNESS</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. When I am asked to stand in front of new people—as we have visitors all the time—and present a song or a dance, it helps if our team leader is 	<p>Children <i>like collaborating</i> on activities together and feel stronger in-group</p>	<p>FRIENDSHIP COLLABORATION BELONGINGNESS COURAGE</p>

<p>there in front.</p> <p>7. “<i>Asholei</i>” (Really), even if she is not, it helps that we do it together.</p> <p>8. Alone I would feel too shy and afraid to do it</p> <p>9. Together we do not feel shy.</p>	<p>activities.</p>	
<p>10. I do well in [my] studies in a big group.</p> <p>11. I like big groups.</p> <p>12. We work together in big group.</p> <p>13. My favourite things are a big group and sitting in a circle together.</p> <p>14. I like sitting in small groups because it helps me concentrate.</p> <p>15. I like mingling with my friends in small groups and answering questions.</p> <p>16. Sometimes we quarrel in small groups.</p> <p>17. It is interesting to sit together and learn.</p>	<p>Group size is a personal preference but children enjoy both group sizes given the task at hand. They like the idea of doing things together, regardless of the size or make-up of the group.</p>	<p>COLLABORATION</p> <p>COOPERATION</p> <p>NON-COOPERATION</p>
<p>18. Only after coming to school did I learn that it is our birthright to be here.</p> <p>19. You know, <i>Apa</i>, my parents did not go to school, so for me coming to school is a very, very special opportunity. It is only because of BRAC. Otherwise, my parents could not afford it.</p> <p>20. I love being at school. Before I did not have a place to go to meet so many girls and boys to make friends. School is special. A place my mother did not have. My older brother did not either. “<i>Khoob bhalo lage school’-e ashte</i>,” I really like coming to school.</p>	<p>The <i>opportunity</i> to study at school is considered a privilege and right by the children. They appreciate the opportunity they now have, which their family members previously did not.</p>	<p>STUDYING</p> <p>OPPORTUNITY</p> <p>PRIDE</p> <p>BELONGINGNESS</p>

3. Formulated meanings and thematic clusters from overall data.

As formulated meanings started to emerge, I began to see certain similarities between them and therefore needed to group the recurring of formulated meanings in order to make the data more manageable. As typically done in phenomenological analysis, and following my previous steps and examples from scholars such as Anderson and Spencer (2002), I arranged the formulated meanings into clusters. Then, I referred to the work of Anderson and Spencer (2002), to guide me through the process of clustering similar formulated meanings into themes. A preliminary indication of that step can be seen in column three of the table above. It is clear that as I extracted meaning from the formulated statements I started focusing on key emerging words or ideas from those meanings (i.e. COLLABORATION, OWNERSHIP, HELPFULNESS, QUARRELLING). Using those words as a key—and then in reflecting back on the inclusive meanings within the formulated statements and previously analyzed pictures—I expanded those words by writing a summary statement explaining the phenomenon of that word as explained by the children in the context of the schools. A total of 14 “theme statements” emerged.

In addition, as my goal was to decipher the inclusive experience through children’s likes and dislikes, after the clusters were thematically arranged, I divided the themes-statements according to children’s likes versus dislikes. This was important because in my original research questions I was concerned about both children’s “likes” and “dislikes.” I acknowledge that if I had approached the data differently, without the agenda of identifying “likes” and “dislikes,” the themes produced could have most probably varied. In the Table below, I have listed the theme-statements. A total of nine “like” theme-statements and a total of five “dislike” theme-statements emerged from the data. Those are given in Table 5.13.

Table 5.13. Generated Theme-Statements

9 LIKE THEMES	5 DISLIKE THEMES
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Children regard togetherness, friendship, and harmony between peers as key to learning and belonging at school. 2. Encouragement of creativity and play are important to the children. 3. Children feel a sense of pride and ownership towards the school and school materials. 4. For children, items at school support learning and also provide a sense of belonging. 5. Children value and respect the environment in and around their school. 6. Children believe that differences between each other are not hindrances, but rather advantageous. School is a place where disabled and vulnerable children feel safe and welcome. 7. For children, their relationship to their teacher is vital. 8. Children like to receive and give study support. 9. For children support from home is essential to their success at school, and they value relationship building between their parents and teachers. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sudden interruptions from outsiders are not appreciated. 2. Scarcity of items is a problem for children. 3. Children view quarrelling, physical fighting, and lying as major hindrances to their development at school. 4. Noisiness, peer absenteeism, disorganization, and distractive play (<i>hoi choi</i>) are hindrances to learning. It keeps children from concentrating. This is a problem in both large and small groups 5. Voicing wishes are not always easy at school and sometimes children feel that partiality is exercised by the teacher.

Subsequently, I collapsed the nine “like” theme-statements and the five “dislike” theme-statements under two major concentration areas: *physical* and *relational* aspects at the two schools. I derived the physical and relational aspects through a collaborative method, after consulting two colleagues. Both being doctors of education, they were not provided any other information except the theme statements and were asked to group them according to large concentration areas. Both colleagues, without being influenced by the other, suggested concentration areas out of which, the two elements of “physical: space and place of school” and “relational: interactions with teachers, peers, the self, and home” emerged as a commonality. At the same time, I categorized the data and arrived at similar conclusions, however, identifying one more category, which was “personal/emotional experiences of school.” In discussion with my colleagues afterwards on the concentration areas, it became apparent that the third area

shared similarities with the other two and essentially only two concentration areas stood out most strongly. At this point, I also renamed and regrouped the *collapsed themes* into fewer manageable, conceptual *motifs* as shown in Table 6.1 in the next Chapter. The conceptual motifs are simply shortened phrases of the theme-statements, each generated by keeping in mind the idea of reflections on the “perspectives,” of the children. For example, one motif is “Capitalizing on diversity”; drawing from the theme-statement: “Children believe that differences from each other are not hindrances, but rather advantageous. School is a place where disabled and vulnerable children feel safe and welcome.”

4. Exhaustive description of phenomenon of IE: children’s view.

Once the nine like and five dislike themes were generated, the final step in the phenomenological analysis remained, which was to formulate an exhaustive description of the phenomena in the compiled data in relation to the research questions. In this formulation, I did not refer to the children again. What helps mitigate this point is related to everything I did in the field with the children, including the various forms of data and regular checking that went on. Further, as one of the goals of generating the description is to take the understanding of the phenomena to a more conceptual level, having generated the description was sufficient. The exhaustive description is provided below, but each of the conceptual motifs is discussed in detail in the following chapter. For example, I divulge in more detail what the children expressed about the motif of capitalizing on diversity and what that exactly means for them at their schools. All findings are supported by relevant photos, quotes, and children’s written or spoken words.

For the children their BRAC school is a vast place. The school is a place they value. They feel a sense of ownership towards their school. At school, they learn to share their materials and physical space. At school they learn about teamwork. They feel supported and loved by their teachers, peers, and administrative staff and appreciate seeing visual signifiers of that support around them. They understand that at school there is a diverse range of students and that not

everyone has the same religion or ability. Regardless, everyone can potentially be a friend. Sometimes, however, children want to have more opportunities to speak about their thoughts, share their creativity, and enjoy more free/play time. They want the adults to recognize this need. They want to avoid being ignored and distracted at school by both adults and peers alike.

Numerical Data Analysis

In addition to the data that lent itself to phenomenological analysis, I also had data from the questionnaire that lent itself to numeric analysis. The full questionnaire along with results has been given in Appendix IX.

I wanted numeric data to support my findings for two specific reasons. First, I wanted to know how many and how children responded to the themes extracted, provided that they were directly asked about those themes after having generated it themselves. For example, if a sense of belongingness was important at school, as indicated in the data, I wanted some numbers to support that claim. The goal here was not to see how many children were in agreement, as it is clear that a certain theme was generated due to its importance to the children, but rather to see how the numeric data within each motif would align itself to that respective issue. In order to do that, I had to generate a questionnaire that was true to the grounded data. Hence, the questionnaire questions were produced, as previously mentioned by, 1) integrating the 12 inclusive meanings, 2) looking at the issues deemed important for inclusive schools in the *Index for Inclusion*, and 3) my previous work experience with BRAC.

At first, I only had the themes generated from the photos to go by. However, after taking a much closer look, I saw that the 12 *inclusive meanings* revealed that peer relationships, belongingness, and the environment were important to the children. These were issues that were discussed in the *Index*; distilling the two together helped me shape relevant, direct questions for the children.

For example, taking the themes of belongingness and collaboration as an example, which sometimes overlapped, I asked the same specific questions to the children. A few examples are given below in Table F.

Table 5.14. Sample Questions

BEL: I am happy at school.
BEL: When I first joined the school I was helped to feel happy.
BEL/COLL: I have good friends at school.
COLL: Boys and girls get on well together.
COLL: Children often help each other in lessons.

There were questions in the *Index* that ended up being irrelevant. However, since those “fell” out as a result of not being a priority to the children, I did not use them; I did add newer, more relevant ones. In the findings chapter, some of the numeric results have been used to support the significance of some of the themes.

In addition to the numerical data from the questionnaire, there were some data that resulted from counting certain significant statements that came up as I compiled the data for the themes. These included, for example, the number of times certain school items were chosen as their favourite, the number of times children mentioned liking their teacher, stated that they belonged at school, helped one another in their homework, disliked quarrelling, or losing their opportunity to speak. These significant statements were tallied as the themes emerged, and some of those findings have been given in the next chapter to support the themes. Outlying topics did emerge, but again those have not been mentioned in the findings chapter as they were not a part of the most significant themes. Further reflections on “how” the data was analyzed, keeping my personal and reflexive position in place, is discussed in the findings chapter.

Trustworthiness and My Inquiry

One of the foremost debated issues in qualitative inquiry is that of what can be considered “good, valid, and/or trustworthy research” (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2002, p. 2). Scholars across research fields have presented measures to gauge what can be deemed valid or trustworthy in their texts, albeit while keeping in mind some fundamental issues that make this measuring very difficult. The difficulty in understanding trustworthiness in qualitative research stems from the fact that measurements of quality and rigor, as practiced in the hard sciences, cannot easily be transferred nor addressed in the same manner in qualitative naturalistic work. This is because the issues at stake in quantitative research differ fundamentally from those in qualitative research. The former tries to directly perceive and measure the world while the latter tries to offer a more or less subjective interpretation of it (Rolfe, 2006).

Positivists like to argue that if the “measures of quality” (i.e. validity, generalizability, reliability) cannot be established, then the rigor of naturalistic studies remains questionable. As a response to such positivistic criticism, forerunners of the naturalistic paradigm have proposed parameters of criteria using different terminology and different scales of measurement to establish trustworthiness in qualitative research. These include facets such as *credibility*, *dependability*, *confirmability* and *transferability* (Koch, 2006). In qualitative research the fact is, therefore, that issues of validity are not linked to “truth” or “value” as they are for positivists (Rolfe, 2006). Rather, “trustworthiness” in qualitative research is a matter of persuasion, whereby the scientist is viewed as having made his or her practices visible and auditable, leaving behind a “decision trail.” As explained by Rolfe (2006), “[This clearly] represents a fundamental shift in the responsibility for the judgments of quality from the producer to the consumer of the research. A study is trustworthy if and only if the research report judges it to be so” (p. 305). In the following sections, I have presented some of the most prevalent understandings and debates of trustworthiness from the qualitative research literature and how those were adhered to in my work.

Credibility, dependability and confirmability.

In a qualitative study, credibility is the derivative of internal validity. Internal validity is the measure of whether the study lives up to the test of what it actually intends to find out (Shenton, 2004). In the qualitative realm, this translates to the question, “How congruent are the findings with reality?” (Merriam, 1998, as cited in Shenton, 2004, p. 64). According to Guba (1981), credibility is directly related to the aspect of truth-value because it increases confidence in the truth of the findings. However, some scholars in the field (Maxwell, 1992) have contended that the realist notion of defining a “truth” to illustrate validity/credibility in qualitative research is difficult. Instead, we can measure the credibility of a study based on its “descriptive validity” (factual accuracy), “interpretive validity” (the degree of insider/participation perspective or reflections), and/or “theoretical validity” (the extent the interpretations function as an account of the phenomenon) (Maxwell, 1992, as cited in Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 14). Some methodologies of ensuring that a study is considered valid on these three grounds include the adoption of well established research methods, transparency in the research process, clear evidence of the length of time spent in the field, multiple forms of field texts, member checks, and the rigorous testing of data as they are derived from the various members in the field.

Dependability—the equivalent of reliability in a quantitative study—is established by ensuring that if the study were replicated with same or similar methods and respondents, in the same or similar context(s), the findings would be replicated (Erlandson et al., 1993). In a qualitative inquiry, Guba (1981) explains, dependability is about making allowances for apparent instabilities arising from the researcher’s belief in multiple realities and his or her dependence on the human instrument. The concept of confirmability is the qualitative investigator’s rough equivalent to objectivity. Here the researcher can practice triangulation or gathering data from diverse perspectives utilizing a variety of methods. Some authors have contended that a goal of confirmability through triangulation is to ensure “as far as possible that the work’s findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher” (Shenton, 2004, p. 72).

In qualitative research, as contended by Butler-Kisber (2010), reliability and objectivity are not considered possible or desirable. This is because both undermine the very tenets of qualitative inquiry. Butler-Kisber (2010) suggests the practices of transparency and reflexivity as key components of qualitative research. Transparency allows for the clear illustration of the research process, pitfalls, and tensions, persuading the reader whether to trust the rigor displayed in a study. This, coupled with reflexivity—which is the practice of displaying the researcher’s identity, reasons, assumptions, beliefs, biases, and even emotions as an integral part of the research process—can make a qualitative inquiry more trustworthy.

My goal, from the outset of the study, was to be as descriptive and transparent as possible with my research procedures and methodologies. This started first with ensuring that after entering the field, I took detailed and descriptive observation notes. In my observation notes, not only did I detail what was happening in the classroom but also my reactions, feelings, and biases relative to the scene that was unfolding. This allowed me to be transparent with my thoughts, as they took shape in my mind. At the same time, this allowed me to not only write down in detail what I saw, but internalize and reflect on what these occurrences meant for me and the inquiry at hand. Influenced by my research goals and worldviews, I tried to stay true to and aware of the reasons behind giving priority to certain aspects of scenes over others. Therefore, my efforts to ensure credibility have entailed me “showing” rather than “telling” how the research procedures unfolded in the field. In this way, I maintained descriptive validity in my study.

In order to maintain theoretical and interpretive validity—other integral aspects of credibility—I depended on testing the data rigorously by conducting member checks and gathering multiple forms of field texts. Although not a part of the main data set, informal interviews with the teachers at both schools “U” and “M” were conducted when I was in the field. This “member checking” format allowed me to validate certain issues, especially those that are part of the social fabric at the schools, which I could not infer directly. For example, the answer to the question, “Were the children welcomed when they first came to this school?”

had to be discovered through discussion and triangulated through “member checks.” This question, in various formats, was asked to the children and their teachers, who all agreed that there was a “preparation phase” during which all school members were oriented and welcomed. Another example that illustrates how I maintained interpretive validity, involves the photovoice, free associative writing, and *adda* methodologies. When a child at school “U” took a picture of a lesson that explored the idea of a young girl with disability accessing school as her favourite lesson, I instantly wanted to explore that thought further. After she took the photograph and chose it as her favourite picture, I asked her to explain her reasons behind her choice. She was a bit shy to speak about it at first, but then when I asked her to write it down she explained how Tamoni (a pupil with a disability) was one of her closest friends at school. Then during the *addas*, she further explained that Tamoni helps her in her Bengali lessons and her disability has nothing to do with her “ability to complete her tasks well.” She explained that maybe Tamoni could be that girl in the photo, and one of her most favourite aspects about her BRAC school is that it is open to enrolling “everyone.” The essence of her response was not reached via a single methodology. Rather, I had to depend on several field texts in order to access what that child really meant in her choice of having taken that specific photo. This process of conducting methodologies in tandem or as follow-ups to each other strengthened my data immensely (Miller & Fredericks, 1994).

Transferability.

Another aspect of building trustworthiness in qualitative research relates to the notion of generalizability. In positivistic works, the concern of generalizability (which is known as external validity) lies in demonstrating the applicability of results and findings to a wider population from the sample studied (Shenton, 2004). The qualitative investigator’s equivalent concept, as coined by Guba (1981), is known as “transferability.” According to Guba (1981), what arises from naturalistic studies are “thick descriptions,” and whether the findings of one study are transferable to another context depends on the thick descriptions of both the sending and receiving contexts (Erlandson et al., 1993).

However, as explained by Butler-Kisber (2010), the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research, alongside the prevalence of “thick descriptions” from a small number of participants and coupled with the varied, emergent, and contextualized processes and outcomes “rule out any willingness or attempt to claim that one situation can be [transferred] to another” (p.15). Further, as explained by Donmoyer (1990), thinking about generalizability in such a manner for qualitative researchers presents two fundamental challenges - complexity and paradigm. Citing Donmoyer (1990) and Cronbach (1982), Butler-Kisber (2010) states that the challenge of complexity lies in the fact that human actions are constructed, not caused, and Newton-like generalizations cannot be expected when it comes to describing human action. Hence, it no longer makes sense to think of generalizability as synonymous with the use of large samples that accurately represent the population (Donmoyer, 1990).

The implication of this paradigmatic challenge suggests that it may be useful to think of generalizability more in psychological terms than mathematical ones, and through qualitative research expand and enrich the repertoire of available social constructions of reality (Donmoyer, 1990). To do so, Donmoyer (2008) finds the utilization of schema theory helpful. He suggests reading accounts of qualitative research as sessions of enriched cognitive schema, loaded with tacit and experiential knowledge and full of interactive sessions of meaning-making. He believes this type of reading creates a kind of “intellectual generalization” (p. 372) even when settings are different. Other authors, such as Conle (1996), have suggested that what should actually be most important can be coined as the idea of “particularizability” or how particular aspects of the “other(s) situations” resonate with the reader. With this the reader is then able to find both confirmation from and/or new understandings of experiences and phenomena from in their own particular contexts or situations.

I struggled with the idea of generalizability in my study, as although similar in their looks and operations, the two schools “U” and “M” were different enough that data gathered from one could not easily be generalized for the other. This makes it difficult to establish—even after spending months in the field, observing extensively, interacting fully, and gathering plenty of thick descriptions of each

school—as to whether my findings would be generalizable for all BRAC schools across the South Asian continent. I do not think this would even be desirable. Hence, the findings of this study may only be transferable vis-à-vis the implications they have in tailoring the provision of education to better fit the needs of young children. My goal for building trustworthiness, like that of most qualitative researchers, has therefore been to give thick descriptions of each school in which the reader can find moments of resonance and applicability. All the data gathered, analysed and then presented has been done in an attempt to provide “thick descriptions” from the field. Children’s words are moments, captured in time, loaded with tacit and experiential knowledge, comprehensible in multiple ways. They are accounts that provide a glimpse into the field as events actually occurred with minimal filtering of my part. They are moments of interaction and dialogue that reveal people’s attitudes, visual descriptions of the setting, and nuances of moments and fragments of certain realities embedded in the fabric of that social world.

The second aspect of my study that establishes trustworthiness through the notion of “thick descriptions” can be located in my treatment of this chapter as a whole. Throughout the chapter, my goal was to create an open dialogue between my positioning and methodological decision-making processes. I did this in order to provide thick descriptions of my methodological movements so that the reader could again resonate with particular aspects of my detailed progression in order to confirm, find meaning, and trust in my journey.

Ethical Considerations

I received ethics approval for my inquiry from McGill’s research board in April 2013. It was an arduous process since I was working with young people and generally due to the fact that in qualitative work, ethics is “not something the researcher should pay lip service to, but is of the utmost importance” (Greig & Taylor, 1999, p.153). Children’s vulnerability and their inability to protect themselves as a result of their place in society makes ethical considerations even more important when doing research with them. I made several ethical considerations in my study, as outlined below. However, one essential point to

mention, before discussing any of those is the aspect of context, and how it impacts ethical decisions and understandings in any given study. For my inquiry, which was conducted in a Southern context, this consideration is especially important.

A note on context.

I started this chapter with a discussion on context. As previously mentioned, context is the culturally and physically definitive boundary that impacts any given research. Depending on the context of the study, the results or findings of research projects vary, and so do the existing relationships and ethical dimensions of investigator and participant. The researcher must bear in mind that the meaning of privacy, confidentiality, and protection change extensively over national, cultural, and physical borders— meaning that not necessarily exportable. Hence, it is essential that researchers be aware of the growing movement in ethics towards the “give and take of research relationships on the ground, rather than in abstract principles” (Riessman, 2005, p. 473). This movement advocates against ethical universalism or the application of “universal” moral principles constructed in one context and exporting them, without modifications, to another.

Most of the literature on ethical measures in research and especially those on child protection, such as with privacy and confidentiality, are Northern based, and although these are salient points to keep in mind whilst doing research in a Southern nation like Bangladesh, issues that may be more culturally appropriate should also be considered. The key in every research interaction may be to protect the participant, especially if that participant is a child. However, a researcher cannot impose Northern morals of confidentiality, privacy, and protection on contexts where those issues are irrelevant or misunderstood in the “pledge” to be “ethical” in Northern terms. Rather, a reflexive, more emotive, contextual, and multifaceted approach is required.

When Riessman (2005) conducted her study of infertile Keralan (Southern India) women, she struggled with Northern concepts of confidentiality, privacy, and protection in a Southern context. While the consent form promised the

protection of identities, many of the participants hesitated to sign the form because to them it signified something “governmental” or “official” and untrustworthy. In retrospect, Riessman (2005) explains:

The act of signing a form carries meanings in post-colonial settings that are different than the protective intent embedded in western discourse. Informed consent functions, in the real world, to release the sponsoring university and funding agency from liability, and to establish firm control over the information gathered – ownership passes from participant to researcher (Lykes, 1989). Signing occasions can provide opportunities for participants to disrupt power and introduce perspectives relevant to their situations, challenging the pre-defined purpose of an investigation (p. 478).

She suggests, therefore, that it is essential to ask as researchers especially in the Southern context, “Who are we for the participants?” and “Who are they for us,” before jumping into the field with abstract guidelines. When working with children who have multiple gatekeepers and who also most likely do not have the understanding of abstract concepts such as privacy, confidentiality, and protection, a researcher needs to be especially open-minded. He or she cannot impose his or her understandings of how the world is and how knowledge is created or protected, but rather should gather those meanings from the field. Being ethical is extremely important, as the safety of our participants depends on it. Nevertheless, having knowledge of the contextual relevancies for certain ethical practices (or lack of) strengthens a research study such as this one by allowing the researcher to delve into the many contested and complex issues within the ethical realm. Below I discuss how ethics played a role in my study.

Parental consent.

As previously mentioned, I accessed the BRAC schools through the BRAC Head Office. Once accessed, I had to gain parental and child consent. The parental consent form is attached in Appendix X. When it came to parental consent, similar to the hurdles experienced by Riessman (2005), I also faced numerous challenges.

I wanted to gather all the parents together in one meeting at each school to explain my project to them and have them sign the consent forms. Although the parental consent forms were signed, organizing this at each

school proved to be a challenge. This was because both the PO and the parents felt that if BRAC's Head Office had granted me access to work with the children and I had already met the children, I did not need further permission from anyone to work with them. It seemed that when at school, the children's guardianship responsibility was transferred to BRAC. The organization served as the authority over what the children did at school and if my project was framed in understanding children's perspectives and being conducted on the school grounds during and around school hours, the parents did not necessarily have to consent to it. One mother said, "Apa you have permission from BRAC to do this research. They have this kind of authority over our children and whatever they do at school we know it is for their best. We have no objections." Further, the parents felt that if they verbally agreed to my project and showed their interest, consent was confirmed. This is because most of the parents were illiterate and had difficulty signing forms.

Children's consent and assent.

In addition to gaining consent of parents, child consent and assent were of particular interest to me. This is because the tacit assumption that adult consent is enough when it comes to doing research with children is something I wanted to avoid. The children's consent form has been attached in Appendix XI.

When gaining informed consent, no coercion or persuasion was used with the children. The children agreed freely to partake in a research project. Further, the information in the forms was presented in an appropriate format for the children to understand. As suggested by Cocks (2006), graphics and simple language were used. What made it challenging, however, was the fact that to successfully consent, I had to assume that "all" the children must have at least some level of competency. However, in a diverse group of children across two schools, competencies varied. In other words, individual children in certain groups had certain immaturities and dependencies that hindered their ability to fully consent. It is reasonable to ask for informed consent, as many studies have shown, when the children researched demonstrate sufficient understanding of appropriately presented materials. However, for children who fall outside this realm, and "live outside the mainstream perception of childhood" (Cocks, 2006, p. 254), such as disabled and refugee children, or children in care, we can adopt "assent" over consent to gauge children's agreement to partake in a project. Although the forms were signed and given, I also reverted to using assent whenever required.

Assent can be viewed as a sensitive and appropriate option for including all children in a research project on issues that affect them (Fargas Malet, McSherry, Larkin, & Robinson, 2011). Also, “It removes the reliance on the child demonstrating adult-centric attributes such as maturity, competence and completeness; rather it accepts the child’s state of being” (Cocks, 2006, p. 257). Assent is a representation of the relationship shared between the participant and the researcher, one that is built on the ongoing sensitiveness and reflexivity displayed by the researcher. It is a way to include children whose communicative methods vary from those of mainstream children to partake in research by agreeing, for example, through their body language. The job of the researcher, then, is to be able to constantly read that body language and be sensitive to children’s behaviours and responses. Cocks (2006) reiterates that assent in this manner is only effective if it is placed centrally within an ethical framework. This ethical framework must first and foremost contain the researcher’s transparency and accountability, as well as other ethical dimensions of research with children, especially the balance of power in research through rapport building.

Assent was an integral part of my research process and ethical framework. Having had previous experience with children, especially student’s at BRAC, I know that during long periods of interaction—often after signing consent forms—children’s willingness and attitudes towards participation can shift. Therefore, through my interactions, I stayed aware to children’s body language, paying particular attention to shy children, children in special circumstances, and those with learning difficulties. At school “M” for example, the teacher’s older son who was enrolled there, often showed me through his body language his disinterest in participating in many of the activities. He somehow felt that with his mother as the teacher, he did not have to fully participate, nor partake in anything that wasn’t particularly interesting to him. I did not infer the reason behind his non-interest, rather I overheard a short conversation between him and his mother. Due to his disinterest, he would lag behind and often get admonished by his mother to catch up and complete a task. I would then intervene and clarify that he did not have to participate, if that is not what he wanted to do, and in some activities such as photography he chose to complete the task, while in others such

as the free associative writing, he did not. Therefore, I had to stay attuned to his wants, though he could articulate them only through his physical and demonstrated cues. In this manner, at times he exhibited assent to not participate even after consenting to the project.

Rapport and power.

The next ethical consideration was of power and rapport. Power mediates all research production (Spyrou, 2011), but a cornerstone of qualitative research is that it offers tools necessary to lessen the power relationship that exists between the researcher and the participant. This, however, has never been an easy task, especially with children, as the inherent power relationship is between a perceived authority figure and a non-authoritarian individual (Mishna, Antle, and Regehr, 2004). Another issue related to power is the question of who gains from the research. How can the researcher ensure that the participants are not mere tools, and are also able to benefit from the project by becoming empowered in some way? In this sense, according to Morgan, Gibbs, Maxwell, & Britten (2002), the relationship needs to be re-defined, and an atmosphere needs to be created that encourages spontaneous contribution and a sense of understanding that the research is not for the researcher but also for the participants.

Therefore, during the research process I emphasized rapport, or the building of close, trusting relations (Mishna et al., 2004). Through the establishment of rapport with the children, I could access the deeper layers of their voices and construct the research process as a journey about them and their experiences. “These deeper layers are not necessarily more authentic or true [but] they do present different...more complex...[even contradictory]” (Spyrou, 2011, p. 156) thoughts that children have, which add to the rich complexity of qualitative research. I built rapport throughout the research process. Specifically, for example, after several days of observations at each school, I asked the children to let me know what they “wanted” from me since they had given me so much of their time. Most of the children had very simple wishes, such as singing or dancing for them, or bringing in a photo I had taken with them for the school; some wanted me to visit them at home, while others wanted me to have a meal

with them. In order to value the children's wants and wishes I did sing for them and brought in food that we shared together.

Sensitive topics.

As was made clear, my research goal was to identify common themes on how students feel about their school and what suggestions they have to make it a happier, more inclusive place. Hence, in my research, children were subjected to discussing some sensitive topics—belongingness, happiness, friendship, or exclusion. However, most of those issues were discussed very playfully, openly and lightly within the *adda* sessions. Only locations or structures, moments, or activities within the school, were photographed and spoken about in relation children's likes and dislikes. Hence, during the research process, no child was directly targeted nor put into a position of photographing or discussing their peers in a negative light. Students conferred on certain activities (i.e. group discussions or peer tutoring) as instances of dislike but the focus here was always directed towards the actual activity and not the individuals within it.

Privacy and confidentiality.

As this was a largely a visual inquiry being conducted at two schools, anonymity could not be guaranteed. While I was in the field, officials and gatekeepers were well informed on the location of my chosen schools. Furthermore, from the few photos I will publish, the schools might become visibly identifiable. In this case, I want to clarify to those involved and the reader that I am not trying to critique or find flaws in BRAC's existing school system. Rather, I am analysing their schools as example of "good practice of inclusion," which could help me find a path to further contextualization of inclusion in Bangladesh.

Although anonymity cannot be assured, confidentiality is guaranteed in this inquiry. Pseudonyms were used for all participants. On the rare occasion I have used a child's photo, the face has been positioned in a non-recognizable manner. Only a few of the photographs taken by the children have been presented in this dissertation.

Data protection.

Data protection has been diligently practiced in this research project. All physical instruments required to “produce” the raw data, such as protocols, cameras, film, questionnaires, voice-recorders, children’s written paragraphs, signed consent/assent forms, etc. remained with me in a locked cabinet. All “raw voice data” from the *adda* sessions was stored in a recorder in Bengali. This raw data was transferred as voice recordings into my secured password-protected laptop. The recordings were then translated and transcribed simultaneously into English and stored as Word files on the same laptop. I provided an password-protected laptop to Ms. Nahid Ansari Keya, my transcriber, which used by her in the same manner. She was briefed on how to keep the data secure and not to discuss the findings with anyone else. Some of the analyzed data, including the photos, may be used for future publications. However, as practiced in this dissertation, participants’ identities will be protected at all times.

The Issue of Voice as a Salient Methodological Struggle

As a researcher based within the framework of the “new social studies of childhood” and working in a Southern context with children, it is important for me to clarify and reflect on the issue of the “representation of voice” with regards to my research experience in Bangladesh. The representations of voice and its various understandings follow in the next paragraph. But first I would like to briefly mention that the reason I have chosen to discuss this topic in this chapter has to do with the struggles I had with it in a methodological sense. This struggle was related my efforts in other standard methodological aspects, such as ethics, trustworthiness, or sampling. This is because, while working with children, I constantly had to be concious of what James (2007, p. 262), calls the three interlocking dangers in childhood research:

- Matters of authenticity or how children need to be “given a hand” and only then can their voices “be heard.”

- The risk of lumping children together into a single homogenous group that has “one, undifferentiated voice” and no diversity or multi-vocality amongst themselves
- Not questioning the nature of children’s participation in the study, as well as the differences of power that impact how the research is conducted.

While conducting an inquiry with children, especially within the “social studies” framework, the relationship between the researcher and participant is of utmost importance. According to the seminal work by Allison James (2007), childhood researchers need to critically reflect on their role in the process of representing children’s voices in their work. She suggests that the way to do this is to “[Revisit]...in whatever cultural context, and in relation to any child, [the] relationship [that] defines who [children] are, how we as adult researchers understand them, and how they understand their own experiences.” (James, 2007, p. 270). In other words, researchers need to not only represent children’s voices, but also explore the “authenticity” of that voice by further scrutinizing the realities of the exchange that occurred between researcher and participant allowing for the “emergence of the voice” in the first place. Moreover, in childhood studies, we must be able to deconstruct the very notion of “voice” and be gauge how much autonomy, rationality, and intention the child’s speaking voice actually has (Komulainen, 2007). As previously mentioned in Chapter 3, voice, according to Komulainen (2007) is actually social and co-constructed, rather than individual, fixed, straightforward, linear or clear. Voice is definitely shaped by a multitude of factors such as our use of language and assumptions about children, the institutional contexts in which we operate and the overall ideological and discursive climates that prevail (Spyrou, 2011; Komulainen, 2007). Lastly, but importantly, as explained by Spyrou (2011) and Jackson and Mazzei (2008), it is almost impossible to grasp voice and represent its essence due to the problem of “authenticity.” This rests largely on our wrongly held assumption that it is possible to capture the authentic essence through words people speak. The best we can do as researchers is to reflect reflexively on the

power relations and contextual realities that led to the words in question to be spoken, and present them transparently. The issue of the representation of voice in my study can be illustrated best through three examples from the field. Each of these examples draws on a different aspect of the process. The first is one of gaining access, the second is related to the use of a certain method, and the third is an example in which power relations were switched. All three examples highlight the organic and constant manner in which the issue of voice permeated this study and how, at certain times, it was not possible for me to separate it from my methodological process.

Voices lost in negotiating access.

The first salient episode that impacted the representation of “voice” was the process of negotiating access. In order to access both the schools and the pupils within, as previously illustrated, I had to negotiate and re-negotiate my terms of access with the adult gatekeepers, including officials at BRAC’s head office, several program officers overseeing each school, and the classroom teacher. In total, at the two schools, I had to negotiate access with seven gatekeepers from BRAC’s side (not including the parents) in order to be in the same vicinity as the children. The parents also had to be consulted before I could conduct my research activities at the given locations. The process of gaining access through various hierarchies of adult gatekeepers impacted the “authenticity” of the children’s “voice.” As mentioned by Ahsan (2009), in her own work, this same process of negotiating access to children’s voices through multiple adult gatekeepers makes the young people vulnerable to not only feeling disempowered in their choice to be a part of the project, but also greatly filters how they voice themselves, or what information they impart to the researcher in the project. This struggle to identify the authentic voice, and whether that is even possible, can be illustrated by reflexively discussing some examples.

The adult gatekeepers, especially the classroom teacher and the PO, were usually present during a majority of my research exercises. Their relationship and views of the children in the classroom impacted the children’s words, and this occurred in slightly different ways in my first visit to both schools “U” and “M.”

On these occasions, often after the children were introduced and we spoke briefly to get acquainted with each other, the PO(s), who knew about my project would launch into a speech. This speech on both occasions, by different men, consisted of the topic of how I had arrived from “a faraway land, Canada,” “all the way” to listen to what they, the children, have to say about school. On both occasions the men mentioned how special this ought to make the children feel. At school “U,” the PO said, for example, “Do everything you can to help *Apa* out. Answer her when she asks a question.” I remember stepping in to say that no one was required to answer anything, however, he went on to explain in front of the classroom that “after all” they were Grade 3 children who must often be reminded what their purpose will be in this project, and that if they didn’t answer me why would I work with them. Then he turned to the students and said, “Won’t you all speak to *Apa*?” At that point all present children nodded in consent that they would. In the field, I could not prevent such “intrusions,” as they were all conducted out of goodwill on part of the people who granted me access in the first place. They felt they had the right to exercise their positions, which often entailed “helping” me along the way and being a median between myself and the children. Hence, while gathering my data, I had to be wary of how much authenticity, autonomy, rationality, and intention the child’s speaking voice actually had (Komulainen, 2007). How much of any of those “four aspects” can a child actually have when he or she feels compelled to speak on a topic? In a culture where obedience is highly valued, and children’s position in a community is often based upon their degree of obedience to their elders (Zerin, 2013), how much authenticity or autonomy does the looming ideology of obedience allow? If instructed by the PO, does a child really even have the autonomous power to make the decision to be a part of my project or not? In other words, Ahsan’s (2009) point is that negotiating access to children’s voice through multiple adult gatekeepers makes the young people vulnerable in significant ways that impact the very outcome of the findings of a project; I faced this reality throughout my fieldwork. Therefore, I had to continuously question how I could approach this situation to allow myself to access the children’s authentic voice, and whether my research methodology needed to be tweaked along the way. Further, I had to

continuously reflect on the relationship of the children to me and the other adults around, in order to recognize and address the imbalance of power that was shaping the nature and outcome of my research project (Christensen & James, 2008).

Quiet voices.

When I entered the field, I assumed that the design of my informal focus groups—“*addas*,” or long, informal, and unscrupulous conversations held between friends, popular with people of all classes, ages, and places including schools and colleges (Chakrabarty, 1999)—would work effectively to capture students’ “voices” in an informal and playful manner in the field. Although the methodology was largely successful in providing an effective and communal way for students to come forward, as it encouraged spontaneity and “group-force” (Sawyer, 2006; Morgan et. al, 2002), on the flipside lay some disadvantages: 1) how authentic can individual voices be when “group-force” is present, and 2) can shy students feel comfortable enough in groups? For example, one very outspoken student, Sunny, age 10, was often seen “leading” the conversation in his *adda*-group, and, although his voice was represented in the group, what he said impacted his friends and made some of the girls feel uncomfortable. When Sunny first said that he looked forward to come to school because it gave him an opportunity to interact with his friends and also sing and dance, somehow this became the reason of the majority of the students in that group. For some other students, once Sunny contributed they could not do the same because they stated that they did not have as much of a “good story” for coming to school and were “scared of talking” since they had nothing interesting to state. For these students I had to switch to writing.

Oppositional model of voice.

Another example of my struggle with the representation of voice occurred during my decisions regarding the use of certain cameras. However, this occasion distinctly different from the previous, allowing me to question the oppositional model of power of voice (Gallagher, 2008) in which power is seen as a commodity held by the dominant adults’ group and not by the subordinate children.

However, this conceptualization masks the complex and multiple ways power is exercised, as well as its impact on voice in the research field. Thus, it is possible, at times, for children to have greater control over the research process in which their autonomous and authentic voice is appropriated by them for their own interests (Ahsan, 2009), regardless of the researcher-participant dynamic. Also, like Ahsan (2009), since I was in the field as a native young female attempting to take on the role of a friendly adult employing participatory and artistic research techniques, I was sometimes in a position in which the children ended up exerting control over me. This was most apparent at the moment when the use of cameras came into question.

I entered the field with disposable cameras with which the children could snap pictures, which would later be developed and shared in the classroom. However, once entering the first school, “U,” and trying to use those cameras, one of the older students, Robi age 13, asked, “*Apa* your phone doesn’t have a camera?” I replied that it did and he said, “Can I use your phone camera? I have a camera in my dad’s phone I have used it before.” At first I was hesitant to allow the children to use my cameras, however, the children were not sufficiently motivated to participate actively when using the disposable camera. They did not like the yellow paper covering on the cameras, nor the fact that they could not instantly see the picture(s) they took. Furthermore, they found it somewhat flimsy and hard to use especially due to the fact that many of them had used phone cameras but not disposable ones in the past. By the end of one hour of trying to use the disposable cameras, I received feedback that most of the students preferred not to use it. Much like what happened to Ahsan (2009), I experienced a moment where the young people’s power and voice overpowered that of my own. They appropriated the situation to fit their own preferences and, in using my phone and iPod camera, I was able to gain a sense of camaraderie and rapport with them. Further, it allowed the children to have much more control over the photography activity, wherein they had more of an “instant say” as to whether or not they wanted a certain picture to represent their likes in the classroom. If they disliked a certain photo, they could take another one right away. In short, the decision to use the phone or iPod camera was made by the

children, which demonstrates that within the organic dynamics of certain research processes and contexts, the “tables can be turned” on the exercise of voice.

Pulling the Threads Together

In this chapter, I have outlined in great detail my methodological journey, addressing issues ranging from context and worldviews, to methods of data collection, analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical consciousness. Through my reflexive journey on each of these issues and many more, my goal here has always been to remain transparent and engaging in order to illustrate the organic and multifaceted relationship research requires the “doer” and “knower” to have. It is never an easy path to tread and the process is often messy, filled with ups and downs, limitations, and struggles. Nevertheless, the goal for me was always to take those in stride and move forward in order to unearth children’s perspectives on their inclusive experiences at their respective schools. The findings, resulting from the fieldwork, are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AT THEIR RESPECTIVE SCHOOLS: THE FINDINGS

The adult has become egocentric in relation to the child, not egoistic but egocentric. Thus he considers everything that affects the psyche of the child from the standpoint of its reference to himself, and so misunderstands the child. It is this point of view that leads to a consideration of the child as an empty being, which the adult must fill by his own endeavours, as an inert and incapable being for whom everything must be done, as a being without an inner guide, whom the adult must guide step by step from without...And in adopting such an attitude, which unconsciously cancels the child's personality, the adult feels a conviction of zeal, love and sacrifice.
-Maria Montessori, 1936, p. 13

Objectives

This chapter is about moving away from adult egocentricities that prevent us from focusing on children's voices. It is about letting go of the "adult attitude" of viewing children as empty vessels. It is also about laying out the empirical evidence gathered from the findings of this study to answer my main research question and sub-question:

What do children in nominally inclusive primary schools operated by the NGO BRAC express when asked what they like and dislike about their school?

Sub-question 1. What central motifs, with regard to IE, emerge from children's pictorial, spoken, and written perspectives?

Sub-question 2. If the children's voices (derived through data collection) are distilled through Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy of education, how can lessons be offered to better contextualize IE in Bangladesh and, more specifically, in BRAC?

In Chapter 5, I illustrated the complex ways in which children chose to engage with these questions and respond with photos, spoken and written words and the questionnaire. In this chapter, I present, unpack, and discuss each of the central ideas derived from these research approaches at the two primary schools "U" and "M." As previously mentioned, after a very close rereading, I decided to collapse the nine "like" and five "dislike" theme statements under two major concentration areas: *physical* and *relational* aspects. I have renamed and regrouped the collapsed theme statements into fewer more manageable

conceptual *motifs* to better answer my research question (see Table 6.1). This is followed by a short section where I reflexively reflect on the spaces between like and dislike statements of the physical and relational aspect motifs.

Table 6.1. Major Concentration Areas and Relevant Motifs from Children’s Input

MAJOR CONCENTRATION AREA 1: PHYSICAL ASPECTS: space and place of the school

Like Motifs:

- Distilling beliefs of self and belonging
- Engaging in collaboration
- Creating ownership of their school
- Acquiring a sense of pride by taking care of the environment

Dislike Motifs:

- Interrupting and Distracting
- Lack of learning materials

MAJOR CONCENTRATION AREA 2: RELATIONAL ASPECTS: the people at school

Like Motifs:

- Capitalizing on diversity
- The teacher orchestrating knowledge and support
- Helping hands amongst peers
- Parental contributions

Dislike Motifs:

- Discordance amongst peers
- Lying, taking, and *faki*
- Feeling marginalized from losing voice

REFLEXIVE THOUGHTS ON THE SPACES BETWEEN LIKES AND DISLIKES

- Taking a look at the poem: “My expensive watch”
- Taking a look at the photo-reflection: “Learning from outside”

Salient Points to Keep in Mind While Reading the Chapter

This chapter covers a vast terrain. Thus, it is necessary to note salient points to be considered while reading the chapter. First, while the chapter is full of insights on the information from the students, it is organized, structured, and represented through my understanding of the data. In engaging with the students, I found them spontaneous; they did not just give positive and negative responses to the points I raised when discussing diverse issues and more tangential matters. Instead, I had to engage, reengage, and reflexively reflect on what they spoke about, asking why they replied as they did and how that may be related, or not related, to my research questions. In this messy field, with massive amounts of data, my scrutiny was ongoing and cyclical; even now, it is open to interpretation and further examination. However, as a qualitative researcher who conducted a “qualitative inquiry” drawing from three different worldviews and enhanced with tools of reflexivity, I had to make some decisions related to the emergent data. Since I had been influenced by inclusive thought, I searched for clues of IE throughout the children’s words. Further, my positioning as a diasporic researcher in Bangladesh, my bias towards children’s rights, my past academic and scholarly influences, and even my emotions and feelings on a day-to-day basis impacted how I interpreted and organized the information. Therefore, it is necessary to keep in mind while reading that my beliefs, identity, biases, and relational status as a “researcher” with this subject and the persons involved are fully intertwined with this work and have inevitably shaped the outcomes presented herein.

Nevertheless, considering that inductive phenomenological methods were employed throughout and that the data shaped the motifs, these results are only a representation of the most salient and widely discussed topics within the massive contextual terrain at those specific schools and at that specific time. In other words, the findings should not be understood as insights into the inner workings of children because, as a constructivist, I cannot claim to have been able to access the “truth.” Rather, the findings are a snapshot, which represent the voices of participants at that time at schools “U” and “M.” Furthermore, although I am using the children’s voices as analytical and interpretive tools to gain insight into

themes of scholarly significance, I do not claim that students themselves were consciously aware of these themes or that these concerns were part of their own intentional, aspirational, or epistemic schemes. It was because they frequently used certain “words” or “phrases” that they could be interpreted as emergent themes. In addition, some of the motifs are much richer and more complex than the way they are represented here and more subthemes and richer interpretations could have been drawn. After all, that is the beauty of qualitative data; with each interaction, and each fresh examination, newer interpretations and meanings can surface. However, framed within certain time, academic, and personal constraints, I chose a specific path in my analysis and interpretation, which then resonated in the way I wrote about them and presented them in this chapter. I chose one out of many possible approaches however, as Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) famously wrote, “There are no facts, only interpretations.” The way I have interpreted and represented the data, therefore, will always be open to debate.

Moreover, the discussions below are the result of my engagement with the data for months at a time. I was acutely aware of my responsibility to present the nuanced complexity that is present in children’s voices. Accordingly, my goal throughout has been not to take a privileged stance in relationship to the children’s voices, but represent a nuanced and humble understanding of the positions of everyone involved. However, at times my voice may sound “stronger” or “authoritative” because, as a qualitative researcher, my voice had to come through clearly. I had to comment on what “x” or “y” might mean as, having lived through the construction of the data for so many months, I needed to answer my research questions. However, in no way do I claim that this is a representation of fact. Rather, it is simply an interpreted snapshot on the lives of children attending two BRAC primary schools speaking about their likes and dislikes.

Next, regarding the issue of “likes” versus “dislikes,” it is important to note that I went into the field with a somewhat stringent focus on these two points. This was the only “deductive” stage of my study, which, in hindsight, created structures within the data collection process that may not have been necessary. In other words, it is because I framed the data collection process within these

deductive parameters that I ended up with themes of “likes” versus “dislikes” in the data. However, after some time in the field, this placed me in a confined position where I was grappling with this inflexibility on the one hand and the complex, nuanced, voices emerging from the participants on the other. Looking back and reflecting on this process while still in the field, I came to realize that as I held on to my categories of “likes” and “dislikes,” other important points children were bringing up would often slip through the cracks.

In an effort to counter that stringency during analysis—as well as to rightfully address the main question of this study, which has to do not only with “likes” versus “dislikes” but also with motifs—the findings below are presented in a more critical and cross-analytical manner. Therefore, once I grouped the themes into major concentration areas, I delineated the previously stringent likes and dislikes by grouping them under both concentration areas. This is represented in Table 6.1 above. Furthermore, at the end of the discussion on the conceptual motifs, I reflexively reflected on some raw data/quotes, which are examples of intuitive and layered statements from the children that reflected much more than a mere “like” or “dislike.” These statements reveal the space between the binary, helping qualify my discussion of findings in a more complex manner.

Lastly, some issues need to be mentioned in relation to the “translated representation” of the quotes and written data produced by the children. As mentioned in Chapter 5, all the interactions with the children were conducted in Bengali. The data was produced in Bengali and then translated into English. I did the majority of the translations, but throughout the process I was aided by my transcriber Ms. Nahid Ansari Keya. In most sessions, we worked together to accurately translate the children’s words. However, the children did not always speak in coherent Bengali. Neither, did they utter or write their sentences in complete and comprehensible language at all times. Often, I had to go back and ask them the meaning of what they spoke or wrote. Regardless of whether their perspective was spoken or written, all the Bengali data was translated verbatim into English. At times, some words, such as articles and intended meanings, that were obvious from their responses have been added to the sentences in order to

translate more coherently into English. However, I have been very careful with this process, making sure that neither the meaning nor essence of the perspective is lost or altered. In addition, the emotional weight and normative connotations that certain words or phrases present in the Bengali language are sometimes lost in translation. This is an issue of language transfer and transformation that is beyond the scope of this research; I am pointing it out only for greater transparency.

As the chapter will unfold, it will become clear that I have used a large amount of Bengali words and phrases. In several places, the Bengali phrases are given then followed by the translation in English. Statements, sentences, and longer sections have been translated on the spot, while meanings of single Bengali words have been provided here and in the glossary of terms.

Major Concentration Area 1: Physical Aspects

As explained by Shultz and Florio (2009), going to school involves much more than mastering academic content. Upon entering a confined area, often the school campus, building, or, in the case for BRAC, a room no larger than 336 square feet (Islam, 2000), children must learn how to behave appropriately in that given space. The space, here a room, consists of physical elements—such as the entrance, windows, walls, and ceiling—which include the room’s shape, orientation, and décor. Once inside, the space influences the children, who behave in certain ways in order to be a part of it (Shultz & Florio, 2009). Children in that space need to know what is expected of them by their teacher or fellow classmates at any given moment. Therefore, they need to be “socially competent” and aware of the culture or deeply held values that govern that space, respecting and appreciating it in a way that amounts to “acceptable” manners. Acceptable here does not imply a single form of behaviour, or that less “socially competent” behaviours would result in marginalization. It implies the ability for the children to share a certain accepted school culture or philosophy and, in the case of IE and the BRAC schools, one that is open to diversity and collaboration.

Thus, within the *major concentration* of “physical space and place” at the BRAC schools, several issues were uncovered. The positive aspects, those

categorized as “likes,” were children’s notions of belongingness to, collaboration with, and ownership of a certain community and, as a result, a sense of gratitude towards the school and the environment. The negative aspects, those categorized as children’s “dislikes,” were their experiences of noisiness, disorganization, distractive play, classroom interruptions, and scarcity of items. In the following section, I unpack the “like” aspects first, followed by the “dislikes.”

Like Motifs

Osterman (2000) explicates that beliefs of self and belonging have to do with being accepted, included, or welcomed into a community. The stronger the sense of belonging, the more young people feel cared for, supported, and secure in a school community (Hargreaves, Earl, & Ryan 1996). Here, collaboration means joint planning, decision-making, and problem solving directed toward a common goal (Friend & Cook, 1992). Constructing a sense of ownership consists of the ability to have control over the learning environment, to personalize it, to express territoriality, and to be involved in one’s learning (Killeen, Evans, & Danko, 2003). According to the authors, by enabling students to assert control over, personalize, express their territoriality, and become involved in their learning environment, educators encourage the success of their students and foster a sense of ownership of the school environment. This sense of ownership extends beyond pedagogical issues because it is a product of the school setting. The physical environments that students occupy, and the extent to which they feel involved in shaping or caring for them, are an important domain of learning (Moore & Lackney, 1993; Olds, 2001, as cited in Killeen et. al, 2003). One of the most important ways to engage students is to develop their sense of environmental competence or the “knowledge, skill, and confidence to utilize the environment in order to carry out one’s own goals and to enrich one’s experience” (Saegert & Hart, 1978, p. 160). In order to do that, a sense of respect for the environment and the space within which children study and learn must be fostered at the school. Respect entails admiration and acknowledgement of others’ feelings and interests (Hill, 2000) and, although it is most often related to humans, this sense of admiration can transfer to the environment and to the tools

and experiences for learning offered by the school's interior and exterior. Through such practices, the school community is built. As a result, the children start to feel organically intertwined within something larger than their selves, something that entails belongingness and collaboration between peers and teachers, elders and youths, humans and the environment. In other words, the school community should be a place in which issues such as belongingness, collaboration, and ownership are fostered and practiced, where *all* stakeholders at the school value and commit to it firmly (Booth & Ainscow, 2002).

Due to BRAC's commitment to inclusive education and their past and present efforts towards fostering school cultures that promote openness and inclusion, belongingness, collaboration, and ownership can be observed at their two schools. Children said that they belonged at school, could learn and work together, and felt a sense of ownership towards the school and its environment. This helped them build a sense of community within the physical space of the school. While this sense of community extended beyond the school to parents and teachers, the children stated that it was most strongly sensed when they were with each other and physically present at the school. It helped them not only gain a better sense of the supportive relationships that mattered, but it also helped shape their identities in general. As explained by Morrison (1995), identity coalesces during the formative years between the ages of three and six, when children begin to develop an idea of who they are. It grows as children pass through pre- and primary school, as that is when "the cultural space within which children learn not only what they were but also what they are not and what they will become" (James, 1993, p. 29) first starts to expand, including more people and contexts than that of their parents and homes. Furthermore, as Spencer proposes (1987), as cited in Morrison (1995, p. 142), "[young people's] evolving identity development is affected by the nature of the ecosystem and the interactions experienced by them within the system." If this system is a functional one that supports children in empowering and engaging ways, then it will expand their notion of self. Otherwise, it can have adverse impacts. Children's identities give them a sense of belonging, but it can also marginalize them when their identities are not recognized or are misrecognized (Taylor,

1994). Taylor (1994, p. 25) emphasizes that “if the people or society around them mirror back to the children a confining, demeaning, or contemptible picture of themselves,” it can be considered a form of oppression, as it imprisons them “in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being...and even when some of the objective obstacles to their advancement fall away, they are incapable of taking advantage of new opportunities” (Taylor, 1994, p. 25).

Instilling a sense of belongingness in a collaborative environment that recognizes diverse forms of identities and gives children a sense of ownership of their space acts as a system of “mirroring back,” where children are encouraged to identify their strengths and not dwell on their limitations. In other words, the school’s ecosystem requires a shift towards ameliorating existing strengths, rather than “improving” what is lacking. Details on how children perceived that at their respective schools via the motifs of belongingness and collaboration, among others, follow.

Several parts of the questionnaire were aimed at uncovering children’s feelings of belongingness, collaboration, ownership, environment, and community and the results were largely positive. A table with some of the questions and responses is presented below.

Table: 6.2. Navigating the School’s Space: Questions and Results

Questions about: NAVIGATING and LIVING the “SPACE”	BEL: belongingness, COLL: collaboration, OWN: ownership, ENV: environment; COMM: community			
	I Agree	I Don't Know	I Disagree	
TOTAL RESPONDENTS “U:” 34/36 TOTAL RESPONDENTS “M:” 27/30				
	U---M	U---M	U---M	
BEL: I am happy at school.	34---27	0---0	0---0	
BEL: When I first joined the school I was helped to feel happy.	29---26	3---1	1---0	

BEL: If I have been away for a day my teacher wants to know where I have been.	33---25	1---1	0---1
BEL/COLL: I have good friends at school.	34---24	0---3	0---0
COLL: Boys and girls get on well together.	34---25	0---0	0---2
COLL: Children often help each other in lessons.	33---27	0---0	1---0
COLL: Children often help each other in pairs and small groups.	33---27	0---0	1---0
COLL: During lessons children share what they know with other children.	33---23	1---2	0---2
COLL: We learn how to settle our disagreements by listening, talking, and compromise.	30---25	2---1	2---1
OWN: I have been involved in making the school a better place.	30---27	2---0	2---0
OWN: My work is sometimes put up on the wall in my school.	34---27	0---0	0---0
OWN/ENV: If some of my school classes were held outside in the field I would like it.	2---4	2---0	30---23
ENV: We learn to care for the environment.	34---24	0---3	0---0
ENV: We learn to care for the environment in the school and the area around it.	34---23	0---2	0---2
ENV: The toilets are clean and safe.	34---27	0---0	0---0
ENV: I feel safe in the playground and in the toilet.	33---25	1---1	0---1
COMM: I feel like a part of a big community.	34---27	0---0	0---0

More in-depth discussions are carried out in the following sections, where I unpack the findings from the remaining methodologies in relation to this area of concentration in order to uncover the reasons behind the children's responses. Further, I briefly contextualize the children's backgrounds to help frame why they responded so positively. I give examples from individual students that, through

my process of analysis, emerged as reflections of the salient motifs, derived through a step-by-step phenomenological process.

Distilling beliefs of self and belonging.

First, let us look at the issue of self and belonging more carefully. Most of BRAC's programs, including its education sector, focus on poverty alleviation. Therefore, the NGO's primary schools are concentrated on enrolling children from under privileged, ultra-poor, and hard-to-reach backgrounds. In 2013, BRAC launched 257 boat schools in the hard-to-reach, poverty-stricken wetlands of Haor. Haor is an area of Bangladesh that is left completely submerged underwater for six to seven months of the year due to heavy monsoon rains. In this context, many of the children enrolled at BRAC schools, including the two I worked at, belong to families that sustain themselves on less than \$1 a day. The parents of these children are often illiterate and, as stated by the children at School "U," the majority of their fathers work in transportation labour, either as rickshaw pullers (12/36) or as motor vehicle drivers (6/36). In this scenario, education and the opportunity to study at school is often seen by the children as a privilege and some of their statements support this claim. For example, a female student at School "U" during the *adda* said:

Only after coming to school did I learn that coming here is our birthright. Children are all supposed to come to school, *choto, boro* and *chele mein* (big or small,⁴⁰ boy or girl). You know, *Apa*, my parents did not go to school, so for me coming to school is a very, very special opportunity. It is only because of BRAC. Otherwise, my parents could not afford it.
(Shamim-Ara, 13, School "U")

This sentiment was shared across the two schools, irrespective of gender. For instance, when asked what children value the most about being at BRAC, one of the boys at School "M," said:

I love being at school. Before I did not have a place to go to meet so many girls and boys to make friends. School is special. A place my mother did

⁴⁰ In the Bangladeshi context, "big or small" could mean two things: the actual age of the children or their social classification, that is, where they belong according to their fiscal standard of living in relationship to those of their peers or people in their community. When I asked the participant to clarify, she explained that she referred to the latter.

not have. My older brother did not either. *Khoob bhalo lage school-e ashte* (I really like coming to school). (Abir, 10, School “M”)

Yet another child, this one with a mild physical disability, at School “U” said:

I am a girl. I also have this leg problem. I used to go to a *madrassa* before, but sometimes the teacher did not understand how hard it was for me to sit in one position the whole day. At this school, *Apa* (the teacher), understands me better and I can sit or move as I need or want. This is a very nice place because I can be myself and my friends, both boys and girls, love me. They take help from me in Bengali and Maths and that makes me...and this place very beautiful. (Tamoni, 10, School “U”)

The children’s photographs also reflected the idea of school as a greatly appreciated opportunity, “a special place,” as shown below in a pupil’s reasons for choosing to photograph a particular page from her textbook. This pupil, named Farin, chose an image of a pair of girls walking towards a school. The image depicts a girl, Salma, explaining to another girl about her best friend, a male student, Reza. When asked what this picture might mean to her and why she chose it, Farin said that the picture shows that males and females can be friends (something she is still working on) and that school is a place where this is possible. Further, she stated that “caring for each other” is her *priyo* or most favourite sentence in Salma’s dialogue because, in her school community, everyone cares about her, especially her friends and her teacher. Perhaps this helps her build community as she senses being part of one, all the while establishing her role in that community. Farin’s sense of self and belonging, then, are intertwined and can only be understood through belonging to a specific community made possible through schooling. It is a place where she feels supported, cared for, and wanted. She could talk to Nun about anything and school is the place she had met, in her words, this “dear friend.”

My name is Salma. My best friend is Rishi. We go to the same school. We are in class five. My father is a policeman. My mother is a housewife. Learning is my favourite hobby. My favourite game is football. Rishi's father is a doctor. His mother is a teacher. Playing is Rishi's favourite hobby. Cricket is his favourite game. We are good friends. We can do all activities.

My reasons are:

- (Farin, 12, School "U")

It is apparent from the discussions above that a sense of self and belonging was fundamentally linked to collaboration in the BRAC schools I visited. Collaboration, as previously stated, can be understood as working together towards a common goal. For the children, collaborating on activities such as dancing and singing, exercises and lessons, or artwork were all sources of joy, especially when they were interested in the tasks they were assigned. Several of the girls at School “U” voiced that collaboration gave them *shahosh* (courage), to do something they otherwise would not (and some said “could not”) have done alone:

er stated that collaborating on singing and dancing sometimes helped them
rt one another's weaknesses. This was hard for one child to articulate and it
teresting to see how his group members helped him formulate his point,
orating together on the response.

Table 6.3. Student Conversation at School “U”

Shagor, 11: Sometimes it so happens that *Apa* tells us to practice a song. But I am not very good at singing. At that time...he...she helps...

As Shagor’s voice trailed off and he looked inquisitively around the group. One member stepped in to speak.

Yamazir, 10: “Shagor not he or she. Try to think of who it was that helped you?”

Shagor, 11: “You did didn’t you?”

Shamim-Ara, 13: “You both helped each other and I did too. I am leader, *to tai* (that is why) we finished on time. I’m so happy we are a team.”

The issue of collaboration was also revealed in the children’s short poems and paragraphs about school, which was not group specific. For example, at School “U,” a male student individually wrote:

I do well in [my] studies in a big group.
I like big group.
We work together and I do well in a big group.
My favourite is big group and sitting in a circle together. (Chotur, 11, School “U”)

Another female student individually wrote:

I like my school because I can see the happy faces of my friends and teacher at school. My best friend is Rupa. We come to school together, play together, and study together at school and sometimes at home we visit each other on homework. (Rita, 11, School “U”)

During the photovoice sessions, two children, one male and one female, photographed the same image from their respective textbooks on different occasions, stating slightly different reasons for liking the photo, yet distinctly attributing it to collaboration.

Image 6.2. Aisha and Karim's Photo and Voices



I have taken a picture of the lesson "The flute has started to play."

My reasons are:

1. All the children are going together with the flag.
2. All the children have raised their hands together.
3. They are all friends marching together happily for our country.
4. It reminds me of 16 December
5. It also reminds me of when we sing or dance or do things together (in a group) and work together (for memorizing).

(Karim, 11, School "U")

1. I have taken a picture of the lesson "The flute has started to play."

My reasons are:

1. As the poem [next to the image] says, all the children in the picture are reciting the national anthem together and I really like that. Makes me happy.
2. I wish we could do that on December 16 outside our school.
3. In school we learn songs like this together and march our feet when we dance together. As a group we can do it with strength and courage, its better?, *ekshathe amra pari* (together we can), *shahosh pai, bhalo hoi*.

For my school, it reminds me that we too can be like these boys and girls big and small together. We can become like the

Therefore, collaboration was key to the children's sense of belonging to something larger than their individual selves. Through completing their work together, they seemed to garner a sense of group achievement, a necessary element to continuously build and support their ongoing relationships at school. However, it is significant that they, as children, recognized and valued that fact. It was not only an adult-centric belief at the schools.

Collaboration was not only important between the children, but also between children and adults at the schools. This was especially true at School "M," where the teacher played two roles simultaneously, as teacher and as a maternal figure. This was the case for several reasons. First, the overall age of the children at this school was younger than in in School "U." Second, her son was at the school enrolled as student, while her toddler was frequently present in the classroom. Third, due to the presence of her children, she had to juggle teaching

and mothering at the same time, creating an overall atmosphere of care and concern relevant not only to her own children, but to the whole class. During the photographing session when I required her help, the collaborative, caring role of the teacher became very clear. Here, in order to curb whether the teacher was trying to influence or control the picture taking, I asked the children to make a list of their most favourite item or activity at school separate from the photo session and specifically instructed her to only help if they had trouble with the camera. Several of them did and with her guidance the children were able to successfully take the photos. At times, when some children were reluctant to participate, I watched her take the time to speak to them individually and encourage them to go forward without thinking about whether they were doing it “right” or “wrong.” Due to acculturation, home environment, and the all-too-common adult notion that children are considered immature and need to be told how to do things, in most of the children, their sense of “right” and “wrong” was highly developed. At this school, the teacher made an exception to work on that obstacle in order to encourage the children to speak their minds freely for the purposes of this project, without worrying too much about whether or not it makes “sense.” She encouraged the children to voice their dislikes at school too. During the *adda* session she said:

It is not necessary that you like everything at school. I am sure there are some things you do not like about school. We need to know those things so we can work on making changes. Who wants to be a part of making a change? (Teacher, School “M”)

It was at that point that a few students stepped in to speak. They replied that they were not happy with outside distractions, peer absenteeism, or scarcity of items. The child with the visual disability stated that she would like to sit closer to the blackboard. She also stated that she does not always appreciate being “pushed” to answer when guests come to school. In response to her, the teacher at School “M” amicably responded:

I am so glad I now know. I will keep that in mind next time we have guests. (Teacher, School “M”)

It could be argued that the schoolteacher responded as she did because of my presence. Furthermore, it could be argued that the child voiced her concerns because an outsider (me) was there to witness and take notice. However, I had only recently begun at that school and we were still in the process of building rapport. Up until that point, the children at School “M” were not willing to discuss much in the open amongst each other in the *adda* sessions, possibly because some were “afraid” to say “something wrong.” It was only after getting assurances from their teacher that they felt safe to speak to their mind; and they did. They stated afterwards that they trusted her and believed that she could protect them from harm, similar to what a mother often does for her child—in a relationship fostered over the years through a mutual respect (or admiration for one another) and collaboration (or valuing working together).

Creating school ownership.

It is clear, therefore, that collaboration is linearly associated to belongingness at the schools. Next, I ask if we can say the same for the third integral aspect of spatial navigation: ownership. As explained by Killeen, Evans, and Danko (2003), in order to construct a sense of ownership at school, children must feel like they have control over their learning environment and have the flexibility to personalize the environment, to express territoriality, and to get involved in their learning. Through my observations and interactions with the children at the two BRAC schools, I discovered that some of this was true, but not all. The sense of ownership was not constant (as the children’s sense of belongingness or collaboration was) across time, space, and “types” of children. For example, a child’s sense of ownership changed even within the span of time (ranging from one day or one week, to a few months) I was present at the schools. Also, some of the older and more “visible” students felt ownership much more than the shyer, “less visible” ones. Further, children’s sense of ownership was not related to ability or disability. For example, the child with the physical disability at School “U” displayed and stated a greater sense of territoriality and involvement in her learning than the special needs children at School “M.” Children’s nuances of personality, preference, and relationships really came out

in this theme, much more so than in my investigation of belongingness and collaboration, possibly because ownership is a much more multi-faceted concept.

I placed the theme of ownership under “likes” because I observed that, overall, more children than not stated feeling a sense of ownership. Furthermore, those that did not have a clear sense of how they felt about it did not see it as a “dislike,” but something they aspired to have more of. In addition, even if ownership meant different things for individual children, the sense of school ownership was a positive one.

The aspect of ownership was first viewed through children’s attitude towards the physical space of their school. At School “U,” for example, the oldest two children were in charge of cleaning the burlap mat before and after class, wiping the blackboard, putting books and materials away in the trunks after class, and instructing the younger children to keep their shoes in a neat circle at the school entrance. During the class, I observed how the team leaders were often vigilant in making sure the piles of books in front of each child was kept in a neat and organized fashion. When the children were asked in the questionnaire, “If some of my school classes were held outside in the field I would like it” the majority of the children at both schools (30 at School “U” and 23 at School “M”) chose “I disagree.” When this topic was later discussed during the *adda* sessions, interesting and multiple reasons were cited:

Why would we have classes outside? This school is here for us to have class inside isn’t it? (Shorkar, 9, School “M”)

Even if we had some classes outside, so we did not have to be inside this room for all the hours of the day, there are so many noises, outside like rickshaws, people, and hawkers. We would not be able to hear *Apa*. (Sabiha, 11, School “U”)

I would like to have classes outside if we were in the village but this is the city. (Fahim, 10, School “U”)

I love my school. I love to see my friend’s drawings on the walls. This is my school for me to be here. Why would I sit outside? My parents would not want that. Even *Apa* would not want that. (Tamoni, 10, School “U”)

From these statements, it is clear that the school represented a calm place of learning. The thought of being outside was discomforting to the children, possibly because school often means being in a certain designated location, usually a building, and the children did not know any other way of being at school. They did not conceptualize school in other locations and did not want to step out of that frame of mind to entertain another way of learning.

This can also be attributed to the fact that most of the children at BRAC schools have either dropped out of mainstream schools or never been to school before. Therefore, the physical reality of belonging to the schoolhouse, and having it as a space of their own, was highly important. School gave them a sense of pride and accomplishment, as revealed in a few of the children's poems/short write-ups about school:

I don't say I can't [do it] anymore,
At school, I learned that if I can't do it once then I try [one] hundred times.
School taught me I can do what fire can do...what birds can do
I can light [a] room
I can fly [with] wings
I am me and I am proud school taught me so many things I did not know.
(Shamim-Ara, 13, School "U")

The person who studies rides in cars and horses.
Let us study
Let us ride in cars and horses.
If you study
One day you will be someone.
If you study
You will get the affection of your parents.
School is that place of study
School is my pride and joy. (Fahim, 10, School "U")

From these poems, one can garner a sense that the children associate their school with values of hope, accomplishment, pride, and other important aspirations. Research across many contexts has proven that school has that potential. However, only after speaking with the children at School "U" was I able to understand more deeply that those with a more acute sense of ownership developed such beliefs of pride and accomplishment while those with a lesser sense of ownership struggled to do so. Thus when given poems and paragraphs to

write, the shy less “involved” children—who were not as invested in their own learning or that of their peers, were not frequently “called upon” by their teacher, and generally remained aloof during sessions—mentioned some of the same issues regarding ownership, but in a very different manner. Some examples with explanations follow:

Everyone says school is where we learn lessons
To be someone one day,
School will make me like a bird
Free like a bird,
But at home my sister does not let me be free
She makes me work.
At school, *Apa* does not see me when I ask her a question.
And when she orders, “pay attention,” my mind never settles on study.
In small groups, I don’t like my peers telling me what to do.
I want to smell tulips. (Naima, 10, School “U”)

Mother tells me to study
Father tells me to concentrate
Madam says, “pay attention”
My group leader asks me questions.
I do not know. This is hard.
I like looking at the clock to see when time will come to run outside. (Roy, 12, School “U”)

Uncovered through their poems and free associate writings, a total of four out of 34 respondents at School “U” wrote this way about school—somewhat negatively with a sense of hopelessness, in stark contrast to some of their peers’ thoughts. Although it was not part of my methodological plan, I did speak to the two children quoted above individually to uncover some of the underlying causes of these types of responses. First I will discuss Naima, and then Roy.

To begin, I must reiterate that Naima’s poem is not necessarily a representation of (non)-ownership. Rather, it is a very deep poem, which can be interpreted in a multifaceted manner. Without perhaps knowing it, she is expressing a profound understanding of the clash between school values and external social or cultural constraints and restrictions. Maybe her last line even suggests forlorn hope or a search for beauty, and/or implies that she is frustrated at school and would rather be outside in a garden somewhere. In speaking with her later on, I discovered that she felt she was being limited at school and directly

linked this to how she was being treated there. She said she wanted to be happier, but due to the treatment from her teacher and her peers, school reminded her more of her home than she would have liked it to, and so it became a space towards which she could not and did not want to feel a sense of ownership. It was not a comfortable space for her to claim as her own. This is why I chose to represent her poem as a reflection of the complexities surrounding this emergent theme.

Naima told me that she wanted school to be a haven away from home. This was because at home, her older sister forced her to do chores. For instance, if Naima was told to clean the dishes, her sister would pile other tasks on her, such as sweeping the floor or cleaning the bathroom. Since her sister was preparing for some “exams” (which Naima could not properly articulate), her parents allowed this to happen. School, therefore, was Naima’s “free time.” However, when her peers asked her to do tasks in the small groups or the teacher asked her to pay attention, Naima could no longer equate school with “free time.” Further, she mentioned how she did not like people at school “ordering her around” like her sister did at home. School was slowly becoming a place like home for Naima; not a free-space she could “own,” but rather a space to which she did not want to lay claim. This detailed and personal information came about through careful conversation with Naima. Obviously she was not being “ordered around” at school and at home in exactly the same way. Neither do I have enough information about her home situation to further scrutinize the relationship between the two. However, it is clear that this poem, and later our conversations, illustrate the complexities of school non-ownership and the various and divergent reasons some students may not clearly identify with it.

For Roy, coming to school itself was a challenge. He told me he wanted to be outside more and did not like spending four hours indoors. He missed his previous life dotted with a few household chores and time spent at his uncle’s teashop. He missed standing there and he missed roaming around the streets of his neighbourhood, playing outside with his tires and sticks. Also, he expressed his disdain towards his peers for always wanting to please their teacher, their *Apa*. He stated that his *Apa* only cared about those students “who always knew

the answers” anyway. Although this may not actually be the case, as I found the teacher to be quite attentive to most of her students during observation, he conveyed his statements very strongly with a lot of conviction. He further mentioned that he did not want to put effort into his Bengali or English lessons as his team leader always knew the answers before him. In the groups, as I often observed, they did not let him answer and whenever that happened, Roy’s face would form a slight frown.

These two children’s experiences portray the complexity associated with the theme of ownership. The attitudes of the people around them, at home and at school, informed their complicated notions of school space and whether it even was a place they wanted to “claim.” For Naima, the goal was to like her time at school, but she could not. For Roy, the challenge was being able to accept school as a normal part of his life. Both of these scenarios made school ownership a challenge for these students. This does not mean other themes could not have been drawn from these very same experiences; however, these children’s stories do appropriately shed light on how their individual struggles obstructed them from fully embracing ownership at school.

Both children reported having good friends at school and while Naima’s was her friend because she helped her study and listened to her, Roy stated his best friend as one who liked to run outside with him. They both said that these friends made it easier to attend school, but that did not necessarily negate their previous understandings of ownership. Even if they had friends, they often lacked the overall desire to be at school, express territoriality, or be involved in their learning.

Therefore, it is essential for the teacher to become familiar with the personal lives of her school children, more than just what is shared at parent-teacher meetings or short home visits. Only then can she address the intricacies of each child’s personal dilemmas and struggles at school. However, this may not just be practical or favourable for BRAC; for each child to want to be more connected and included at school, it may be necessary.

Lastly, ownership was displayed through children’s conceptions of self-worth at school. While this is open to debate, I observed and uncovered through

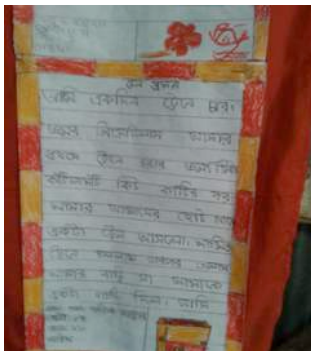
my conversations with various children and the teacher that ownership was displayed more if children thought their work and themselves as individuals were valued at their respective schools. For example, children said that they could label the school as “my school” (i.e., a space that they “own”) if they saw their artwork up on the walls. Further, if they were greeted consistently upon entering, with a smile by their teacher(s) and peer(s), their stated desire to be at school for the duration of the day increased. For some children, the objective of coming to school was to see the “smiling faces of their friends and teacher,” which many of them stated in their write-ups. Possibly, as their bonds became stronger due to their mutual interest in one another, so did their sense of ownership. This can be displayed in more detail through the example of Maisha, a newly recruited pupil at School “U.” Although her example can be used to understand various facets of the children’s school experience, it especially reflects ownership.

In January 2014, Maisha, age 12, was newly recruited into School “U” due to a move her family had made. She was not only a new recruit, but it was her first time at a BRAC school. Although she was at a Grade-3 level, due to her previous training at another institution, she still needed time to adjust to her teacher, peers, and new school environment. She had to undergo curricular and subjective adjustments as the pedagogical level and styles differed at BRAC schools.

During the first few weeks, I observed that she was quiet, shy, and unwilling to participate in classroom and research activities. She did not blatantly express her reluctance, but her body language gave some hints towards her reluctance, for example, she would look away if questioned, turn to her peer when she did not hear something (but not ask the adults), and, at times, nodded her head to signal a “no” of either disinterest or unwillingness to participate. This happened in curricular items and in the activities I was conducting. During my activities, I told her that she could just “participate” by listening and being in the classroom, but after a day or two, she conveyed through a peer (but not directly to me) that she was interested in participating. I assured her that she could just do some of the activities and did not need to “catch up” and complete the ones she had missed (e.g., the photos). However, she insisted on “catching up,” perhaps it

was her way of stepping into the circle of peers who were partaking in the research. Further, “catching up” may have allowed her to increase her interactions with her peers and team leader, resulting in opportunity for further interactions. Again this is open to debate, but, as she participated, she slowly started becoming more engaged, often smiling and happier in class. Perhaps this process helped in transforming Maisha’s conceptions of belonging at the school. By this time, she even was able to speak about her new best friend Rokeya, who listened to her and helped her with her toughest subject, Bengali. A shy girl, unable to express herself well through words, Maisha better expressed her transforming sense of school ownership through her photo and the free associative writing activity. Those are given below.

Image 6.3. Maisha’s Photo and Voice



I have taken a picture of one of my new friend’s wall hangings. My reasons are:

1. I love red [and] yellow.
2. My new school friends help me.
3. I want that one day my work will also be on the wall.

FREE ASSOCIATIVE WRITING

I come to school to learn. I am sad I left my friends at the other school, but [here] I am making some new friends. Sabiha helps me with Bengali and also when I get stuck in [small] groups. If someone helps, I feel [they] care. I can say more that this is “my school.” I feel happy [if] someone listens to my talk. Apa listens to me also. That makes me very happy. One day my work [will go on] the wall Apa said [so]. I draw or write something nice.

(Maisha, 12, School “U”)

For Maisha, as her relationships in the classroom changed, it transformed her notions of being a part of and claiming her space. Her work still had not gone on the wall, as she had not produced anything yet, but putting her art on the wall was something she aspired and looked forward to eagerly.

Acquiring a sense of pride by taking care of the environment.

This leads to the fourth and final aspect of physical environment at the schools: acquiring a sense of pride by taking care of the environment. In order to

discuss this aspect, it is essential to first give a clearer visual on what BRAC schools look like, followed by a detailed discussion.

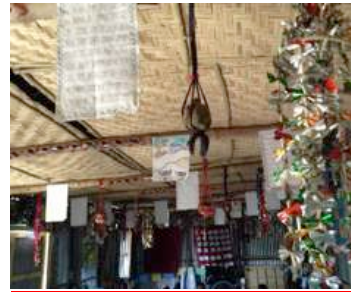
The physical environment of the classrooms at the two schools consisted of the actual room space, the school building, and the environment around it. Usually BRAC schools, like the two I worked at, are freestanding brick, mud, or tin walled rooms. As apparent from the pictures below (mostly from the two schools, with a few from others), BRAC schools differ only slightly in size (around 336 square feet), shape, make, and internal décor.

The school environment was a special place for the children to meet, mingle, and create stories and memories, but most importantly, it was something tangible that had to be cared for in fragments and as a whole. First, I will discuss each fragment in more detail and then comment on the whole. I am choosing to do it this way because the children spoke about these aspects as such: in fragments and then as an entity. Further, through understanding the roles of each fragment, the children stated that they felt more obligated, proud, and responsible towards taking care of their school environment and the area around it.

Image Set 6.1. What do BRAC Schools Look Like?



TOP LEFT: Morkun School, outside
TOP RIGHT: Uddayon School, outside
MIDDLE LEFT and RIGHT: Mirpur School, inside and ceiling
BOTTOM LEFT: Uddayon School small group activity
BOTTOM CENTER: Norshindi School inside
BOTTOM RIGHT: Morkun school wall and ceiling



The first fragment was the school's walls and ceiling. The walls (and sometimes the ceiling) of the school represented a space on which the children could proudly display their work for peers, teachers, parents, community members, and visitors. It was also a place where the black board hung, a space the children recognized as one of knowledge transfer. Moreover, it provided them with protection from the outside world. Sometimes it was hard to decipher whether the children's likes indicated just the decorations and if their affinity was directed towards the aesthetics of the room, rather than the walls or the ceilings themselves. However, in speaking in more detail with them, I was able to

understand that, although they really appreciated the décor, the walls and ceilings were more important because without those the décor would not have been possible.

Out of the 36 children at School “U,” 34 completed this task, in which 30 of them listed “likes” related to the wall, either indicating the wall’s decorative and/or practical roles. The following quotes are an example of the different reasons: “I like the wall hangings [at our school] because it makes our school look prettier;” “I like that on the wall, friend’s drawings hang next to one another’s;” “I like painting and because we have the walls, I can ask *Apa* to hang my paintings on it;” “The paintings, pictures, maps, charts, blackboard, and colors go on the wall. This makes me happy. When I am bored, I can look at them instead of the clock;” “If my wall hanging is there on the wall, I feel very proud, ‘I can say...look I did this’, and I want to come to school every day;” “The blackboard hangs on the wall. If we did not have walls where would the blackboard hang and how would *Apa* show us multiple choice, or where would she display the date?” “The walls keep the noise out of the school and it protects us from the sun, the rain, the street, the dust, and other people;” and finally, “Our school, our walls...shows our work...together we make it pretty...we [build] friendships because we have to make wall hangings together.”

At School “M,” the findings were similar. One of the items the children liked the most was the *baboi pakhir basha* (bird’s nest), hanging from the ceiling. A total of 24 out of 30 children indicated that they like it. Additionally, the majority of the likes and accompanying pictures at that school were of *wall* items, differing from school “U,” which was book focused. Children reported liking items such as the hanging *kolshi* (pot), the wall letter chart, wallpaper decorations, wall art of a village scene made in small groups, and the number chart. In the table below, I have numbered how many “votes” each of those liked wall items received and listed next to it some selected reasons why children liked each item.

Table 6.4. School “M” Pupils’ Wall Items and Reasons for Liking

# of selections out of 30	Wall/ Ceiling item	Selected reasons, as spoken or written by the children.
24	<i>Baboi Pakhir Basha</i> (Bird’s Nest)	-I like seeing it. Outside inside. -It makes our school prettier.
8	Wall Paper Decorations	-Makes our school wall colourful: red, green, yellow. -When I am bored I can look at those colors and designs.
16	Letter/Number/ Word Charts in Bengali and English	-We can learn new letters of the alphabet from the chart. -I can see it easily because it’s just hanging right there [<i>points to the wall</i>] on the wall. -If I forget [a letter], I can look at it and remember. -We can learn new words and those we forget. -It’s good it is hanging on the wall. Makes it easier to see.
21	Village Scenes or Flower posters and paintings produced by the children in small groups	-My friends and I, we made it together. Those [<i>provide</i>] good memories. -I love my friends. I love our work together. It must be up [<i>on the wall</i>]. I feel proud.
3	<i>Kolshi</i> (Pot)	-I love the colors on the <i>kolshi</i> . When I feel bored, I can look at it and it gives me ideas. - <i>Apa</i> collected the <i>kolshi</i> for us. <i>Apa</i> loves us a lot.
2	Clock	-I like looking at the time. This wall [<i>points to the wall</i>] is a great place for the clock. Right on top of my head. -Without the clock I would be lost. When will I go home? I would not know.
5	Blackboard	- I like the blackboard because the blackboard is a place where we learn. - <i>Apa</i> writes on it and we copy it from the blackboard. -I like standing in front of the class and writing on the blackboard to help my friends. I am team leader. I like helping. -The wall in the front of the room is my favourite

		place in the school. -The blackboard hangs there. The teacher stands there. -Without blackboard I can't learn. Teacher cannot write math problems. -I have trouble seeing and I sit near the blackboard to learn. If it was not there I would learn...maybe more slowly?
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In addition to the walls and ceilings, the other fragments of physical community building at the schools were the floor and the small play spaces outside each of the two buildings.

The floor was especially significant for the children, because it was a space for meaningful bonding. The children stated have noticed it was where they harboured feelings “sameness,” regardless of gender or age differences. They also appreciated how the adults (teachers, POs, visitors) sat on the floor with them, displaying a general appreciation, as well as BRAC’s attempt to foster equity, rather than implying equity. This is because, at BRAC schools, everyone sits together on the floors, creating an atmosphere where there is no division between age, religion, social class, ability, or family background. Of course underlying biases and sociocultural divisions—such as people’s views on the maturity level of children versus adults, ability versus disability, normative relationships between students and their teacher, and gender/religious differences and the roles those imply, all of which impact and shape Bangladeshi society—still play a role in unstated, yet undisputed, ways. However, policy-wise, the commitment at BRAC is towards creating an inclusive environment where value is attached to, not differentiating and breaking up, the physical space of the school with tables and chairs, which research has shown denominate strains of power in unstated ways in classrooms. What made the floor even more inviting for the children was the burlap rug.

The burlap, a rug made from jute, was one of the most appreciated items at the two schools. At School “U,” although no one photographed it, this item appeared in the “top three” of ten children’s lists of liked items. At School “M,” it showed up on eight children’s lists and two children photographed it as their

most liked item at school. For Mitali, like her peers who indicated this specific item, the burlap possibly played a dual role of beautification and comfort. Furthermore, it held good memories of past and current activities the children had conducted with their teacher and peers. It separated the outside of the school from the inside and made the school more comfortable overall. A picture of the burlap and Mitali's associated reasons indicate those points.

Image 6.4. Mitali's Photo and Voice



I have taken a picture of our school's burlap rug. My reasons are:

6. The burlap keeps us warm on winter [mornings] like today.
7. I love the flowers on it. So beautiful!
8. When we first came to school, *Apa* made it. She did the *alpona* (designs) with paint. Some of us helped. While others watched.
9. We all sit on it. *Apa* does. *PO* sir does. It is always there for us all in this school. We play games on it and have small group sitting on it.
10. I like the way it feels [on my feet] when I step on it from outside.

(Mitali, 10, School "M")

The third physical fragment that helped build community at the schools was the play spaces outside of each schoolhouse. Both of the schools I worked at were located within school "complexes," where several other freestanding BRAC schools were in close proximity to one another. At School "M," over half a dozen schools were located in the same vicinity within very short walking distances whereas, at School "U," two schools stood side by side. This created pockets for children to play in where they could meet and spend time together before or after school and during breaks (although I rarely observed breaks during their 4-hour school sessions). I must also mention that, at the two schools, the adults did not encourage playing outside. Most of the time when I was present, the children were inside the schoolhouse; there were only a few occasions I was able to observe and speak to the children about being outside—four times at School "U" and twice at School "M." The playground, which was not officially named nor organized as one, was a great place to observe children's interactions and social relations in a more natural, organic, and spontaneous manner.

Due to its location, the play space at School “U” was very limited. There were a set of bamboo poles, some climbing steps, and bunches of hay all haphazardly stored next to the left wall of the building. The poles and steps were placed in such a way that they created a climbing frame with two poles protruding sideways off which the children could hang. Hay was scattered underneath for a soft landing. These items were not BRAC’s property and may have belonged to the garages behind and next to the schoolhouse. Then, there was a clearer part of the play space, no larger than 250 square feet, at the entrance of the school. On the right of the school, there was a narrow passageway created by the two schoolhouses where children could stand or hide. This constituted the sum total of the play space and all of it was very close to the main street and hardly distinguishable from the areas occupied by neighbouring traffic, local stores, garages, and other buildings like homes and offices.

School “M,” on the other hand, was located on a large piece of land with empty fields and half-built properties all around. There were several other BRAC schools close by and pockets of play spaces were created between them. The area around the school was also much cleaner because the teacher and students made an active effort clean it every day and the school itself stood on a grassy piece of land, close to the town of Morkun, but separated by some narrow walkways secluded behind buildings.

Despite subtle differences in the layout of the school environments, it was important for me to observe the relationship the outside environment had on the children’s navigation of their overall school space. Of particular interest was how trust and friendship were built outside differed from how it was built indoors. Outside, it was more about sharing similar interests and engaging in those activities together while, inside, it was more about “making up for” and complementing each other’s shortcomings by helping each other during class. Making friends inside the school is discussed in greater detail, in the “helping hands” section later on in this chapter. Here it is of interest to particularly discuss the point about building friendship outside the school walls and how those friendships emerged through the examples of some of the boys at School “M” and Tamoni, the girl with a physical disability at School “U.”

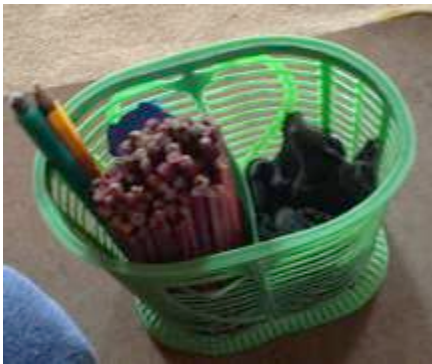
One of the boys at School “M,” 9-year-old Shahid-Ullah, when asked about who his best friend was and how they became friends, stated: “My best friend is Faruque. We became friends that day when some naughty boys from the other school moved my shoes and hid them. Faruque helped me find them. Then we went home together and ate peanuts on the way.” When I asked Faruque, aged 10, he added just a bit more to this story of friendship. “Inside the school, we are not in the same small group and sit far away from each other. It was only outside that I could help him. He is from my village and so in school I should help him. [That way] we can be better friends. We love eating peanuts together. Also, together we are stronger [in front of] those naughty boys.” For the boys, the outside area represented a place of greater freedom of choice allowing them to engage in activities they enjoyed doing together. It was also a place to build school camaraderie and identity, distinct from that of pupils enrolled in other schools in the vicinity.

In another example, in relation to Tamoni at School “U,” the outside was a space to build camaraderie and friendship, but in an altogether different manner. Physically disabled, with an artificial limb, Tamoni was only recently able to walk to and from school. Before that she had to be carried. More importantly, in relation to “playing outside,” she indicated in conversation how inadequate she had felt in the past when she could not engage in any of the physical activities of her peers. In her free writing session, she articulated how, as her role in her small group inside the school grew with her ability to help her friends with their assignments, her ability to engage in outside activities also transformed. As she became more popular, her friends would consciously arrange outside activities so that she could participate. They would play with small stones or marbles sitting on the ground, often one of them would accompany her to and from school. At other times, when some of the girls would take rests after running around, they would usually take turns sitting with her. As previously mentioned, outside playing was rare and only manageable in short timeslots for the children, usually before their teacher arrived at School “U” or for a few minutes after school. Nevertheless, it was interesting to see how the outside consisted of a separate

space in which acceptance, collaboration, and belongingness, although built on different pillars, continued to shape a sense of community at the school.

The last fragment of physical significance consisted of school supplies such as rulers, counting sticks, textbooks, and pencils. As educational items, these items were different from those that hung on the walls or adorned the floor. Therefore, they should be singled out as important because they were often photographed when children wanted to express their likes, especially at School “M.” Later on in the discussions, the role these items played in increasing inclusivity was uncovered as the items represented the first step in achieving some of their goals. Further, they were the educational items that aided the children in their learning processes (something I address later on in this chapter). In the following photos, reasons, and discussions, I reference how some of those items were portrayed in a different light, related to how they helped continue bolstering the school’s values and beliefs.

Image Set 6.2. Ricky, Meera, and Soheli’s Photos and Voices



I have taken a picture of the “pencil basket” at our school. My reasons are:

5. I like that everyone has one.
6. Keeps the items at our school tidier.
7. It makes our school pretty.
8. At the end of the day, we help each other organize our pencils and counting sticks in the basket. I help Abir who often forgets to put his pencils back.

Ricky, 10, School “M”



I have taken a picture of “counting sticks.” My reasons are:

1. I love math. With the counting sticks my [group] leader...sometimes *Apa*...helps me practice plus [addition] and minus [subtraction].
2. We do the plus minus fun small group activities together. We learn [from] each other.
3. When I can’t answer maths, my leader she says “you can!” and so I try again and again.

Meera (girl with vision impairment), 10, School “M”

I have taken a picture of the “scale [ruler].” My reasons are:

1. It helps us draw straight lines in the notebook and not write below the line. It keeps our books pretty.
2. It helps us learn sharing.
3. Some of the students use the scale to hit others. I don’t like that. We are all friends at school. Why hit?
4. Even in groups. I am the leader but they don’t listen to me always.
5. I tell them to help one another with the scale to only draw straight lines.

Soheli, 11, School “M”



From the photos and reasons, it seems that, at School “M,” these three items clearly indicate much more than tools of learning. They reflect a sense of children’s notions and relay their sense of belongingness, ownership, and camaraderie at the school.

For example, when it came to Ricky, he enjoyed conducting the day-end organizing activity with or for one of his friends. He used the pencil organizer as a way to continue strengthening his friendship, as this activity gave him an opportunity to spend greater time with his friend.

When it came to Meera, who has a visual impairment, the counting sticks were especially useful, not only because she loved maths but also because with the counting sticks she is able to engage with her peers, teacher, and group leader. The counting sticks make it possible for her to learn inside the group in manner in which she is involved—in other words, in way of learning in which she is can be attentive, interested, and participatory (Killeen et al., 2003). This is especially important because, due to her visual impairment, I observed how she sometimes had difficulty following along in the larger group. In speaking with

BRAC officials and teachers, I found out that Meera had recently undergone corrective surgery. However, she still needed glasses and was awaiting a time when her family would be able to afford them. During my observations, I noticed she barely sat at the front, choosing to sit next to her friend towards the middle/back of the room. She explained later on that she felt more comfortable sitting next to her best friend, who helps her with her weakest subject, English.

As for Soheli, aged 11, one of the most outspoken, imaginative young girls at School “M,” the scale provided a way to “keep things straight.” This included the lines and words in her books and on her slate and in some ways even the relations between her peers. Being a team leader, she did not like it when others used the scale to hit each other, and explained during one of our conversations that the scale was given “only for study purposes...it cannot be [misused] to hurt one another on the head, arm, or shoulder.” She detested the scale being used this way and often told her group mates that they should only use the scale to help one another, like showing someone how to draw straight lines in their notebooks or on their slate. She also mentioned that because students often forget their scales at home they must borrow each other’s at school, which likely teaches them the concept of sharing. It was quite difficult for her to articulate that, but she said:

When someone does not bring their scale, I give mine or Rodela [9, her friend] gives her. Then one day, I use theirs if I forget mine. But I don’t forget mine! But we can give each other our things to use in class even like pencil, rubber, and pen- all same, same. I love it. We share because we here are all friends: *bondhus* (boy-friends) and *bandhobhis* (girl-friends).

She enjoyed sharing her things with her friends, adding that we only share things with people we “love.”

For the children, fragments of each school’s physicality composed it as a whole, physical space. The walls, burlap, and items were essential to creating the school’s culture. While this interpretation is subject to debate, it was interesting to note the different roles each fragment played. The walls were a place of pride, protection, and knowledge transfer while the burlap and floor provided a sense of grounding and safety. Together, they fostered a sense of involvement and

territoriality. Lastly, the physical space outside the school provided a zone where children could freely choose what strengthened their bonds, a space where they experienced control, personalization, territoriality, and involvement in parts and parcels.

Children did express that, because of the artwork on the walls, they were able to feel that their school is a personalized space, although not always in equal amounts, especially regarding the nature of control, territoriality, or beliefs on how much say they had over their scholastic performance or class content (Killeen et. al, 2003). In other words, the walls were a space where they could express their self-identity through creative measures by producing write-ups or art pieces, individually or in groups, proudly displayed to everyone. Through owning and sharing school materials, some of which were their most “liked” aspects, the children stated that they feel involved in their own learning process. Further, due to their social backgrounds—in which many had not attended school previously nor had been given importance as young learners and members of a community—even the smallest of items and gestures was given a lot of value by them. They valued the opportunity to go to school and, as a result, everything that came with it, especially the tangible everyday school materials. For example, for many of them, it was the first slate they had ever owned.

Since the children valued the opportunity to attend school, most of them understood that they had to take care of it. At BRAC, children are responsible for organizing their items at the end of the day (stowing materials in the trunk if required), cleaning the floor the school, organizing their shoes at the entrance, and folding or cleaning the burlap mat. Usually, one or two of the older children are assigned this task and do it every day as routine. Some of the children are guided by the leaders as and when required. For example, the teacher, during several lectures at School “U,” reminded the children how the school is a reflection of themselves and that a clean school shows that they are caring, organized, and mature children. At school “M,” which was significantly more organized and cleaner than School “U” because it was in a newer building in a less crowded and polluted location, the teacher gave similar lectures.

In speaking with the children, during one of the *adda* sessions in which

they expanded on questionnaire topics, the following points about cleanliness, pollution, and environment were generated. As previously mentioned, the *addas* were informal conversations, guided only by key questions on certain topics. Below is an excerpt from the conversation that resulted at School “U” when I brought up the topic of environment, within which we addressed issues such as cleanliness, pollution, and school safety.

Table 6.5. Transcribed Excerpt from *Adda* Session–“Discussing the environment”

<i>Tahiya:</i> Ok, so now we will speak about your school’s environment. In the questionnaire, we had a few questions such as: “should you care for your environment (that could be at school or anywhere else),” “do you feel safe at school,” “is your school clean?” Who has something to say?
<i>After a long pause, one of the team leaders, Shamim-Ara, aged 13, raises her hand to speak.</i>
<i>Shamim-Ara:</i> I feel <i>nirapodh</i> (safe) at school. In the toilet also because I know that it is very close to the school building and my friends and <i>Apa</i> are right here. We care for our school and even the toilet. The school is a “pure” place of study. It must be kept clean. Pure places must always be clean. I also learned at school that we should be more responsible about throwing trash [on the streets]. Now when I eat peanuts, I try to save the scraps and the paper bag to throw it at home in my mother’s kitchen.
<i>Fahim, aged 10, steps in.</i>
<i>Fahim:</i> Me too! Me too! I eat peanuts. But I don’t throw the paper bag in the kitchen. I think I threw mine on the street.
<i>Then Sabiha, aged 11, who is Shamim-Ara’s best friend, raises her hand to speak.</i>
<i>Sabiha:</i> We had a lesson, <i>poribesh-o-amra</i> (the environment and us), in which we learned that we have to do a lot of things to keep our environment beautiful, like planting trees and flowers and not throwing trash. I cannot remember more, but I know in the village my father plants trees near our house. It is so beautiful. Birds sit on the branches and sing. We do not have any trees near our school. That makes me sad.

All three issues—pollution, cleanliness, and safety—were addressed by the children in this conversation. Several points can be gleaned from this conversation about environmental responsibility and how it impacted children’s understanding and navigation of their physical space at School “U.” First, the points mentioned by Shamim-Ara regarding school safety and cleanliness, were related to her vision of what the school represented. She and other female pupils agreed that since the toilet was closer, they felt safer using it. However, more importantly, school was a place of opportunity and learning, a place they “looked” up to, a place they must respect and keep clean. When she used the word “pure,” it was in the context of admiration, care, and a deep respect for her place of learning, where for the first time she was given the opportunity to be a team leader, help others, and was valued as a student. She and most of the other girls appreciated this about their school and stated that girls could be heard, listened to, and speak up at this school, the same as boys. Although at times the boys were more outspoken (as displayed by Fahim, who spoke about peanuts in the above conversation), female team leaders were able to counter this by displaying confidence and leadership in group situations and activities, ranging from drawing and cleaning to memorizing English phrases.

The children also appreciated learning about the environment in their school curriculum and tried to apply that to their lives, as mentioned by Shamim-Ara. For Sabiha, that was also the case; she wished to one day have the opportunity to plant trees, mentioning how she was elated when she saw her father practice what she had learned at school. Sabiha’s statement reflects that her and others alike grasped, or at the very least became aware of, ways that individuals could keep the school and neighbouring environment cleaner and greener. Learning about and caring for the environment, as outlined in the *Index for Inclusion*, should be an integral and essential aspect of any inclusive school curriculum. BRAC’s schools did address that topic and, in speaking with the children, what they were learning at school was bringing small changes in some of their everyday practices.

Dislike Motifs

The children highly valued the opportunity to come to school where community, belongingness, and ownership were tangible experiences. However, within the process of building their school community by navigating its physical space, there were some elements that the children disliked—elements that hindered the successful navigation of that space. From the children’s perspectives, these were 1) interruptions and 2) a lack of some school items.

Interrupting and distracting.

The schools were located in very busy and semi-busy locales of the city of Dhaka. While School “U” was in the center of a bustling hub, just beside a car garage, School “M” was located inside a conclave of half-built buildings surrounded by some open space. This did not create a serene environment at either school. During the *adda* sessions, one of team leaders at School “U” (first paragraph) and a boy at School “M” (second paragraph), stated:

Yes, if we had trees and not these cars and garages [there would be] less noise [in our school]. I would feel safer if some of those boys outside did not peek in all the time. Sometimes the boys at our school make a mess and they don’t clean after and Monir *bhai* (the oldest boy in the school) has to do everything. Madam tells them not to do this. They listen but when she is not there they do *dushtami* (naughtiness). These are the same boys who skip school or come late sometimes. We must all come to school every day, on time, and keep our school clean together. (Farin, 12, School “U”)

Sometimes when we are in the middle of a lesson, and my mother shows up at school and asks for *Apa* I feel a little bad. Maybe she should come when school is finished and I feel nervous will she show up right now? But she can’t sometimes. She has work. Then PO *Apa* comes and all the adults talk and we wait. Then I think [actually this is] fun. We can skip some of the reading but then our group leaders tell us to focus. I can’t focus. I think about the clock ticking away. (Aryan, 11, School “M”)

Outside distractions were something that negatively impacted the physical space of both schools. There are several issues with outside distractions that have to be unpacked. As pointed out from the quotes above, and in cross-checking them with the findings from the questionnaire and children’s lists on dislikes,

outside distractions included too much noise and interruptions caused by outside visitors, peer tardiness, and strange troublemakers peeking in.

As I observed, noise was definitely an issue of concern, especially at School “U” where the teacher often had to speak very loudly. There was always a cacophony of outside noise from honking of cars or yelling neighbours, which created a generally loud and distractive atmosphere. The windows could not be closed as it was hot, even in the middle of December and, more importantly, the open windows were the only source of light for the school. The children did not let the noise get change their desire to attend school, but they did wish for a more serene environment. Many mentioned that if the school were surrounded by trees, like their home village, it would be far more pleasant. One of the male student’s photos at school “U” represented this point quite well. While none of the children photographed any dislikes, this photo displays a like or “wish” that explains the reasons behind his dislike of noisiness.

Image 6.5. Monir's Photo and Voice



I have taken a picture of the *talgach* (Palm Tree). My reasons are:

1. I like this tree. The *talgach* is so tall. Every time I want to look up to it, I have to stretch my neck. *Apa* said if we study, one day we will stand tall like the *talgach*.
2. If we had a *talgach* outside our school it would give shade to our school. Sometimes it is so hot in here. If we had shade...aaaah it would be so cool and nice in here.
3. If we had *talgaach* we would hear birds sing...not people shout.
4. We have many *talgach* in my village. I can sit under its shade when I go to my village. Birds make nests in trees.
5. If we had a *talgach* outside school we could sit there also. I miss *talgach* in Dhaka city.

(Monir, 13, School "U")

Clearly, this student stated that having more trees would make the school more serene, quiet, and cool. Trees would even separate the school from the surrounding noisiness and buildings. It would also give him (and other children) a space to rest outside, a place to sit and play “under a cool, shady tree” during their short breaks.

Interruptions were the second most prevalently quoted problem within the physical space of the school. At any point in time a visitor—the program officer, a parent, or a neighbour—could and did show up at both schools. I intruded into the schools in the same manner; BRAC officials knew about my imminent arrival, but the children did not, especially not the first or second time I came. Although they enjoyed and appreciated the arrival of guests, outside distractions did hamper their learning and took away from class time. The teachers at both schools very conscientiously tried to make up from the lost time, but they mentioned that this was not always easy and their pupils held a similar opinion.

For example, Farin quotes many reasons why time gets lost and clarifies that she does not like latecomers. Neither did she find it appropriate that curious passers-by would sometimes stop to inspect the school. Similarly, Aryan stated his embarrassment when his mother came to school in the middle of a lesson, when the teacher had to pause to direct her attention to her. Neither children

commented specifically on the interruptions by officials and teachers (the other adult visitors), but generally indicated their yearning for a less distracting environment. Seventeen students at School “U,” wrote that one of their most disliked happenings at school was *hoi choi*, which means noisiness and distractions.

Culturally, privacy is not a common practice and it is not highly valued in Bangladesh. Furthermore, the young children I worked with did not have living spaces that were private by any means, as most of them lived in one-room homes and shared the space with siblings, parents, and in many cases even grandparents.⁴¹ Therefore, most had probably not even experienced privacy in its most basic form, “a characterization of the special interest we have in being able to be free from certain kinds of intrusions” (Thomas Scanlon, as cited in Rachels, 1975).

When speaking about privacy, I observed that it was not a conceptualized idea in their minds and they did not articulate a need for it. However, they clearly expressed a sense of wanting more personal learning space while at school and they stated that they did not want to always feel that anyone passing by could and should easily interrupt their class. In other words, children wished to have some advance notification about visitors. Some of the female children also commented that BRAC officials should do something about curious passers-by, especially young male gawkers or “peekers” who sometimes made objectionable and discomfoting comments towards them through the schools’ open windows.

Lack of learning materials.

The next issue that broke the essence of the physical space at the schools was a lack of certain learning materials. At the BRAC schools, all the children are given the same items: the required textbooks for that year of study (e.g., English, Maths, Social Studies/Environment, and Bengali), an equivalent number of notebooks, writing utensils (pencils, pens, an eraser, and a pencil sharpener),

⁴¹ Due to my past work with BRAC, I am familiar with the kinds of home settings and socio-economic backgrounds these children have. I have visited the homes of several BRAC students on several occasions.

counting sticks, a ruler (or scale), slate, cleaning materials, a few pieces of chalk, and a small basket organizer. In the picture below from the New York Times, the items each child receives upon enrolment can be seen.

Image 6.6. Jamalpur School



Classes at the BRAC basic school of Jamalpur, a village near Dhaka, Bangladesh, in 2007.

Credit: *Tomas Munita* for The New York Times from an article by Tina Rosenberg.

Supplementary school materials include big and small storybooks, posters, cards, sticks, clocks, and maps. These materials tend to be written in simple language and use motivational illustrations. The examples used in these resources are linked to learners' life-experiences, adequate activities are provided, and content transition is progressive (Dfat, 2015). They also address issues crosscutting advocacy on gender, disability, and social inclusion. In the final two years of schooling, BRAC students use government textbooks in preparation for the government examinations as they prepare to transition into high school (Dfat, 2015).

As an organization, BRAC aims to provide children with continuous material support. Nevertheless, when I spoke to the children, the scarcity of items surfaced as the second most common "item" of dislike. Some of those had to do with personal items, such as wishing for more pens, pencils, notebooks, or chalk, while others wanted more supplementary materials, both new and replacements. In the table below, I have outlined the findings from School "U" in responding to the question, "*It would have been better if we had 'X' at school*"

Table 6.6: Items “Wished for” at School “U”

Personal: Additional: (A)/ New (N)	Supplementary: Additional (A)/ New (N)	Outlier
-Slate (A) <i>-I want to have it as a backup in case the first gets lost.</i>	-Paints (A) <i>-I need them to draw more.</i>	-Personal Watch <i>-I want to wear it to school and look at the time.</i>
-English, Environment, Bengali, Mathematics textbooks (A) <i>-I want to have it as a backup in case the first gets lost or torn.</i>	-Fan (N) <i>-I need it to keep cool.</i>	
-Erasers, Pencils, Chalk, and/or Pens (A) <i>I want to have it as a backup in case the first gets lost, finishes, or gets left at home.</i>	-Clock (A) <i>-I am scared that the clock on the wall might fall and break, so another one should be put on the opposite wall.</i>	
-Notebook for writing (A) <i>-I want to have it as a backup in case the first runs out. Also, if we had more notebooks we could practice our handwriting.</i>	-Magazines and/or Newspapers (N) <i>-I like reading magazines or seeing the pictures in them.</i>	
	-Pitcher (A) <i>-One time our pitcher almost fell and broke. I was scared we would not have water that day. So we have one in case that one we drink from breaks.</i>	
	Flag (A) <i>-I want to another flag of my country at school. Everyone loves the flag. I like looking at it and the way it makes me feel.</i>	
	Many-pages story book (Short Novel) N <i>-I always finish reading the assignments fast then I wish I could read a storybook. Maybe Tuni's story could be longer and I would borrow it from school and read it at home.</i>	

Speaking in more detail one child stated:

I have problems seeing the [black]board so [they have] moved me to the front [of the class]. But I like to sit at the back...close to my friend. [So], I would like to see better maybe have glasses? Everyone at school loves me I know but still... (Meera, 10, School “M”)

Meera received her corrective vision surgery. However, it is clear that her feelings towards lagging behind and her activities in relation to where she sits and what she does in the class are still complicated because she did not have glasses. At this school, the teacher's son also had a vision problem. Similarly, for him, it was about affording prescription glasses, which BRAC does not provide (only surgery if required). Right before my entry into the school, his glasses broke and he and his mother were hoping to afford a new pair in the near future. He was attending school with a taped pair of glasses during my observation periods. At BRAC, providing children with the equipment they require is a priority, however, as apparent from my time at School "M," there is room for improvement. This relates to an idea I discussed in Chapter 2 on the cult of efficiency, as BRAC prides itself in its target driven numerical achievements. For example, the total number of special needs children at BPS by the end of December 2013 was 462 621, covering seven different regions of Bangladesh from Rajshahi to Dhaka. Up until that time, BRAC had completed 403 eye operations, 6145 eye treatments, 2760 ear treatments, 10 ear operations, and 91 students undergoing some form of psychological treatment or help. A large number of other devices have also been provided; for example, 934 schools ramps were built, 217 children were provided hearing aids, and 83 children have received artificial limbs. Most of BRAC's medical services are conducted by affiliated local hospitals and, currently, a majority of the funding for these services comes from its social enterprises.

BRAC's focus on meeting numerical targets for school improvement hinders the act of school improvement itself. In other words, overall school improvement and dealing with micro-level issues become secondary to the targets they have to meet in terms of training, enrolment, device-provision, and raising awareness. Furthermore, even if training and awareness sessions are provided effectively and are well monitored by school stakeholders, in practice more work remains to be done in order to remove all the barriers to improving children's daily educational experiences. These barriers have to do with listening to children and taking their suggestions seriously. For this, BRAC has to slow down and de-prioritize pressures emanating from the cult of efficiency and focus

more on people and children at their existing schools. For example, instead of only concentrating on adding another student to their increasing list of “eye operations,” as with the case of Meera, BRAC officials need to sit and speak with Meera’s parents and search for a financial solution that can provide her with the glasses she needs, thus, successfully removing an additional barrier to her classroom engagement.

In addition, as outlined in Table 6.6, many of the children also yearned for and noted the lack of back-up or new items that could make their stay at the school more pleasant and their overall experiences better. However, it is not practical for BRAC to provide all the children with their requested “back-up” or “new” items. What can be done, in this case, is direct action against damaging, losing, or forgetting books, pencils, slates, and scales. Furthermore, some of the supplementary items the children yearned for can easily be supplied by neighbours or parents, such as a fan or old magazines and newspapers. Finally, the teacher or program officers can help the desire for novels by loaning children old personal books of theirs for short periods of time.

Major Concentration Area 2: Relational Aspects

At school, relationships with peers, teachers, and other stakeholders are sometimes even more important than academic pursuits. This can be interpreted as another central aspect of building school culture. As explained by Booth (2005), relationships underscore the very soul of school, which is a place where individuals meet and leave everlasting impressions on one another—both positive and negative. Yet, when individuals go to school, especially young children, they do not receive any guidance on how to deal with the people they meet and the kinds of relationships they forge with them. Being socially able is perceived as natural and easy, even though research and lived experience have proven that this is hardly the case. Many children conquer and rise above, some manage quite well, some just about manage, but others suffer continuously in trying to understand out how the diverse bonds they create with others—as they spend a large portion of their day at school—impacts them. In essence, building and breaking relationships are unavoidable for socially active, human children who

attend school; it is part of what children do and it is key for an inclusive school because, without positive peer and teacher relationships, inclusive education fails. So for the BRAC schools where I did my research, what did fostering these positive relations mean and, according to the children, what worked and what did not?

This concentration area number two deals with unpacking the intricacies and dynamics of relationships and how they shape the BRAC schools and impact their inclusivity. The positive aspects that surfaced from the children were the fact that diversity is cherished in the schools and that building valuable relationships with peers and teachers is appreciated and practiced. The aspects that negatively impacted relationships for the children were discord, such as quarrelling and feeling marginalized due to losing individual voices in the crowd. In the following sections, I unpack the “like” aspects first, and then the “dislikes.”

Like Motifs

Before I can unpack the findings on these topics, it is essential to define the concepts I use, such as diversity and relationships (or friendships), how the value of the former defines the latter, and why both are central to IE.

In its most basic understanding, diversity refers to the racial and ethnic differences in society (Ghosh, 2011). More broadly, diversity is related to the variations of race, gender, social class, sexual orientation, disability, age, and values and beliefs concerning the self-evident moral good in society (Haidt, Rosenberg, & Hom, 2003). Increasingly, schools across the world have started to closely mirror the diversity that exists in the outside world and, even in relatively homogenous societies like Bangladesh, “school diversity” is a reality. Diversity existed at the BRAC schools through religion, age, gender, and ability, as shown in Table 4.3. As for religion, at School “M,” for example, there were three Hindu students representing the small community of Hindus inhabiting Morkun. There was obvious gender diversity, as BRAC aims to have female majority representation in the schools, and due to the organization’s goal to be more “inclusive,” children with mild and moderate disabilities are intentionally recruited to the schools. I did not collect exact numbers on the overall differences

I observed in the dialects children spoke. Thus, while the children spoke Bengali, they used different dialects depending on the part of the country they migrated from.

Recognizing the subtlety in some of those differences and the starkness in others, and seeing “difference” as positive or an asset, was essential for the children in order to build valuable relationships at the schools. Valuable relationships can be defined as two-way long-term exchanges based on mutual respect and connections that are built between individuals, in which each person adds to the positive emotional and mental growth of the other. These transpired amongst children and between adults and children. As the schools operated on a four-year term, if the children opened up to the diversity present at their schools, then they were not only better able to adjust to the school environment, but also contributed to the valuable relationships they negotiated every single day. Hence, they were better able to meet the social challenges associated with being a valuable peer and a recipient and giver of affection, in other words, a friend in their school community. Being open made it much easier for children and it impacted both their perceived and received social and emotional support from their peers.

For many of these children, coming to school was in itself a first time opportunity and this directly impacted their behaviour at each step. Many behaved in “prescribed ways,” in which they always spoke about valuing each other with regard to perceived differences, whether about religion, age, gender, or ability. It was very difficult to dig deeper into that understanding. As such, it is very important to be aware of that aspect in understanding the findings I present in the following sections.

Capitalizing on diversity.

When the issue of diversity was unpacked, the children portrayed the school very positively. At school, diversity did not have to be “embraced,” as children did not essentially see difference at a macro level (ability or religion, for example) and everyone worked together to make sure that the school was a safe and welcoming place for disabled, vulnerable, and newly-arrived children.

Furthermore, the children believed that the differences between them were not hindrances, but rather advantages in their educational journeys.

In observing and talking to the children, diversity amongst and between them were described and accepted in a detailed fashion, rather than on a large scale. For example, once in the classroom, it did not matter to the children that their peers were from different villages, that some practiced a different religion, or that one had artificial limbs. A similar finding was reported in a study Messiou (2002) conducted on marginalization, where a disabled boy viewed his difference in the classroom based not on his disability, but because he had to wear a religious cap. Similarly, what the children expressed as elements of difference and diversity were based on issues that divided them in the classroom and things they did on a daily basis; for example, the team leaders versus the rest of the students, the students who never forgot their books or slates at home and the ones who did, the pupils who always participated and the ones who did not, and the girls who came to school better dressed than the rest. Many of the children appreciated this difference because it was about educational improvement, that is, they strived to be more like the leaders or the engaged students, and “looked up to them.” There were, however, a handful of students who did not share this view. For these children, they valued difference and diversity, but believed a few of their peers had an unfair advantage, either at home or at school. Children’s perspectives illustrate these points through their free associative writings:

I come to school with my friend. I like my school, because I can see the happy faces of my friends. I [also] love my school [because] I can learn from my team leader. Get help on English homework. Sometimes, I forget one textbook at home. Then I can look at her one [during the group activity]. It is good she never forgets her book. She is a good team-leader. She never forgets. I wish I could also always remember. (Shagor, 11, School “U”)

I feel bad sometimes, some of the girls come to school without properly brushing their hair. One day I saw, that girl’s dress is torn. As the team leader, I want to help. I notice she had dress torn not me. Even if we are all living in the same neighbourhood, at home our lives are not the same. Naima...

At school, we are more same sometimes. (Sunaina, 11, School “U”)

I like the big group. I do well in a big group. In the small group the leader always has all the answers. *Apa* loves the leaders. My friends tell me *Apa* loves me too. But I don't know any answers. (Tumin, 9, School "U")

Tumin's words demonstrate that he suspected the team leaders were favoured, as the teacher usually singled them out during performances for visitors. Leaders also got a lot of the attention during the small group sessions because they were in charge of keeping group decorum and making sure tasks were done on time. Some of the children that could not become team leaders, as female leadership is preferred at BRAC schools, resented this, creating an understated but still present form of division in the schoolhouses.

However, the sentiment expressed by Tumin does not undercut the fact that, on the whole, the children "did not see" the apparent differences in their peers that the adults would—labels such as able-bodied or representing a minority community. When I spoke about "diversity," that itself was a "non-issue," the majority of the children did not see such differences and did not state that they had to take any additional steps in order to "embrace" each other. Everybody was already a "friend." According to the children, anyone who was in the community could and should access the school and school was definitely a place where everyone got along well together. It was also up to them to create a safe school environment. In the questionnaire, some questions specifically addressed the theme of diversity.

Table 6.7. Valuing Diversity Questionnaire Questions

Questions about: VALUING DIVERSITY			
TOTAL RESPONDENTS "U:" 34/36 TOTAL RESPONDENTS "M:" 27/30	I Agree	I Don't Know	I Disagree
	U---M	U---M	U---M
Any child who lives near the school is welcome to come here.	34---27	0---0	0---0
Children are kind to each other at the school.	29---26	3---1	1---0
Boys and girls get on well together.	34---25	0---0	0---2
It's good to have children from different backgrounds at my school.	33---25	1---1	0---1
Children with special needs are respected and accepted at my school.	32---25	1---2	1---0

In discussing these questions during one of the *adda* sessions, the following conversation at School “M” surfaced.

Table 6.8. Excerpt from *Adda* Session-“Discussing diversity” at School “M”

<i>Tahiya:</i> Ok, so now we will speak about our peers at this school. We answered questions such as “Any child who lives near the school is welcome here” and also “It is good to have children from different backgrounds at this school.” Background means home environment or religious belief. Who wants to say something?
<i>After a long pause and silence, the teacher urges the children to speak.</i>
<i>Teacher:</i> Say something. If you don’t remember, you can speak about the lesson we had on “Our Neighbours” the other day. Remember I told you how we should live with them in friendship and harmony? There are no right or wrong answers. What about you Fadila (team leader) or you Russell?
<i>Russell, aged 10, raises his hand to speak</i>
<i>Russell:</i> I love coming to school and drawing lines on my slate with my friends. One day we had a competition when we came to school early. We can all draw the lines the same. So we are not different.
<i>Fadila, aged 10, steps in.</i>
<i>Fadila:</i> I think everyone who lives around this school can come here. From my street, three of us do... (<i>voice trails off</i>). My friend here Meera, did not go to school before, so good now that she does. And I do too. Sometimes I don’t understand why our neighbours fight. My neighbour yells <i>galis</i> (curse words). In school we are all sisters. We don’t fight. We are safe here.
<i>Then Sania, aged 10, who is also Meera’s friend, raises her hand to speak. Before that, for a brief moment, she and Meera whisper a bit to decide who would do the speaking. Sania speaks.</i>
<i>Sania:</i> One day Meera here told me that before she came to this school, she had no friends, only cousins. She also could not see...now at school she can see, <i>smiles</i> , I am her friend, <i>grins</i> . I love her and because of my school and PO sir she is here. <i>Apa</i> taught us to love each other and our neighbours and friends. We repeated in our lessons that everyone is the same. Isn’t it so <i>Apa</i> ?
<i>Teacher:</i> Yes, <i>Apa</i> , as you know, we recently did the lesson “Our Neighbours.” You were here that day. It’s a very good lesson for my children.

At School “U,” a photo taken by one of the students embodied a similar message, that disability or difference is not a reason to stay out of school, and most children in this school did not even notice the different labels adults used to define a child. At school, a disability was much less important than his or her role as a contributing member. Further, some children stated that having disabled

peers is advantageous. The picture below gives another example of those sentiments.

Image 6.7. Shefali's Photo and Voice



I have taken a picture of the lesson "Pupli's Words".
My reasons are:

1. Pupli is a disabled girl. She is different from us but wants to come to school. We are different...some of us...but we can study together. I like that.
2. When in school does it matter that Tamoni has a wooden leg? She still knows all the answers.
3. Everyone should come to school. I have always wanted that and Pupli is a brave girl who shows that. We can all learn from a girl like Pupli.

(Shefali, 11, School "U")

Shefali's thoughts really sparked my interest and so, when I got a chance, I spoke to her personally. In our conversation, the issues mentioned above and her reasoning came through. Shefali said that since she has become a student at the BRAC school, she deliberately wanted to be Tamoni's friend, although Tamoni is not in her peer group. So before and after school, she made sure to speak with her to ask her how her day went because Tamoni was always so good in all her subjects. Then Shefali explained how she always noticed her answering questions in class and helping her peers in the small group, she didn't even know that Tamoni had an artificial limb. She said,

At first, I didn't even see nor understand she has one missing limb. Then one day I found out. But even after that she comes to school and knows all the studies. I felt like I should study more. (Shefali, 11, School "U")

Shefali was not able to articulate it, but it seems she did feel admiration for Tamoni. Also, she seemed to recognize that Tamoni did not let her disability get in her way of completing her school tasks. I also observed that Tamoni worked very hard, sometimes harder than her peers, during assignments, always receiving praise for her handwriting, listening carefully to directions, and being a

helpful member of her group. Her peers valued this contribution and her leg was a non-issue in the classroom. At the end of our conversation, Shefali stated that people who have a disability, but dream to go to school show courage, like her friend Tamoni or the girl Pupli. She could learn to have more courage from them and, like Tamoni, step up and sing when visitors come to school. Therefore, learning how to be a more courageous performer from her disabled friend was valuable to Shefali. In speaking with Tamoni and Meera, two special-needs girls at School “U” and School “M” respectively, I found the following:

My leg problem kept me out of school...but not this school. Here I feel welcome and safe. I am good at drawing and I show my friends how to draw a bird or a vase. We all need friends. I want that everyone can go to school. Everyone. (Tamoni, 10, School “U”)

I love coming to school to see the smiling faces of my friends. I can help them and they can help me in school. *Apa* always makes me feel happy here and the PO sirs are nice to me. When I first came it was like that. It is still like that. (Meera, 10, School “M”)

They also reiterated themes of safety and contribution, keeping their “disability” as a marginal issue. In many ways, they showed more ability than their peers by being scholastic or creative assets to others.

At the core of valuing each other lay the children’s positive relational experiences with their peers and teachers. This is not to say that quarrelling and teasing did not exist at either school; it did, as I will unpack in the following section. However, positive relationship building experiences were much more frequent than negative ones. At the center of this process lay three essential points: 1) the integral role of the teacher as described by the children; 2) the children’s sense of responsibility and harmony to each other as friends and as supporters who help one another succeed in their school work; and 3) the children valuing their opportunity to go to school from their home and community, during and outside of school hours. Together, these shaped how children viewed the school as a place to build valuable relationships over their four-year term. Detailed discussions of each follow.

The teacher orchestrating knowledge and support.

In their short write-ups and poems at School “U,” 20 out of 36 children mentioned their teacher. In the table below, I have selected the statements children used to describe their teacher and their relationship with her. Some of the statements were very similar, if not identical. In that case, I have indicated the number of times that statement appears in the write-ups.

Table 6.9. School “U” Pupils’ Perspectives on Their Teacher

<i>Statements</i>	<i>Stated #</i>
a. Let’s go to school...Madam teaches us in an interesting way.	1
b. My <i>Apa</i> is so kind and good.	4
c. She teaches us many things very well.	2
d. I love to come to school because I can see the happy face of my Madam when I come here.	2
e. My madam likes/loves me very much.	4
f. I love Madam very much.	2
g. Madam teaches us...I learn from her...She gives us work on slate. I learn to write on slate from her.	1
h. One day, Madam told me she likes those who never miss class. From that day on I never miss class. I come to school every day.	1
i. Madame gives us homework. We do our homework at home. Madame knows what needs practice.	2
j. <i>Apa</i> teaches me so that I can do well. So that one day I can grow up and have a job. Be rich.	1
k. One day, I said, “ <i>Apa</i> , I love your bangles.” So she told me she would buy me bangles.	1
l. Our miss teaches us with joy.	1
m. Our miss teaches us so one day we can be established.	1
n. <i>Apa</i> gives us a lot of time. She tells me try again when I cannot understand the first time. She shows me again and again.	1
o. I always tell <i>Apa</i> if I get teased at school.	4
p. My relationship with my Madame is very important to me.	2
TOTAL NUMBER OF STATEMENTS RELATED TO THE TEACHER	30
TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS WHO WROTE ABOUT THEIR TEACHER	20
9 STUDENTS WROTE MORE THAN ONE STATEMENT (i.e., the same student wrote comment b and c)	

For children, their relationship with their teacher was vital for their emotional wellbeing and growth at the school. At each school, they recognized the teacher's kindness and valued her giving them time when they did not understand something at first. They regularly saw her joy when they came to school and appreciated learning new things from her, such as writing on the slate. They said she taught them many different interesting topics. They understood the importance of homework, when it was assigned (homework is kept at a minimum at BRAC schools), and stated that their teacher was there to help them "get established." Getting established meant securing a future through education. Although this was still a very far off goal for many of them, perhaps still even unrealistic for some, the children understood that right now this opportunity they had with their teacher at BRAC was a crucial step towards that future. The teacher also played a motherly role, as previously explained, being someone who could be trusted when children had bad experiences, like teasing. Moreover, the children looked up to her and wanted to please her, as explained by one of the pupils who wrote she never misses class since her *Apa* told her she favours those who come to school regularly. In short, the teacher played a several roles in the classroom—the holder of knowledge and provider trust, safety, and leadership. The children also played some of these roles at varying moments in the classroom; however, the person of authority on a consistent basis was the teacher and the children recognized her authority. This acknowledgement led them on a daily route of negotiation and re-negotiation that fostered a healthy relationship between them. I spoke to the teacher very briefly at School "U." She stated:

I have been teaching at BRAC for many years now. I have graduated two other sets of students. My husband and my neighbours ask me, how I do it? I tell them I do it with love. I view each of my pupils with love and care and can see when someone needs more help. Even if we often have interruptions, like when we have visitors and if come to class a little late due to my health, my students finish their lessons and yearly curriculum in a timely manner. If you see the handwriting and speaking ability of my students, you will notice that, for Grade 3, they are advanced. This is because I am not afraid to spend the extra time I need on them. They also know I am always here for them. Ending each day on a happy note, finishing our tasks, is so important for my school.

Similarly, the teacher at School “M” played multiple roles. As discussed in a previous section, hers was centered on a motherly role whilst completing her teaching tasks in the classroom. She also shared an amicable relationship with her children, in some ways even more than the teacher at School “U,” and her pupils’ valued building on this relationship in order to succeed. Below, I have presented the questions posed by the questionnaire that specifically addressed the role of the teacher in the classroom, followed by an excerpt from the follow-up *adda* sessions that took place at school “M.”

Table 6.10. Addressing the Teacher Questionnaire Questions

Questions about: TEACHER’S ROLES			
	I Agree	I Don't Know	I Disagree
TOTAL RESPONDENTS “U:” 34/36 TOTAL RESPONDENTS “M:” 27/30			
	U---M	U---M	U---M
Adults are kind to children at the school.	34---27	0---0	0---0
I like my teacher.	34---27	0---0	0---0
If anyone bullies me or anyone else, I would tell my teacher.	34---25	0---2	0---0
Teachers stop children from making a fuss during lessons.	32---25	2---1	0---1
If I have a problem I can ask an adult for help.	32---25	1---2	1---0
Teachers do not have favorites among the children	32---24	2---1	0---1
If I have been away for a day, my teacher wants to know where I have been.	34---27	0---0	0---0
I think the teachers are fair when they praise a child.	34---27	0---0	0---0
I think the teachers are fair when they punish a child.	30---25	0---2	4---0
Teachers are interested in listening to my ideas.	27---24	3---3	4---0
Teachers don’t mind if I make mistakes as long as I try my best.	32---25	1---2	1---0
When I am given homework, I usually understand what I have to do .	31---24	3---3	0---0
<i>Apa</i> comes to school on time and stays here the whole time we are here.	30---27	2---0	2---0

Table 6.11. Excerpt from *Adda* Session–“Discussing our *Apa*” at School “M”

<i>Tahiya</i> : Ok, so now we will speak about your <i>Apa</i> . We can all see that <i>Apa</i> is here but there is no need to worry, you can speak your mind.
<i>Teacher</i> : Yes, there are no right or wrong answers. Please feel free to discuss whatever <i>Apa</i> [Tahiya] wants to.
<i>Tahiya</i> : Ok so we had questions such as “I think our teacher is fair when she praises or punishes,” or “The teacher is interested in listening to your ideas,” and “ <i>Apa</i> doesn’t mind if you make a mistake as long as you try.” “If you get teased, you can turn to <i>Apa</i> ?” Anyone want to start?
<i>Ridwan, aged 10, raises his hand to speak</i>
<i>Ridwan</i> : One day (long pause)....one day...I was hit by the ruler. Then I told <i>Apa</i> . She then spoke to my friend who did this. Never again.
<i>Rina, aged 11, steps in.</i>
<i>Rina</i> : If <i>Apa</i> ever hears a <i>gali</i> (curse word) in the school she stops us right away. She says school is for learning. We do not learn <i>galis</i> at school.
<i>Then Sania, aged 10, raises her hand</i>
<i>Sania</i> : We love our <i>Apa</i> . She teaches us so many new things. I think if someone does something wrong she corrects slowly. Never screaming. I like that about her. Also, she listens to us and helps us in our studies every day. I feel happy with <i>Apa</i> .
<i>Teacher</i> : Yes, <i>Apa</i> , as you know, it’s my job to keep the children safe and happy. I try my best every single day.

In discussing these questions at School “M,” themes similar to School “U” were uncovered, where the teacher is centrally important to the children. She provides them a safe zone of learning and study and resolves discord, although the children also depend on one another to create and uphold this safe zone.

Helping hands amongst peers.

At the core of the children’s friendship at both schools lay their perception of received and given “help,” in other words, their perception of their friends’ or peers’ sense of responsibility towards them, to help them succeed at school, created the basis of their harmonious and choral relationship. They also gave similar weight and importance to how they, as individuals, could give back. This does not mean children did not value friendships, or if support lacked they could not sustain their friendship; once the friendship was built, support did not matter

because the relationship was important and friendships were essential to their sense of belongingness and self. However, in order to become friends, the former was necessary for the majority of the children I spoke with at both schools.

This point was strongly highlighted in the write-up at School “U” when the children had to answer, “*Who is your best friend at school and why?*” Out of the 34 respondents, 23 stated, “*X is my best friend because s/he helps me in my studies.*” Outlier answers, which are equally important, ranged from being friends because one child gave another food when he was hungry, and running outside together, to finding shoes together, home visits, phone calls, walking to school together (in the case of Tamoni, it is to bring her to school), playing together, gossiping, and loving one another. Therefore, the base of the interaction that started the friendship was reciprocal action, in which one child had to do something for another, either once or repeatedly, to be labeled as a “friend.” Three of the students were very popular as friends and received more than one nomination, ranging specifically from two-four, while two students’ names were not mentioned in the friends list. This was a privately written activity and I specifically requested the children not to speak about it afterwards. Hence, in theory, the children were not supposed to know “if and how many times” they were nominated. However, I noticed several peeking attempts during the activity and whispering sessions after it. In short, for most of the children, the purpose of coming to school was very clear: they needed to study and do well. As a result, the relationships they built and valued had to support that cause in some way or another, at least in the beginning.

This did not mean that receiving and giving help was the only reason children valued their friends and believed in having positive relationships at school. For many, it was about finding a play partner, gossip partner, or someone outside a family member to share their thoughts with. For many of the children, this was their first opportunity to come to school and meet peers, and so school became synonymous with “fun,” allowing them to be part of a community with a purpose. Lina’s photograph clearly indicates that point.

Image 6.8. Lina's Photo and Voice



I have taken a picture of children playing together. My reasons are:

1. Look at how much fun the children are having. I feel like that girl in the middle.
2. [At school], I have good friends like this. We play together. Sing together. Walk together. And on weekends, [we meet to] play outside our homes sometimes.
3. When I go to my village, I play [like this with my] cousins there. Before I came to school, I used to be scared to play outside. [Now I feel] less scared.
4. I can tell my friends anything. I can scream [and] shout [also]. My older brother...never. My mother, also not.

(Lina, 12, School "U")

As children's friendships grew, so did their self-confidence. Their ideas underwent a transformation (e.g., Maisha's, which I discussed in a previous section). Furthermore, as pointed out by Lina, before she did not have the courage to play outside in the city and the village, but now she does because her friends have helped bring out her self-confidence. In addition, she is able to voice her opinions in a free and non-judgmental space, something she could not do with adults. Through this, she may be able to understand in time that she too has an opinion that counts.

Parental contributions.

The third most important aspect of relationships was support for their sense of being from the elders in the children's lives. This was linked to maintaining an amicable relationship with their parents and teachers and receiving their parents' active support for their efforts at school. This is not something that happened physically at the school, all the time. However, in deriving meaning from children's photos, discussions, and short-write-ups it became clear that 1) children knowing their parents are happy to be sending them to school, and 2) children knowing that their guardians and teachers got along well, was essential to their success at school.

During the photo-voice session at School “U,” Sima, one of the team leaders, clearly outlined her need for more support at home in order to do well at school.

Image 6.9. Sima’s Photo and Voice



I have taken a picture of the lesson “Tuni’s Exam.” My reasons are:

1. I like that everyone loves Tuni.
2. It shows Tuni in her kitchen.
3. Before her exam, Tuni’s mother is making sure she eats an egg. Her grandmother is also there.
4. Grandmother and mother want Tuni to do well in her exam.
5. My mother takes care of me.

(Sima, 10, School “U”)

Similarly, in the write-ups at School “U,” children expressed statements such as:

- “I can see my mother and father’s smiling face when I tell them about what I learned at school.”
- “Mother tells me to pay attention at school.”
- “My grandmother feeds me sugar-bread whenever I do well in my assignments.”
- “My father told me he wants me to be a ‘big’ man one day.”
- “My father was very happy and proud to see the picture I took for Tahiya *Apa* at school.”
- “I am happy when I know my mother and father are happy because I go to school.”

At School “M,” guardian support was just as important and it was made clear during the questionnaire and *adda* sessions. In addition, it was essential that the children know their parents and teachers had a good relationship for their happiness and success at school. The questionnaire and following *adda* session at this school shed further light on this discussion.

Table 6.12. Role of Parents and Guardians Questionnaire Questions

Questions about: PARENTS and GUARDIANS			
TOTAL RESPONDENTS "U:" 34/36 TOTAL RESPONDENTS "M:" 27/30	I Agree	I Don't Know	I Disagree
	U---M	U---M	U---M
I like to tell my family what I have done at school.	34---27	0---0	0---0
My family feels involved in what goes on at the school.	28---26	2---1	4---0

Table 6.13. Excerpt from *Adda* Session-“Discussing our Parents” at School “M”

<i>Tahiya:</i> Ok, so now we will speak about your parents...your mom and dad. Do you think they feel like they know about what happens at school? Do you show them your schoolwork? Anyone want to say something?
<i>Ridwan, aged 10, raises his hand to speak</i>
<i>Ridwan:</i> One day (long pause)...one day...I showed my mother what I drew at school. She was so happy.
<i>Suimui, aged 11, steps in.</i>
<i>Suimui:</i> If my mother comes to school, <i>Apa</i> always speaks to her nicely with a smiling face.
<i>Then , Meera aged 10, raises his hand</i>
<i>Meera:</i> I know our <i>Apa</i> loves my mother very much. They meet during the meetings. Like that day when you were here they met. They talk, hug, and shake hands. Before my mother did not send me to school. Now she does.
<i>Then , Rohini aged 11, raises her hand</i>
<i>Rohini:</i> Yes, my grandmother is so happy I come to school. She never went to school and lives in the village. I tell her all my stories when I meet her. My grandmother grins and gives me <i>ador</i> (petting and cuddles) and says, “ <i>tui ekdin boro hobi</i> ” (One day you will be someone).

Many of the parents and guardians of these children are illiterate,⁴² but when their children are able to share new things they learn at school, their feelings of pride were reflected in their words. One of the parents came up to me told me personally during her attendance at the consent meeting at School “M:”

Through our children, we too can learn new things. Like we are learning that people from abroad countries want to work with them. Or, even things like the importance of not polluting our environment, or how to do some simple multiplications. I am happy my child is finally going to school and she knows that I will always support her. I tell *Apa* that together we are working for the betterment of our children’s future. She is always so kind to our children. We are good friends now. (Parent of female student at School “M;” *Words noted with permission during informal conversation*)

Her daughter, Nishi, stood next to her as she spoke to me and her words reassured the young pupil. Nishi beamed with happiness—she was not only attending school but was one of the group leaders. Then, as she nodded and smiled earnestly at her mother, signalling something, her mother took my hand to show me her artwork on the walls of the school.

Dislike Motifs

As pointed out by Crozier and Dimmock (1999) and Messiou (2002), discord and absenteeism marginalization are prevalent and hurtful features of student school experience across the globe. In a study with two British primary schools looking at 60 pupils, it was found that over 20 per cent of the children experienced nasty comments and unkind nicknames on a daily basis, such as those targeting the child’s appearance, ethnic background, family, etc. (Crozier & Dimmock, 1999). Name-calling is cross-culturally the most frequent act of bullying in 8- to 12-year-olds in many different countries (Baldry, 1998; Bentley & Li, 1995). A recent study conducted in West Bengal, India revealed that one of the major problems faced by teachers in integrated schools was dealing with the bullying of hearing impaired children by the “normal children” (Bhattarcharya & Mukherjee, 2013). In a previous study with BRAC, I discovered that hand hitting,

⁴² This information was given to me from BRAC’s head office.

ruler hitting, and slapping were commonly experienced between the children at BRAC schools (Mahbub, 2008). Therefore, almost all children experience some of the effects of negative behaviours at one point or another in their school journeys, and BRAC is no exception. However, a few unique points surfaced during this study: in addition to the teasing and hitting, children experienced quarrelling, disruptive behaviour, lateness, lying, and losing voice at school. I have grouped all of these experiences that children disliked under the umbrella of “student discord.” The word discord reflects the context of Bangladesh and BRAC in particular, where the children found themselves in shorter spurts of conflict rather ones that can go on for days.

According to the children, quarrelling involved any period of heated argument and loud yelling between a student and his or her peer. Disruptive behaviours included laughing, walking, making noise, and generally creating disturbances during class hours. Lateness involved wandering into class late on a regular basis. Lying involved being untruthful about anything, from why homework was not done to being late to class or skipping school entirely. Stealing involved taking materials that belong to the school or to peers without permission. And, finally, losing voice involved getting drowned out in a cacophony of noise and not being respected when attempting to speak, so that the child is no longer able to state what he or she wanted to others.

Discordance amongst peers.

Peer discord was a reality at the BRAC schools and it came out in the form of quarrelling, name-calling, physical fights, and disruptive behaviours. Moreover, the children agreed that this hindered their learning and generally caused pain. In practice, they showed a range of these behaviours to varying degrees throughout my time at the schools. They also reported experiences of these behaviours, done both by them and to them, individually or in a group making it difficult to detach each and discuss them separately. Instead, I give examples below of when I observed any one or a mix of these behaviours and how children viewed their negative peer experiences in the schoolhouse. Out of the 34 respondents at School “U,” “quarrelling” or “shouting at each other,” “disruptive

behaviour,” and “physical fights” were the top dislikes for 20 students. At School “M,” this number was 12 out of 28 for the same topics. The top five cited reasons for each dislike are detailed below and the data is from both schools.

Table 6.14. Reasons for Top Dislikes

<p>I dislike quarrelling/shouting at one another because:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It creates loud noises in the school. 2. It breaks my concentration. 3. It hurts my feelings. 4. Friends are not supposed to shout at each other. 5. After a quarrel, my friend and I don’t speak for days.
<p>I dislike <i>Galagali</i> (name-calling) because:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It is very embarrassing and painful. 2. It is a sin. 3. In the books, we learn not to hurt one another. 4. It breaks friendships. 5. Mother and father did not teach us to swear and disrupt the class.
<p>I dislike disruptive behaviour because:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It impacts our daily schedule. 2. I cannot hear <i>Apa</i> if someone makes noise close to my ear. 3. There is already so much outside noise. Inside it should be quiet. 4. Adults call us naughty children. 5. We go to school. Children who do not go to school create <i>hoi choi</i> (noisiness).
<p>I dislike physical fights because:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Someone can get hurt on his or her arm, head, stomach, or leg. 2. After a fight, nobody wants to be your friend. 3. Adults call us bad children if we fight. 4. It is a big waste of school time. 5. <i>Apa</i> does not like students who fight.

It is apparent that the children did not like these negative experiences. Many feared losing the faith of their friends, teacher, and parents if they behaved negatively. Others knew it caused pain and suffering and did not want to be recipients of negative behaviour and, as a result, understood the importance of refraining from it. Some even had religious reasons for disliking negative behaviours. Yet many did behave negatively in the classroom and most were at some point a receiver or giver of this negative behaviour, thus causing or bearing hindrance and/or pain.

Quarrelling.

Quarrelling in both the large group setting and small groups was a reality for the children at both BRAC schools. I witnessed it during my observations and the children mentioned it during other methodological activities. A majority of the children disliked quarrelling with their peers, but did it anyway, especially when they were compelled to do so or when they were threatened. This was especially true between leaders and non-leaders. At School “U,” this issue arose during the photovoice activity, as children had to wait their turn to take the pictures in their groups since I only had two cameras going around. Even if we established the order of the photographs beforehand, as I mentioned in my methodology, many children were not pleased to go last or second-last. In one of the groups at School “U,” an argument ensued when the shyest girl randomly picked chit #1 and one of the most outspoken boys of the group picked chit #4.

Table 6.15. Photovoice Quarrel from Observation Notes

Grabbing chit #1 from the shy pupil’s hands, he says, “She won’t manage, let me do it first.” The shy girl complies and lets him grab the chit out of her hand. She doesn’t say anything. Right then, the team leader steps in and says, “She picked # 1. Let her do it!” She hands the chit back to the shy pupil. The boy resists and says, “She gave it to me, why do you care?” The team leader steps up and says, “I am the leader of his team. Listen to me.” The boy refutes, “What if I don’t? Always your wish?”

Then I step in to stop the argument before it gets more out of hand. I explain to the children that it is essential that the order be maintained as everyone will get to use the cameras. There is no rush. However, throughout the whole process of the activity, the outspoken boy remains restless and eager. He disrupts each student in his or her attempt to take the photo and tries to show them how to do it properly, until an adult comes and stops him. I am having to stop him from causing disruptions a total of three times today.

(Observation and Activity Notes: October, 2013)

It was very interesting to specifically note these two students’ list of dislikes at School “U” because it reflected their experiences of quarrelling in many ways. Those lists, with their accompanying discussions, follow.

Table 6.16. Two Students' List of Dislikes at School "U"

<p>OUTSPOKEN BOY</p> <p>The three things I dislike the most at school:</p> <p><u>Boka-boki (being shouted at) by the team leader.</u></p> <p>-It makes me feel sad and angry.</p> <p>-I don't understand it.</p> <p>-I know all the answers...but still get shouted at.</p> <p><u>Naughtiness/Disruptive behaviour</u></p> <p>-It disrupts my study.</p> <p>-No one loves naughty boys.</p> <p>-Mother said no naughtiness in school.</p> <p><u>Those who come to school late</u></p> <p>-In the middle of the class they come, makes us all stop.</p> <p>-Apa told us never to be late.</p> <p>-I am not late.</p>	<p>FEMALE TEAM LEADER</p> <p>The three things I dislike the most at school:</p> <p><u>Galagali (Swearing/Name-calling)</u></p> <p>-School is not a place to swear.</p> <p>-Our team members should not do this. I told them not to.</p> <p>-It is a sin to swear.</p> <p><u>Quarrelling in small groups</u></p> <p>-Sometimes we have arguments in our group.</p> <p>-Those make me sad.</p> <p>-I don't want to talk loudly but I have to.</p> <p>-Some children don't like me because of it but Apa chose me.</p> <p><u>Fighting/Slapping</u></p> <p>-Everyone will say we are bad children.</p> <p>-People get hurt.</p> <p>-Apa told us never to slap.</p>
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From these points, it seems that there was some animosity between the leaders and non-leaders, which caused them to quarrel at School "U." For example, the boy wrote that he disliked being bossed around by the team leader, this was his top dislike. He did not appreciate her shouting at him either and, therefore, did everything he could to make her job harder. Perhaps he did not understand why the girls had to be the team leaders in the school, especially because he was also a sharp pupil and doing well in his studies.

Therefore, being the team leader was not easy for some of the girls. For example, this team leader experienced sadness due to the conflicts and quarrels in her small group. Through the reasons she gave, it is apparent she realized that some of the students did not like her, or at least did not want her leadership all the time, so they behaved disruptively. She tried to calm them down, but she was worried that those students would dislike her even more because of it.

Name-calling/swearing.

Name-calling was also a prevalent part of the children's school experience. Some of the pupils would use swear words at one another while in the building

itself, while many would use them on the playground. Common name-callings at both schools were: donkey, evil, bad-boy, bad-girl, sly, show-off, or weird. In a few cases, some of the male pupils used the word *shaala*. This word literally means brother-in-law in Bengali, but in Bangladesh it often has a derogatory connotation meaning jerk. The word *shaala* was used, for example, when disruptive behaviour was displayed by a handful of students during a clean-up session at School “U.” In another session, when one of the boys took someone’s scale without asking, he refuted with “Why did you take it, jerk?” Both of these incidents took place when the teacher was absent, but name-calling was prevalent even when the teacher was present. It was only that the children kept it at a minimum and, as I observed, used low voices and whispers while using a word they knew would be hurtful and that the teacher would not like. In their list of dislikes, three students at School “U” and two students at School “M” wrote that name-calling was their top dislike because it was embarrassing and painful to be called names.

Disruptive behaviour.

Disruptive behaviours were described as naughtiness and mischievous activities in the classroom that disturbed others from concentrating. This involved suddenly speaking loudly as the class was going on, coming to school late and not settling down, whispering in each other’s ears, laughing unnecessarily, and peering out the windows while class was on-going. Disruptive behaviour at School “U” was a common occurrence during the photovoice activity although, as previously explained, it occurred more in some groups than in others. During my observations, I also noticed that when in large groups at School “M,” the children were continuously whispering and talking as the teacher gave her lecture. This was usually handled by the team leader sitting close by. Several children voiced their disdain towards whisperers, making statements from “I don’t like blabbering close to my ears because then I cannot hear anything else,” to “I don’t enjoy listening to their stories when I have to concentrate on the lesson of the day.”

Physical fights.

While at the schools, I witnessed a few physical episodes. I would not describe them as fights that involved prolonged periods of engagement, rather as short episodes involving “a hit with a scale,” “a slap on the cheek,” “a push on the shoulders,” and, in one case, “a tug on someone’s hair.” The children were aware that fights caused physical pain and disruptions and ruptures in their friendships, although some still engaged in it. As mentioned in my discussion of quarrels, this occurred if one was threatened by another; the threat could stem from their rivalry in the classroom based on who was a better student, to who would read first in the small group, or who the teacher calls upon to write on the blackboard.

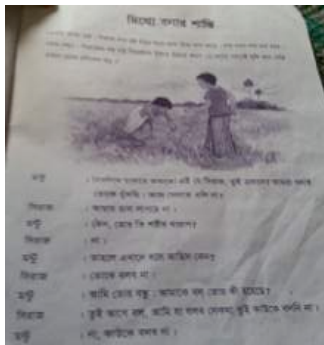
As I observed one day in the large group session at School “U,” when the teachers stepped out to speak to the program officer for a bit, a dispute started brewing between two of the boys because of an eraser. One of the boys had taken the other’s eraser. He had then given it to someone else without asking the owner’s permission. The owner looked for the eraser, but could not find it. By then, the teacher returned to the classroom to check the student’s notes. As she looked at the owner’s notes, she noticed that he had scratched out a section with his pencil. She told him to use his eraser in the future. It was already the end of class and everyone started packing up and, as the borrower tried handing the eraser back to the owner, he received a sudden slap on his head. The owner of the eraser yelled, “*Age di the parli na? Apa amare ki koilo shunli?*” (“Why didn’t you give it back earlier? Did you hear what *Apa* said?”) By this time, that boy who received the slap looked teary-eyed, his face was red. Right away, the class teacher stepped in to calm the children down. She explained that it is okay to share the eraser, but everyone should remember to bring their erasers to school every single day to avoid such situations in the future.

Lying, taking and “faki.”⁴³

After quarrels, name-calling, disruptive behaviour, and physical fights, the thing the children disliked the most was when others repeatedly lied, took materials from their peers without permission, and skipped school. They viewed those as points that caused a break in trust between themselves and their peers.

For example, 12/34 respondents at School “U” outlined lying as a top dislike. Presented as a “like,” a photo from this school further encapsulates children’s negative sentiments towards lying.

Image 6.10. Shafin’s Photo and Voice



I have taken a picture of the lesson “The punishment for lying.” My reasons are:

1. It teaches us if we lie then we can be punished.
2. If we lie to our friends, they can feel pain.
3. At school, if we lie, then after we should tell the truth.
4. I like Mintoo.

(Shafin, 12, School “U”)

In this lesson, Shiraz, the boy on the ground, was being punished for a lie he had told. His friend Mintoo had approached him to find out why he was being punished. As we discussed this photo, Shafin explained that his parents taught him never to lie, and that lying could be the cause of pain if someone later on finds out the truth—like when his peers lie about skipping school. This gives his *Apa* pain, he explained. However, he likes Mintoo in this picture, because he is trying to find out why his friend is being punished. He shows concern for Shiraz like *Apa* does for her pupils. In addition, Shafin is like Mintoo, always concerned about his friends at school. So he likes this picture because it reminds him of “himself” while also illustrating why he should not lie.

⁴³ *Faki* is a general term that denotes avoiding responsibility in Bengali. The word also carries an undertone of a lack of commitment. In this context it means: “skipping, or not showing up to school” and generally practicing absenteeism.

The next disliked point was taking (at times termed as “stealing”). At school “U,” 15 out of 34 respondents disliked “taking” while 10 out of 28 did so at School “M.” One child’s reasons are given below:

Table 6.17. Sabrina’s Reasons for Disliking “Taking”

<p><u>Taking</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Taking is a sin. 2. <i>Apa</i> taught us we should not take other’s things or steal from them. 3. All the items at the schools belong to us all.
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Sabrina recognized that taking was a negative act, it was a “sin,” and therefore “bad.” Further, their teacher had taught them that it was also “punishable.” When I asked her what she thought of taking in relation to her friends, she, like Shafin, stated that those who took without permission risked losing their friends. However, some children did mix up taking with borrowing.

This point was highlighted several times at both schools; the action of taking a pen, pencil, or a scale for a short time, with the intention of returning it, was not always understood. The children somehow thought that the borrower, who had taken the pen or pencil without permission, would not be returning it. This type of a misunderstanding caused one girl to pull the hair of another at School “U,” when the borrower took a pencil without permission, escalating into the latter girl throwing the pencil across the room and causing a ruckus; I had to intervene to stop the two of them and return the pencil to the owner. When I spoke to the borrower, she mentioned that she was only taking it to use because hers was broken and she could not find her pencil sharpener. She explained she had every intention of returning the pencil, but did not think it was necessary to ask before taking, since last time the other had borrowed her scale for “one hour.”

The other behaviour that betrayed the children’s trust was if they knew their peers were intentionally skipping school or regularly coming late. Many stated in their various reasons for this dislike that if they themselves could make the effort to show up at school every day, so should their peers. Others stated that

they would be letting the adults in their lives down if they did not show up at school. Furthermore, some were worried that skipping school would indicate laziness. In the table below, I have listed the top five reasons children gave at both schools for disliking lateness and *faki*.

Table 6.18. Top Five Reasons for Disliking Lateness and *Faki*

<u>Lateness/<i>Faki</i></u>
1. Our studies are disrupted if we skip school.
2. I want to see my friends at school. If I come, I want them to come.
3. Only lazy children skip school.
4. My mother/father feels sad if we do <i>faki</i> .
5. Our <i>Apa</i> feels sad if we do <i>faki</i> .

For the children, therefore, whether they were lazy or not, whether they lied or not, in their perception what others thought—their peers, parents, teachers, etc.—was central to the reasons for their dislikes at school. However, some of them still acted in ways that would jeopardize those relationships and continued to do things that they themselves or others disliked. For example, the same child who wrote he disliked skipping school also wrote his favourite item in the schoolhouse was the clock, because he could tell time from it. In another example, the same child who said she disliked latecomers wrote in her poem that she cannot concentrate on her studies and gets distracted by the smell of tulips. In yet another example, the team leader who mentioned she disliked being bullied because it caused pain, bullied her own group mates. Similarly, one of the most boisterous young students stated a dislike of noisiness and naughtiness, but was the noisiest student during all of the methodological activities. Therefore, the children’s responses were filled with contradictions and changes as they navigated their sense of self-identity through the tricky terrain of their classroom on a day-to-day basis. Therefore, how were dislikes perceived in relation to the children’s “own selves” and how did the relational aspect of school impact “the self” at these BRAC schools? Also, can these questions of self explain any of those contradictions? The next and final section of this chapter unpacks that point.

Feeling marginalized from losing voice.

In the array of discord caused by name-calling, fighting, and struggles related to school attendance, what happened to children's inner voice? Did they know it was there? Was it audible to them and to others? I discovered through my journey with the children that, at both schools, it was not always easy for the children to 1) recognize their voice, or 2) voice themselves. In other words, children did experience what the United Nations Development Programme (1996, p. 1) has defined as marginalization, "the state of being considered unimportant, undesirable, unworthy, insignificant and different resulting in inequity, unfairness, deprivation and enforced lack of access to mainstream power." According to Messiou, an expert on children's feelings of marginalization:

Marginalisation can be conceptualised in four ways: when a child is experiencing some kind of marginalisation that is recognised almost by everybody, including himself/herself; when a child is feeling that he/she is experiencing marginalisation, whereas others do not recognise this: when a child is found in what appears to be marginalized situations but does not view this as marginalisation; and, finally, when a child appears to experience marginalisation but does not recognise this (2011, p. 3).

There is no one, single, unified concept of marginalization. Rather, these definitions suggest thinking about marginalization as a multi-faceted notion vis-à-vis diverse and varying contexts. Furthermore, her categories consist of multiple conceptualizations and a child does not necessarily fall neatly under one or another at a certain point in time.

Although the children's experiences of marginalization were fewer or, at least, articulated less than their feelings of community, it remained a part of several students' experience of school. Their feelings stemmed from getting drowned out in a cacophony of noise or not being respected when wanting to speak, so that some children were no longer able to explain what he or she wanted to peers or the teacher. In other words, by Messiou's standards, they were experiencing marginalization as described in numbers two and four.

This created a tension between what the children said, did, or wrote down as their likes and dislikes and how they actually acted. Sometimes there was a

correlation between the two, but at other times there was not. In order to delve further into that discussion, the table below refers to a discussion from Chapter 3 on children's loss of voice.

Table 6.19. Section from Chapter 3

Researchers need to not only represent children's voices, but also explore the "authenticity" of that voice by further scrutinizing the realities of the exchange that occurred between researcher and participant allowing for the "emergence of the voice" in the first place. Moreover, in childhood studies, we must be able to deconstruct the very notion of "voice" and be wary of how much autonomy, rationality, and intention the child's speaking voice actually has (Komulainen, 2007). As previously mentioned in Chapter 3, voice, according to Komulainen (2007) is actually social and co-constructed, rather than individual, fixed, straightforward, linear, or clear. Voice is definitely shaped by a multitude of factors such as our use of language and assumptions about children, the institutional contexts in which we operate and the overall ideological and discursive climates that prevail (Spyrou, 2011; Komulainen, 2007). Lastly, but importantly, as explained by Spyrou (2011) and Jackson and Mazzei (2008), it is almost impossible to grasp voice and represent its essence due to the problem of "authenticity."
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At the schools, some aspects were quite positive. Children felt a sense of ownership, collaborated with one another, valued diversity, and built positive relationships. However, negative experiences were also a reality, impacting their vision of themselves, their relationship with the "self." It is self-evident from the findings that, as children's sense of ownership grew or their circle of friends swelled, their vision of themselves became positive. Likewise, when the opposite happened, their self-worth diminished. This was revealed mainly through their loss of voice, attributable to three main reasons: 1) peer neglect or discord; 2) the teacher's partiality; or 3) the school's curriculum not allowing enough time for creative activities. However, even before the loss of voice was experienced, many children struggled with recognizing that their voices were of value. They were not used to being asked questions about their "likes" and "dislikes" and, for many, *answering* those questions was a challenge in itself.

As I worked with children at both schools, I realized that recognizing their own voice was a difficult task for many of the pupils, except team leaders and some of the more extroverted children. When I use the word "voice," I refer to thoughts, ideas, fears, and concerns, and the children's ability to communicate their voice to others. This was especially true when children were in small or large

groups because when they wrote poems and paragraphs, responded individually on paper to the photos they took, or to me in person, they were much more articulate. Whenever they were asked to speak in front of others in a group, either adults or peers, the same children who were expressive in their writings seemed lost. They had to be coerced and asked several times before they would speak.

This phenomenon could be attributed to the fact that, at both schools, the children were used to answering questions related to their studies. They were generally not required to think independently and share their feelings. For example, I observed at School “U” that the teacher often questioned different pupils on parts of their assignments, or asked them to read or respond, and showed interest in what they had to say. However, if the child wanted to share an idea on an assignment or an extracurricular activity, he or she was not listened to carefully. In these scenarios, very few children voiced themselves regularly or visibly, rendering a large number of pupils’ voices “invisible.”

As “invisible” pupils, it was therefore very easy for many of the children to get carried away in a “mob-mentality” during small group activities. If one person answered—usually the group leader, the outspoken children, or the most popular pupil—the others echoed a similar answer and always aimed to “speak right,” rather than express themselves. For example, this impacted the photography session of School “U,” as explained in Chapter 5, when several layers of coercion had to be applied and repeated requests made for many of the children to state their ideas with greater comfort and clarity.

The children were also confused at times as to why I was interested in speaking to them as opposed to their *Apa* or Program Officer. Two written responses at School “U” illustrate this confusion:

Apa has asked me to write about my school. No one has asked me this question before. What do I like? I love my *Apa* and my friends. Sorry *Apa*, it’s hard...for me to know. (Roy, 12, School “U”)

I like it when we just read our books in school. I don’t like speaking in the large and small groups. I don’t know what is the right answer but I like my slate and my books and our *Apa*, she is the best...she knows all the answers, I don’t. (Jabbar, 11, School “U”)

For these two children, as well as for many of their peers, answering questions that required them to excavate and listen to their own ideas was a struggle. Confusion was a common reaction by children, used to being quieted and told not to act “older than their age” by the adults around them, when an adult stepped in and gave them some autonomy to engage with their own thoughts. This confusion was displayed through facial expressions, reluctance to participate, speaking incoherently about an unrelated topic, or complete silence followed by awkward smiles and long pauses.

Some children were able to recognize their voices and speak without too much coaxing or coercion. However, I observed how other students found it difficult to voice their wishes at the school. Their thoughts and ideas either got drowned out in the cacophony of noise or were not respected, interrupted, and even cut off. As this happened on a repeated basis in small or large groups, I started to notice that children were no longer able to state what they wanted. One child would forget or was unable to articulate an idea and would then regress into displaying behaviours similar to those mentioned above. Sometimes, the whole day would go by without those children speaking to their peers or their teacher. I cannot say if this has changed and, at a later date, that specific child was able to speak up. However, even if that happened, the experience of losing one’s voice is not easily erased. In their list of dislikes, according to seven children at School “U” and three at School “M,” losing voice or *kotha keiu shune na*, was their top dislike. The top five reasons for losing voice are given below.

Table 6.20. Top Five Dislikes for Losing Voice

Losing Voice	
1.	I feel sad when no one hears me.
2.	I feel left out if my friends don’t listen to my ideas.
3.	I feel sad if my friend tells me to be quiet.
4.	I don’t like the big group because no one asks me to answer.
5.	I raise my hand but <i>Apa</i> doesn’t see me.

The teachers at both schools did have particular students, like team leaders and disabled children, who were usually given more chances to speak in the classroom. They were asked questions, requested to sing and dance, and

speak to visitors more frequently. Additionally, they were encouraged to speak during regular school hours when they remained quiet. A few of the students perceived this as the teacher being partial and did not understand that, as per BRAC rules, those children are considered “more vulnerable” (as females and disabled children). Hence, they were encouraged to take leadership roles in the classroom. Two of the boys at School “U” listed *keu amake dekhe na* (no one sees me) as their top dislike. They could not articulate the reasons, but rather wrote down scenarios of when they were ignored. Also, it is likely that these two boys were working together as their responses are almost identical. The list and reasons follow.

Table 6.21. “Dislike” Reasons for No One Sees Me

No one sees me
1. <i>Apa</i> calls on the girls more.
2. I always do my homework and want to share the answers in class.
3. It makes me feel sad and lonely.

The final, but central, way students’ felt their voices got lost had to do with wanting more creative outlets. At School “U,” for example, during the free associative writing activity, three children wrote:

One of the main reasons I love my school is because when I come here I get to sing and dance, besides my studies. Drawing is fun too. I wish we had more paints at school because paints are required for drawing pictures and wall magazines. Then we could have more drawing lessons. (Shefali, 11, School “U”)

I told *Apa* one day that we should have more time to draw. She promised us we would. I hope that day comes soon. I love drawing and I wish we had more big papers to draw on and she could show us how to draw flowers and trees and we could learn. (Lina, 12, School “U”)

We sing, dance, and even do some plays at this school, but I wish we could do some sports and run outside and play with a ball sometimes. What about a games day? Playing more games would make the day go faster. (Monir, 13, School “U”)

Children valued the opportunities they had, but recognized a need for more creative outlets in the classroom. Research across the world has illustrated

that developing the creative mind is an integral aspect of educating youngsters and is only achievable by allowing children to practice thinking creatively by asking questions, pondering over simple problems, and searching for solutions individually or in teams—and most importantly by making mistakes and learning from them (Neogy, 2010). Tagore advocated this central point of education very strongly, as we will see in more detail in Chapter 7.

Summary of Motifs

It is essential to briefly summarize the major findings here before moving on to the next chapter, in which I connect these findings (children's voices) to Tagore's educational lessons in order to address my final research question. This chapter began with a breakdown of children's likes and dislikes, which were then merged into two main motifs: physical aspects and social relations at the school. Under each of these motifs, children's likes and dislikes were grouped and presented.

The first of the motifs was children's likes and dislikes regarding the physical aspect of their school, identified through pupils' experiences of belongingness, collaboration, ownership, and environmental care. In other words, this motif explored how the physical space of the school was viewed by the children. There were several variables that surfaced:

1. Feeling a sense of togetherness and belongingness towards one another within the physical environment, as a result of doing activities together and being collectively responsible for caring for the school and cleanliness.
2. Having the ability to collaborate with one another on school assignments.
3. Feeling a sense of ownership of the school's physical fragments, partially and/or as a whole, including the school's walls, floor, and outside play space. This was achieved through pupils' feelings of accomplishment and/or security.
4. Learning about the environment in school texts and applying the lessons learned at home or in the care and cleanliness of the school.

5. Outside distractions, interruptions, and a shortage of materials were aspects in which children desired change.

The second motif concerned exploring children's perspectives on relationships at the school with their teacher, peers, and themselves. In summary, the main points that surfaced were:

1. Acceptance of diversity in terms of age, religion, or ability was a "non-issue" in the schoolhouse according to the children. They were more concerned about whether their peers were individuals they could be friends with, look up to, trust, and value as being helpful.
2. "Help" was the element for building friendships at school.
3. The teachers were an emblem of learning, safety, and security at both schools.
4. The children recognized the importance of support at home and valued the roles of their guardians in their education.
5. Children feared the disapproval of both adults and peers by engaging in negative behaviour at the school, yet many still did not alter their behaviour.
6. Discord and its many different facets were a cause of pain and scholastic hindrance, according to the children.
7. Lying, skipping school, and being late were viewed as negative peer qualities that broke down friendships.
8. Recognizing one's voice and speaking one's mind was not an easy task, as shy children were prone to mob-mentality and marginalization. When children wanted to have more creative outlets they felt ignored by authority figures.

In the next section of the chapter, I turn my attention to discussing a few of the findings and raw data in a different light. This data—and its ensuing process of categorization under areas of concentration and motifs—suggested a lot of complexity and nuance, which requires it to be thought about more reflexively.

Reflexive Thoughts on Spaces between Likes and Dislikes

As explained in Chapter 5, I conducted phenomenological analysis in order to categorize and thematically understand the vast amounts of information produced in this study. However, the often stringent adherence to children's "likes" and "dislikes" during the process of analysis boxed some of the children's perspectives into a space that was too limiting for the message they wanted to convey. This does not mean that their voices were being misrepresented or distorted, but rather categorized. That being said, sometimes words cannot easily be categorized and, in doing so, statements run the risk of losing their nuanced complexity. What the children were stating was much more multifaceted than a "like" or "dislike." Therefore, the framework I used needs to be shed for this discussion. Although the statements can definitely still be attributed to either a "like" or "dislike," irrespective of my framework of data collection, some voices from the free associative writings, poems, and *adda* responses suggested much more nuanced and complex perspectives. I have chosen two⁴⁴ such pieces (1 poem and 1 photo) from the raw data to emphasize the ability of children to speak articulately about a given topic, even when the setting is framed in certain "prescribed" boundaries. In the next section, I reflexively unpack my position by shedding my aforementioned framework of observation. After that, I give examples of each of the findings and discuss them without the "like" or "dislike" filter.

Accounting for my lenses and filters.

Reflexivity is not a straightforward endeavour. As explained by Mauthner and Doucet (2003, p. 414):

⁴⁴ Why these specific two pieces? After combing the data, I realized that there were several quotes that stated more than "likes" and "dislikes." I chose these two perspectives specifically because they were the most coherently written reflections/poems, i.e., in full sentences without blanks or repetitions and with the least amount of side notes on my part. For the reflexive discussion, I wanted to pick the quotes that were the closest to representing the children's most authentic voices (and that needed the least amount of syntax interventions). Also, I wanted to pick two different types of data, each generated through a different activity and representing a different school. Moreover, this discussion is carried out to *illustrate my thought process* about the spaces between "likes" and "dislikes." It is to emphasize that I was aware of the complexity of the data. Due to the limitations of the thesis—length, space, and word count—such a discussion on additional pieces of raw data was not feasible.

...the importance of *being* reflexive is acknowledged within social science research...however, reflexivity has not been translated into data analysis practice in terms of the difficulties, practicalities and methods of *doing* it.

For me, being reflexive in my research process was important and I have outlined how I maintained reflexivity in the field in Chapter 5. Reflexivity was also important during the data analysis process, in which I tried to interpret the layers of meaning indicated by children's voices, through different perspectives, while staying within the parameters of "likes" and "dislikes." However, as explained by Mauthner and Doucet (2003, p. 415), I had to always question whether:

[there is] a limit to how reflexive [I] can be, and how far [I] can know and understand what shapes [my] research *at the time of conducting it*, given that these influences may only become apparent, [later on] once [I] have left the research behind and moved on in [my] personal and academic life.

In answering that question, I have to say that I definitely had limitations. First, I was limited by my research questions and, second, I was biased because my background as a researcher and teacher is heavily impacted by the literature of the social sciences and inclusive education. I was also limited by additional factors: my emotions and moods.

In terms of social science—although my explicit theoretical and methodological position is one where I reject notions of the detached, neutral, objective researcher—when it comes to analysis, I prefer the kind of organization and framing opportunities that more detached and mechanical forms of data analysis procedures allow. In other words, I integrally value the messiness that reflexivity provides while conducting research, but cannot always navigate the messiness of reflexivity when it comes to analyzing data. Thus, I tend to gravitate towards analysis procedures that allow the data to be streamlined. This could be attributed to Mauthner and Doucet's (2003) points above, which state that there is a lack of guidance available when it comes to reflexive data analysis. As a "reflexive" researcher, I was unclear on where I should draw the line.

In terms of the literature on IE, I am biased because I believe in the social model of disability and advocate that IE should be about whole school improvement in which a diverse range of students are empowered and engaged through meaningfully relevant forms of education. I also think that neo-

imperialistic forces within the global movement for IE are harmful for the evolution of IE in countries of the South. Further, my thoughts have been impacted by my belief that schools should aspire to instil “model” inclusive cultures, policies, and practices in which they continuously and contextually address their obstacles in a collaborative environment, where children are valuable stakeholders and speakers. These positions colour my understanding of a school situation in any given context, including that of BRAC.

Several other biases influenced the way I view the data collected for this dissertation, including my emphasis on seeking out children’s “likes” and “dislikes” and my need to search for links between that and Tagore’s philosophy of education. I am also an ardent advocate of children’s rights and voices. In addition, at every juncture of the data collection and analysis I was confronted with my emotions, my ever-changing relational status with the children, and my not always clear understanding of the extent of my own “reflexive” limitations. All of these points influenced how I interpreted the emergent data during my largely phenomenological process of analysis. This is especially the case because phenomenological analysis is a procedure that breaks the flowing and organic forms of thinking required by reflexivity into one that calls for a series of neutral, mechanical, and decontextualized procedures keeping the issue of generating themes at the forefront. In other words, the principal concern of phenomenology states that “how knowledge is acquired, organized, and interpreted is relevant to *what* the claims are” (Altheide & Johnson, 1994, p. 486, as cited in Mauthner & Doucet, 2003, p. 416).

However, what if some of the particularly insightful findings are interpreted in another way, by moving farther away from some of my aforementioned biases, *especially that of “like” versus “dislike,”* in order to see data in a new light? It will be interesting to see how this expands the complexity and nuance of the children’s perspectives. I attempt to do that with two such pupils’ perspectives below—one from each of the two schools and produced in different field activities. Furthermore, I do not intend to make any claims on the data by such interpretations and displays, but rather to simply highlight the extent to which one issue can be interpreted in a multifaceted manner and how

that same finding, which was previously categorized as a “like” or a “dislike,” can be understood in much broader terms.

Discerning a poem

I will be happy by studying.
If I study well,
My parents will love me.
If I study well,
Father will give me an expensive watch.
If I go to school by wearing the watch,
All the students at the school will be surprised.
I'll tell them, “It's a prize for coming to school and getting mark A!”
I will gain respect from them.
Maybe I will be a leader. (Shafin, 12, School “U”)

In this poem, Shafin speaks more about his own aspirations related to school, rather than indicating something he likes or dislikes. This poem was not previously used in this chapter as an example of a motif, but upon closer examination, I realized it was part of the data that was categorized under the theme of parental love, which was then further streamlined as the conceptual motif of *parental contributions*. However this poem clearly indicates much more.

Shafin writes how going to school will make him happy, but more so, it will allow him to gain his parents love. He will be happier because his parents will be happier. His parents will then reciprocate, by gifting him an expensive watch. Perhaps, for Shafin, the watch was a motivating factor for coming to school, but a closer reading of this poem indicates that it was much more. After receiving the watch, he will not only be able to rejoice in surprising his peers, but also gain their respect and even become a leader at school.

He does not indicate in the poem why the leadership position is so important to him. However, becoming a leader is linked to being a good student and being respected at school. In his mind, this “upward transition” was only possible by getting an A and displaying a tangible reward for having gotten it. This would then surprise his peers and make them notice and even respect him enough for him to become a leader. He probably senses that his current leader has been chosen because she is respected by others and perhaps he fosters

feelings of respect towards his team leader and aspires to have others feel that way towards him.

This short poem speaks volumes about the current situation of BRAC School “U.” It highlights how the undemocratic mechanism of assigning team leaders impacts the children. It also signals how boys also aspire to be leaders and, although the aim of BRAC is to put girls in that position, this does not always help in an inclusive classroom. Further, it highlights that, even at one of the most non-formal flexible school systems in Bangladesh, the focus for children is their grades. In any case, Shafin is happy to go to school, but emphasizes in his poem the importance of grades, especially the top mark. The reason for his desire may be skewed, but what is interesting is that it is so important to him it changes how his parents and friends view him. If his father were to buy him a watch for getting an “A,” his belief in wanting to receive higher marks would be cemented. Furthermore, the mechanisms of how he got there (i.e., memorizing or learning just facts) would be solidified in his young mind. Would he then be able to break out of this mould of memorization, which so desperately needs to be broken for IE to succeed in Bangladesh? This is an essential question to ask and ponder. What is also interesting is the intricate ways in which every stakeholder at school is interlinked to Shafin’s experiences and aspirations and each must play a vital role in his ability to make the most of it.

Understanding a photo

Image 6.11. Zooni’s Photo and Voice



I have taken a picture of the window and painting. My reasons are:

1. The window is my favorite. I look outside it.
2. I like scene very much also because I want to play in field and jump ropes like that girl.
3. My hair would blow in the wind outside. I have long hair like her. I will feel happy.
4. The sun will shine on my face and I can teach my friends how to jump rope.
5. Then everyone in school can learn how to jump rope.

(Zooni, 10, School “M”)

Interestingly, Zooni, one of the older female students at School “M,” pointed out her wish to be outside more often. She very creatively captured two different elements in a single photo to make her point. This is a very unique photo, wherein a student captured multiple elements to convey her message, and it was previously categorized as a “like” in the role of the outside in building community at school. However, it is obvious that an interpretation of this piece of data solely within the aforementioned categories would be anemic. It requires a more careful examination to unpack the child’s layered message.

It is clear that, for Zooni, the outside is important for several reasons, including the sunshine, the wind, and the space it will give her to jump rope. In school pictures and books, the children read about and discussed the potential of being outside and learning from play, but did not practice it all that much. It is clear that seeing those images instilled in Zooni an aspiration to go outside and learn a skill she could not master inside the schoolhouse. Furthermore, she did not aspire to learn a new skill only for herself, but wanted to be able to share that experience with her peers. This shows that Zooni may have felt playing outside was not only fun, but also an activity for sharing, one that allowed students to be outside more often. Therefore, this not only expresses a student’s current wish, but also her future plans, which are illustrative of the intuitive nature and ability of this child. It also glaringly underlines that, although they would like to, children are not currently able to learn from and teach each through certain outdoor activities at BRAC.

Concluding Comments

This chapter has been about displaying the voices of the children that participated in the study, divided and categorized into relevant themes derived from the data and analysis procedures. It has also been about finding meaning and having a discussion on children’s understandings of what they like and dislike about their school. It has not been an easy chapter for me to write, as the children’s voices were vast and diverse, at times contradictory, and at many times more complex in thought and word than I could have possibly imagined when I

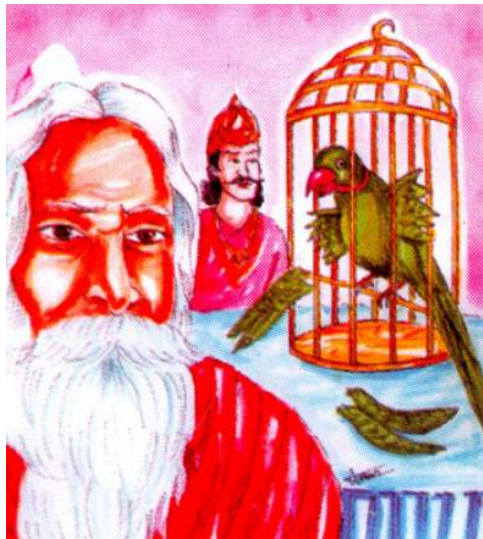
went into the field. I started this Chapter with a quote by Maria Montessori, renowned education scholar, who underscored in late 1930s Europe the importance of shedding our adult egocentric views of children and paying careful attention to what they express. However, as I have pointed out, that is not an easy task. Voice, especially those of children, is hard to pin down; it plays hide and seek in complex ways, sometimes exposing itself fully, at other times barely present, and yet more often than not it is only half-heartedly there, trying to impress the listener or respond in an acceptable manner. Therefore, all the findings in this chapter are the outcome of my engagement with the children face-to-face and later on with the data, as I had to derive meaning out of what the children were saying as a mediator and messenger. I was never far from their words, yet—as an outsider, a researcher, an *Apa*, and an adult—this process and journey has been far more complex, organic, and dynamic than this chapter can fully summarize and convey in words.

CHAPTER 7

DISTILLING CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES THROUGH TAGORE'S PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

An excerpt of “*Totakahini*,” (“The Parrot’s Tale”)

-A story by Rabindranath Tagore, 1917/1922



(Image from Unistar Books Publication House: www.unistarbooks.com)

Once upon a time there was a **bird**. It was **ignorant**. It sang all right, but **never recited scriptures**. It hopped pretty frequently, but lacked manners. Said the *raja* (king) to himself: “Ignorance is costly in the long run. For fools consume as much food as their betters, and yet give nothing in return.”

He called his nephews to his presence and told them that the bird must have a **sound schooling**. The *pundits* (high/scholarly priest) were summoned, and at once went to the root of the matter. They decided that the ignorance of birds was due to their natural habit of living in poor nests. Therefore, according to the *pundits*, the first thing necessary for this bird’s education was a **suitable cage**.

A golden cage was built with gorgeous decorations. Crowds came to see it from all parts of the world. “Culture, captured, and caged!” exclaimed some. Others remarked: “Even if culture be missed, the cage will remain, to the end, a substantial fact. How fortunate for the bird!”

The goldsmith filled his bag with money...he said: **“Textbooks can never be too many for our purpose!”**

The nephews brought together an enormous crowd of scribes. They copied from books, and copied from copies, till the manuscripts were piled up to an unreachable height. People said with satisfaction: **“This is progress indeed!”**...

The nephews smiled and said: “Sire, what do you think of it all?”

The *raja* said: “It does seem so fearfully like a sound principle of Education!” Mightily pleased, the *raja* was about to remount his elephant, when the fault-finder, from behind some bush, cried out: **“Maharaja, have you seen the bird?”**

“Indeed, **I have not!**” exclaimed the *raja*. **“I completely forgot about the bird.”** Turning back, he asked the *pundits* about the method they followed in instructing the bird. It was shown to him. He was immensely impressed. The method **was so stupendous that the bird looked ridiculously unimportant in comparison.** The *raja* was satisfied that there was no flaw in the arrangements. As for any complaint from the bird itself, that simply could not be expected. **Its throat was so completely choked with the leaves from the books, that it could neither whistle nor whisper.** It sent a thrill through one’s body to watch the process.

The bird thus crawled on, duly and properly, to the safest verge of inanity. In fact, its progress was satisfactory in the extreme. Nevertheless, nature occasionally triumphed over training, and when the morning light peeped into the bird’s cage it sometimes fluttered its wings in a reprehensible manner. And, though it is hard to believe, it pitifully pecked at its bars with its feeble beak...**the bird’s wings were clipped. The bird died.**

Nobody had the least notion how long ago this had happened. The fault-finder was the first man to spread the rumour. The *raja* called his nephews and asked them, “My dear nephews, what is this that we hear?”

The nephews said: “Sire, the bird’s education has been completed.”

“Does it hop?” the *raja* enquired.

“Never!” said the nephews.

“Does it fly?”

“No.”

“Bring me the bird,” said the *raja*.

The bird was brought to him. The *raja* poked its body with his finger. Only its inner stuffing of book-leaves rustled. Outside the window, the murmur of the spring breeze amongst the newly budded leaves made the April morning wistful.

Excerpt Taken from:
Bhatia, V. (1994). *Rabindranath Tagore: Pioneer in Education*

Tagore Depicted: The Start of the Conversation

“Totakahini” strongly reflects Tagore’s educational thought by advocating for an organic, flexible, and simple form of education that does not suppress children’s creativity and potential through the use of large amounts of educational materials. The purpose of providing this story at the beginning of the chapter, however, is not to dissect its various meanings. Rather, it is to provide one example of a Tagore’s literary works, which creatively introduce many of the underlying discussion topics to be taken up later on. Moreover, the story illustrates that Tagore’s thoughts on the aims of education are well aligned with inclusive education—the idea that education should prepare children to “hop,” “sing,” and “fly” towards their full potential, countering past and deeply engrained educational mechanisms that have repeatedly done the very opposite.

Chapter Structure

Tagore’s educational thought is vast and expansive. Scholars from across the world have thoroughly analyzed and unpacked Tagore’s educational ideals, drawing on his teachings to inform postcolonial education, globalization in education, and aesthetics in education with respect to Indian nationalism and cosmopolitanism. My goal here is not to cover the vast literature available on Tagore’s works on education and pedagogy, many of which focus on political, aesthetic, and nationalistic perspectives. Rather, my goal in this chapter is to use Tagore’s teachings on education as a contribution to inclusive education, and, more specifically, to frame children’s voices in regard to the physical and relational aspects of their school. Hence, I aim to scrutinize how Tagore’s words can inform each of the motifs outlined in Chapters 5 and 6. Therefore, in the discussion below, I go over all the emergent motifs from Chapter 6 alongside the teachings from Tagore’s work that relate to them. I do this in order to not only inform those motifs, but also to keep the relevance of what Tagore stated in his works closely aligned to the issues that were most significant to the children. In

order to do this, I have predominantly drawn from primary⁴⁵ and secondary sources written about his *ashram* schools at Santiniketan. Some examples from his university building and village reconstruction projects at Sriniketan have also been provided. But before that, two salient points must be mentioned here in relation to my approach.

First, although in this Chapter I have maintained the headings for areas of concentration (physical and relational) and used words to describe each of the motifs similar to those in Chapter 6, here I have removed the “like” and “dislike” categories in dividing the motifs. This is because relationships between the motifs and Tagore’s teachings can be drawn without the divisions of like and dislike. Furthermore, as Tagore does not speak about these issues as likes or dislikes, that filter is no longer justified.

Second, I have provided two Tables (7.1 and 7.2) at the end of each area of concentration (physical and relational). In each of these Tables, a short statement of Tagore’s thought on each of the motifs from that area is presented. This is done to encapsulate and summarize each area of concentration succinctly in relation to Tagore. At the end of the discussion of each area, links are drawn between Tagore’s teachings and the current situation of BRAC schools, followed by broader associations between Tagore’s teachings and IE in Bangladesh.

Before delving into the detailed discussion of motifs in relation to Tagore’s teachings, however, it would be interesting to note that the life and works of Tagore are taught to the children at both schools, and specifically at School “U” one of the children photographed the lesson on Tagore as her most favourite of all. The picture and the reasons follow.

⁴⁵ Refer to the Appendices for a detailed list of the primary resources from which I draw. It is not an exhaustive list, however I received the pieces in it from Tagore scholar and co-editor of the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, Dr. Amrit Sen, during one of my several visits to Santiniketan, as *key* pieces Tagore produced on education.

Image 7.1. Depiction of Tagore by a Child



I have taken a picture of the lesson “Our Rabindranath.” My reasons are:

1. I like Rabindranath very much.
2. He wrote so many songs...poems...stories. We can recite his poems in Bangla. Learn new things from stories.
3. Our national anthem is written by Rabi *Takhur* (nickname). I can sing that one and one of his other songs too.
4. *Takhurji* had many brothers and sisters. I do too. We can all live happily and not fight.
5. Also *Thakurji* studied a lot. His picture reminds me of why I should study hard.

(Zenía, 11, School “U”)

Motifs of Physical Aspects and Tagore

Fostering belongingness.

At Tagore’s schools, fostering belongingness was a cornerstone value. Many of the primary and secondary discussions on his teachings reveal that making his students part of the *ashram*’s culture was integral to his pedagogical methods. Belongingness was garnered through building sacred student-teacher relationships, in which role-model teachers helped children become more aware of their interconnectedness with the environment and people around them by doing community service.

Tagore considered his personal role, and that of the adult teaching staff, as indispensable in establishing this system. In a letter to Kunjalal Ghosh, which served as the first constitution of his school and remained in effect for much of its first decade, Tagore wrote about the essentiality of locating *gurus*: “Teachers are readily available but *gurus* are difficult to find” (Tagore, as cited in O’Connell, 2002, p. 128).

Tagore believed that *gurus* were the only ones who were effective embodiments of the traditional wisdom of service, community care, and sacredness in teacher-student relationships. These characteristics were best role-modeled and displayed by these *gurus* as a way of life for the children to value, learn from, and integrate into their own lives (O’Connell, 2002). This was the only way through which students could properly be guided towards constant and

ongoing service to their community, surrounding people, and nature—a cornerstone activity for fostering belongingness. For Tagore, individuals belonged to one another through service. In order for this to happen, his students had to be selflessly invested in helping each other and the community in which they lived. He wrote in “My School I”:

Our children began to be of service to our neighbours, to help them in various ways and to be in constant touch with the life around them. They had their own freedom to grow, which is the greatest possible gift for the child life. (Tagore, 1924, p. 1)

At the root of his vision for service lay the notion of equal collaboration among all members.

Collaboration emphasized.

As explained by Ghosh (2012), “Tagore’s theory of pedagogy, the teacher, the taught and nature were caught in...games of mutual domination and interchangeable supremacy involving imagination, empathy, and tolerance” (p. 16). At Siksha-Satra, an educational endeavour in Sriniketan where six destitute boys were placed under the care of the Institution in 1924, there were no set classes and the teacher was the facilitator, while the students were collaborators in their learning tasks (Chakrabarti, 1993). According to Elmhirst, Tagore’s close associate who oversaw his rural program at Sriniketan: “He [the teacher] is forced to adopt his rightful place behind the student, ever on the watch, ever ready with a word of advice or encouragement, ever ready to be a student himself, but never in the way” (Elmhirst, as cited in O’Connell, 2002, p. 298).

Similarly, Tagore (1931) wrote in his “My School II” piece:

Only I tried my best to have some aspect in the school, which they did not have in their orthodox schools. The teachers shared the common life with the boys, it was a community life. In the sports and festivals the teachers and the students fully co-operated with each other. It was not like a cage in which the birds are fed from the outside, but it was like a nest which students themselves cooperated in building up with their own life, with their love, with their daily work and their plays. (p. 1)

In addition to building teacher-student collaboration during in-class and out-of-class sessions, Tagore emphasized that simple *ashram* procedures provide the opportunity for revitalizing the principles of cooperation in students' daily lives. The boys and staff worked together to clean the *ashram* quarters and serve meals. As the boys worked together on projects or assignments, they became more inventive, expressive, and developed in their thought. Through collaboration the boys could recognize that the whole was always stronger than the single unit. Collaboration allowed the children to fill in for each other's weaknesses:

The boys also became leaders in the *Brati-Balikas*. "They have begun," writes Majumdar, "to feel in their own little way that the individual's effort is not purely individual, but invariably has social reactions. They are realizing the value of mental aid and have acquired the social habits of kindness and brotherliness" ...[A] boy belonged to a wine-maker's caste and showed a sense of inferiority when he came to Sriniketan, but after six months he became a leader of the group, resolving disputes and winning various prizes. (O'Connell, 2002, pp. 298–299)

It is clear that at Tagore's schools, collaboration was a practice of everyday school life for teachers, students, and staff.

Ownership through devotion.

At the *ashram* schools, children's sense of ownership was built through devotion (*bhakti*) to the school and the teachers. This was encouraged by requiring the students to clean their teachers' quarters on a rotating basis. Serving the teachers was considered a duty of the students. Moreover, to emphasize well-rounded development, students led a common community life, working together with peers and teachers to produce the school's curriculum and cultural activities. Students had a choice to build their own study plans, and Tagore believed that through it his pupils could reach goals such as personality development, fellow-feeling, and intellectual spontaneity. In addition, the writing and publishing of periodicals were encouraged, in which students at Santiniketan routinely created their own publications and put out several illustrated magazines. These publications were shared among students and teachers on

special literary evenings and children had primary control over deciding when these would take place. Tagore (1938) writes in one of his letters addressed to the students at Santiniketan:

I was led by a new idea when I thought of evolving a true education through the collaboration of the teachers and the students, both of whom would own equal responsibility to the *asrama*. To follow this ideal or not depends entirely upon you. All that I can do is to make an appeal to you to make the truth of understanding and love grows all around the *asrama*. When you leave the institution, leave something of your own, some contribution of yours to the atmosphere of the place.
(p. 1)

It is clear that by proceeding in this way the children were made part and parcel of their school, one in which they had the voice and ability to be both the givers and recipients of knowledge. Children's rightful place at school was valued and through their devotion towards the school, they could fully display their sense of ownership. Even after they left, they were asked to leave something of their own that marked a lasting imprint of their contribution to their school.

The vital environment.

The environment is another one of Tagore's cornerstone values. For Tagore, the environment was a place of great awe, unity, beauty, learning, and creativity. He believed the environment established creative and free thought in children like nothing else. For him, it was always about the transcendental side of nature, which satisfies the personality and evokes a sense of the beyond, and not the side that is biological or factual (Neogy, 2010). He also believed that children had the capability to be intimate with nature in ways that adults were not. The preservation of a sensitive appreciation of nature is that which fuelled the "child-like" mind.

As a result, at his *ashram* schools, the curriculum revolved organically around nature, and classes were held in the open air under the trees, providing an unstructured appreciation of the plant and animal kingdom and seasonal changes (Gupta, 2005). The children did not sit on chairs, but on hand-woven mats beneath the trees, and were allowed to climb and run around them between

classes. Nature walks, evening functions, and outdoor astronomy classes were all part of the school's routine. The children also had flexibility in deciding the timing of their classes depending on weather shifts and interests.

In his essay, "The Vision," Tagore writes of three experiences that profoundly influenced his life and instilled in him "a direct message of spiritual reality" from nature (O'Connell, 2002, p. 183). The first of these happened when words, which seemed disconnected fragments, suddenly came together as a unit when he encountered the rhyming phrase "*jal parey/pata narey*" (the water falls/the leaf trembles). In recollecting this experience, Tagore writes:

The rhythmic picture of the tremulous leaves beaten by the rain opened before my mind the world which does not merely carry information, but a harmony in my being. The unmeaning fragments lost their individual isolation and my mind reveled in the unity of a vision. (Tagore, as cited in O'Connell, 2002, p. 183)

As a result of this experience and two other major incidents in the natural world, Tagore believed that parts of the environment came together in a streamlined manner. He was able to recognize the fluidity and beauty of how the pieces together formed oneness into a single higher, transcendent aspect of nature. Further, his aesthetic experiences served as a sense of release from self-isolation and separateness through contact with a transcendent force. Also, through these experiences he was able to create a deep reverence for all creation, for the "spiritual splendor" of a world that exists behind the obscurity of fact and illuminates the whole of humankind (O'Connell, 2002).

No interruptions or distractions.

For Tagore, the outdoors was not a distraction nor was it an interruption. As explained by Paz (2013), at his Santiniketan school (1901), and later on at his farm school in Sriniketan (1922) and rural school of Siksha-Sastra (1924), most of the classes took place in the open air under trees, and were only held indoors during the rainy season. The children had a voice and input in the development of the curriculum, which included outside excursions, school walks, and nature walks. Evening soirees were commonly held, during which children were given an

opportunity to display their creativeness through music, dance, and drama sessions. Even night walks were encouraged, in which the senior students carried out nocturnal outings to the nearby forest where they would sit down to sing until late into the night.

At Tagore's schools, walls did not divide the inside and the outside; the outside and everything within it was seen as a learning source. Furthermore, partnership and brotherliness existed among all the children regardless of whether they were peers from the same or different subject classes.

No lack of learning materials.

One of the main pillars of Tagore's educational philosophy was "education for direct experience." Tagore lamented the fact that we do not touch the world with our mind. Rather, we touch it by books. He wanted education to connect with the "flesh of the body," and with the "flesh of the earth" and so feed the intellect (Ghosh, 2012, p. 24). He believed that preoccupation with material things coarsened the sensibilities. Moreover, related to his insistence upon simplicity was the conviction that too much educational apparatus suppressed sensitivity for each child's unique personality (Neogy, 2010). Tagore felt that unnecessary educational materials impeded the development of the child and that the goals at his schools were better achieved through a simple, flexible, and organic learning environment wherein there was no lack of materials because he believed that every single object represented a teaching opportunity. He delighted on the singularity of objects, refusing to see them merely as "objects for use" (Ghosh, 2012, p. 17). He tried to create an environment in which every object and creation would have value. Living within and around nature, a joyous energy would flow through the children, and the arts would become instinctive (Ghosh, 2012). Tagore also used to encourage his students to observe people on the road, to listen to the singing of the cart-men and the particular signs and sounds of the roadside market (O'Connell, 2002). There was no scarcity of items at Tagore's schools as the living, breathing world around the students was a classroom itself.

Table 7.1. Tagore and Physical Motifs

Tagore's main thought in summary: as related to each <i>physical</i> motif emergent from children's voices
Belongingness at the school is established, fostered, and garnered through sacred student-teacher relationships, in which children are made aware, through service, of their interconnectedness with the environment and people around them.
Collaboration is valued between all members. It is nurtured by allowing children to fully cooperate in school sports, festivals, <i>ashram</i> duties, lesson planning, administration, and so forth. Collaboration lets children fill in for each other's weaknesses and provides them with autonomy and valuable partnerships in the process of building life.
Ownership is established by ensuring children feel a sense of devotion towards the school. Devotion is something that does not happen automatically, but is built over time with practice. The practice of devotion for pupils include: cleaning the school, committing themselves to a life of communal living with peers and teachers, and producing creative and intellectual materials to share and display.
The environment and its transcendental side is a place of great knowledge and learning. Children should spend as much time in nature as possible. The curriculum should incorporate all forms of natural learning, allowing classes to be held outside and children to go on regular nature excursions.
There was no conception of interruptions or distractions for Tagore, as walls did not divide the inside and the outside in Santiniketan. The outside, and everything it offered, was seen as a learning source and classes were usually held under trees, and were only held indoors during the rainy season. Children were free to move around and even climb on trees during lessons, if they so pleased.
For Tagore, the lack of materials was not a concern because the living, breathing world around the students was a classroom itself and everything within it could be used to teach children. Moreover, Tagore felt that direct experience for learning was much more effective than using excessive educational materials.

Inclusive practice and physical motifs.

How do Tagore's ideas relate to children's voices and current IE mechanisms at BRAC? Given that the relational motifs listed in Table 7.1 emerged from the children's understanding of their experiences of likes and dislikes, as related to inclusive education, it is clear that for them these five topics were important. In this section, it is important to carry out a discussion on what the children said and Tagore's thoughts on each specific theme in order to inform the physical aspects of inclusive schooling at BRAC. This is done in order to suggest how IE can be further mechanized and fill in some gaps for BRAC. It

should be clarified that BRAC as an organization is not necessarily aware of these physical aspects, or motifs, as these were uncovered by focusing on children's voices, which is not a common practice at the organization.

In terms of belongingness and ownership, the links to what Tagore advocated and what the children stated are pretty straightforward. For example, the children at BRAC sensed a greater form of belongingness if they were encouraged to feel more connected with the people around them, including their peers, teachers, and family members. This "connection" was developed by building friendships, caring for peers and adults, working together, and displaying their valuable place in the community through meaningful interactions (e.g., sharing new school knowledge with grandparents). Similarly, ownership was a strongpoint and children at BRAC were in charge of cleaning their school at the beginning and end of the day. In addition, children shared creative work by displaying their artworks on the walls. Together, these two issues clarify that some IE practices are a priority for BRAC personnel. When it comes to collaboration, the environment (outside versus inside), and materials, however, BRAC can draw from Tagore's teachings for improvement.

With respect to collaboration, BRAC has not yet reached the level suggested by Tagore in which there is full cooperation. Children are still treated like birds fed [knowledge] from the outside. Due to the lack of teacher-student collaboration, which stems from adults' doubts in children's abilities, there still exists a superior-inferior relationship between adults and children at BRAC. Therefore, the children are predominantly directed towards their tasks. This practice is not in support of IE, nor Tagore. Further, the most unhelpful practice for children is directing them towards memorization.

The issue of "memorization as learning" is a key point to mention because a continuation of this practice hinders learning and collaboration in the classroom. The practice of memorization at BRAC schools may be a lingering result of previous mechanical teaching methods, low faith in children's abilities to learn on their own, and teachers' previous learning experiences. However, even though BRAC advocates against it on paper and policy, memorization is a practice that plagues both BRAC schools.

For example, after learning a poem on fishing at School “U,” the children were able to recite the poem very well with minimal errors, but when questioned about the lesson or meaning behind the poem, none of them raised their hands to answer. After a few moments of silence, the teacher who was sitting beside me turned and explained that for the time being they were only focusing on mastering the words in the poem. Prioritizing the mechanical learning of the “words” over emphasizing the need for discussing the meaning of a poem, which may or may not happen later, suggests that memorization is still perceived as a very—or even more—important aspect of learning. This type of attitude may be attributed to the fact that the teachers themselves have mostly learned through rote memorization when they were students. It may also be because this is what the teachers are most comfortable doing.

For IE, however, this is highly problematic since this practice does not foster creativity or critical thinking in students, nor does it address the learning needs of diverse pupils. Rather, it constricts the possibility of day-to-day lessons and is diametrically opposed to Tagore views on learning. Tagore was a harsh critic of rote memorization and viewed the emphasis on English education in the subcontinent as the root of the memorization problem. He advocated early education in the Mother Tongue and the learning of multiple languages including English (Mukherjee, 2015). In addition, memorization hinders children from being able to collaborate together on building constructive knowledge, thus curbing creativity and critical thinking. This is because the materials are often unrelated to their lives and as they continue to memorize, they see themselves as knowledge recipients who need to “learn” by repeating what elders are stating. Consequently, they fall into a “learning space” where they continuously need to be “fed” knowledge from textbooks. And since that leads them to short-term success, they lose the value of needing anything else, such as discussion, critical and collaborative thinking, brainstorming, and creative learning activities. They still might want to engage in these activities but do not see them as necessary to achieving an “A” grade. As most pupils aspire for the “A” grade, which is achieved through perfect re-production and not critical thinking, they become like machines in a factory, each great at “making goods exactly to order” (Tagore, as

cited in Mukherjee, 2015, p. 48). However, as an impact of this ongoing and repetitive cycle through each subject and grade, children are left disempowered, unable to take charge of their own learning.

As Tagore stated, “[mechanical learning is a] system that [makes] the child the target of dry lessons like ‘hailstones on flowers’” (Seth, 2007, as cited in Ghosh, 2015, p. 402). This type of learning “treats the students’ minds as captive birds who sole value is judged according to the mechanical repetition of lessons” (p. 402). While this practice may keep teachers in their comfort zones, the desired goal is to get them to try diverse teaching methods tailored to the children’s different needs and to not merely see learning as isolated moments in which children master a certain lesson.

For the issue of the environment, even though the majority of the children did not want outdoor classes, they clearly did want more play time and generally more free time during their school hours to learn on their own. They understood that the natural world could be a great teacher and wanted to spend some time outdoors every day. As suggested by Tagore, by being engaged in activities that required the children to be closely linked to the natural world—such as collecting sticks for counting, planting trees, or even cleaning the school grounds—his students were encouraged to “get their hands dirty,” thus allowing their creativity and mindfulness towards nature to flourish organically and abundantly.

For outside “distractions” and learning materials, the children at BRAC did not consider anything that was not directly tangible as a learning tool. At BRAC, children are not encouraged to record detached isolated facts from the roadside for example, nor observe people, nor sketch and write at the same time. They are not encouraged to learn from their localities. Rather, while they are at school, they are encouraged to stay inside, largely focusing their energy on reading and writing from books. Often the books are not enough to pique their curiosity, and they have a void that they look to fill with more learning materials. This was displayed by a student’s desire for novels, for example, as she had already mastered most of the lessons from her current books. She wanted to have access to more reading materials. Some students merely asked for more paraphernalia as backup materials. To them it was essential to preserve learning

materials as it was the only way for them to continue “learning more.” However, if a more organic learning environment can be encouraged at the BRAC schools, there would perhaps be less desire for such specific items. Instead, the curiosity towards the world that exists outside books and the schools’ four walls would expand, in which children’s creative thinking could be further cultivated. Through this, children would be better able to see that learning can take place without many of the materials they requested or already have. Perhaps they can even bring items from home that they could share in the classroom or do projects that required more hands-on work, thus allowing them to have a more expansive vision towards what entails a learning item. This would be particularly applicable at the primary level: Elmhirst (1961) (cited in O’Connell, 2002) explains that it is between the ages of six and twelve that the growing child is most absorbed in gathering impressions through sight, smell, and hearing, but even more so through touch and the use of his or her hands.

Thus, the curriculum of the BRAC schools needs to expand to allow children to not only prepare for standardized exams (PSC⁴⁶ and JSC⁴⁷), but also learn in ways that allow them to be in touch with the local and wider world and access their inner creativity in more constructive ways. BRAC has the human resources, research facility, and flexibility to bring these subtle changes into their school practices. As Tagore (1930) states:

[Children’s] subconscious mind is active, always imbibing some lesson, and with it realizing the joy of knowing. This sensitive receptivity of their passive mind helps them, without their feeling any strain, to master language, that most complex and difficult instrument of expression, full of ideas that are [non-definable] and symbols that deal with abstractions. (p. 1)

He further states that a child only needs to be provided with that platform (Pridmore, 2009). His or her learning and discovering, through intense moments of awareness fueled by innate curiosity, will happen on its own. BRAC currently needs to do much more in providing and continuing to work towards maintaining such a platform.

⁴⁶ Primary School Certificate

⁴⁷ Junior School Certificate

Motifs of Relational Aspects and Tagore

Diversity is key.

Diversity was a pillar of Tagore's educational thoughts. As explained by Chattopadhyay (2000), he believed that the human exists in two modes: the individual and the universal. The individual is concerned with immediate needs such as food, clothing, shelter, and other external activities. The universal, on the other hand, finds meaning in transcending the individual and living for an ideal (*adarsa*) that is concerned with universal excellence, the greater good of the species, and release from universal bondage. This perception of human identity, in which the aspirations of human consciousness is concerned with the reality of the greater human and freedom from individual isolation, is that which transcends difference between individuals. Each person is capable of operating in the universal mode, which also helps transcend differential thought that creates strife between people of different races, religious sects, nationalities, and genders. Tagore believed this is the key method to authentically experience truth. He wrote, "whatever human knows the soul of another within one's own soul, and knows one's own soul within the other, this person has authentically experienced truth" (O'Connell, 2002, p. 193).

For Tagore, *mukti* (i.e., freedom, liberation, deliverance, release, and salvation) was the way to transcend the individual towards the universal and "perfect freedom" (Gupta, 2005). This was found in a perfect harmony of relationships, not in a mere independence that has no context. This "perfect friendship" consisted of the freedom from the isolation of the self and from the isolation of things in recognizing that we reach truth not through feeling it by our own senses or identifying it through reason but by through the union of perfect sympathy (Neogy, 2010). One of the greatest obstacles to *mukti* was religious sectarianism and reified religious traditions that kept people separate. Thus, Tagore emphasized the *Upanishads* (sacred Hindu treatises) at his schools, but interpreted them in a universal and non-sectarian ways. He emphasized "education for sympathy," stressing harmonious relations and the inclusion of all social and regional groups (O'Connell, 2002).

While delivering a talk to teachers he stated:

In the East there is a great deal of bitterness against other races, and in our own homes we are often brought up with feelings of hatred...we are building our institution upon the ideal of spiritual unity of all races. (Dasgupta, 2009, as cited in Mukherjee, 2015, p. 50)

Children organized and participated in festivals such as *Rakhsha-Bandhan*⁴⁸ that promoted and celebrated voluntary kinship, particularly between Hindus and Muslims, through the exchange of arm bracelets (O'Connell, 2002). In addition, Tagore would invite Western friends and scholars from around the world to live and teach in his school. As explained by Mukherjee (2015), he not only sought to bridge the growing differences between religious groups at home, but also tried to bridge racial disharmony by engaging and including people of all classes, castes, tribes, and races from home and across the world.

Teachers as gurus.

One of Tagore's key educational ideologies was based on the integral role of the teacher, more specifically the integral role of the *guru* at school (O'Connell, 2002; Neogy, 2010; Chattopadhyay, 2000). According to Tagore, the *guru* had to possess certain qualities and while teachers were easy to find, *gurus* were not. This is because the *guru* had a much higher calling and was not merely motivated by monetary concerns. The qualities of a *guru* included (O'Connell, 2002, p. 203-206):

- 1) Being able to devote his whole mind and spirit to the service of his students by rising above financial considerations.
- 2) Being able to make pupils happy with his affection.
- 3) Being able to recognize the unique personality of each child in order to guide that pupil according to his or her interests and capacities rather than simply facilitating a particular curriculum or teaching method.

⁴⁸ Hindu festival celebrating the love and connection between siblings.

- 4) Be able to act like a child and respond to the “primal child” within him/herself.
- 5) Recognize that “to teach is to learn.”
- 6) Be able to emotionally encourage pupils and at the same time be able to transmit a love of the material.
- 7) Be able to role-model an austere way of living.
- 8) Be willing and able to serve community members.

These essential qualities in a *guru* were necessary to achieve one of the chief aims of Santiniketan, which was to establish a *guru*-disciple, or “sacred relationship” (p. 127) between the teacher and the disciples. Tagore referred to the Upanishad to explain how teachers could transcend the boundaries of simply teaching to become *gurus*.

[Teaching] is a path of *dharma* (duty). In this world many things are bought and sold, but *dharma* is not such a commodity. On the other hand it is given through a desire for well-being (*mangal*), on the other hand it is accepted with humble faith. Because of this, learning was not considered to be a commodity in ancient India....Nowadays, those who teach are simply teachers, but at that time those who gave lessons were considered *gurus*...Teacher’s are readily available, but *gurus* are difficult to find....If you decide to work for the well-being of others, you must be prepared to face different conflicting obstacles and anxiety—much injustice and injury as well must be borne with patience. All opposition and the contradictions must be overcome through fortitude, compassion and a feeling of goodness....I am hoping that the teachers will enthusiastically and joyously harmonize their lives...not by my discipline, but by the natural manifestation of inner good intention. (From Tagore’s “The First Constitution of Santikiten,” 1902: Translated by Kathleen O’Connell, 2002, pp. 128–140)

The schoolmaster here is an anachronism. He can no longer tower over his pupils...He is forced to adopt his rightful place behind the student, ever on the watch, ever ready with a word of advice or encouragement, ever ready to be a student himself, but never in the way. (Elmhirst 1961, as cited in O’Connell, 2002, p. 298)

As explained by Ghosh (2012), at his schools, therefore, “teaching was not monological instruction but part of a collective process of aggrandizement where no member of the team survived at the expense of another” (p. 16), it was a

sacred space of mutual teacher-student (and environmental) respect and cooperation.

“Helping hands” of togetherness and cooperation among children.

Tagore emphasized the importance of children supporting one another in order to live, learn, and work together creatively at his *ashram* schools. As it was a residential school, children were not only put in contexts where they had to support each other’s learning during lessons or class activities, but were also given roles and responsibilities in which they had to cohabit a space with consistent and meaningful cooperation. For example, children had to govern and lead one another through the school’s internal management strategy in which each week a student captain was in charge of dealing with misconduct incidents (Gupta, 2005). In order to emphasize well-rounded development, students had to produce the school’s cultural activities. Students also took field trips together that involved short nature walks or evening excursions in Santiniketan. Older students were expected to help younger ones and a “spirit of concern” was prevalent among the children. Students also had to take care of each other physically and nurse back to health ill classmates. Pupils had to take turns to serve one another at mealtime and if a guardian sent food, they had to share it with others. If there was a special student, they had to be particularly welcoming, warm, and accommodating towards that individual. This was illustrated by Tagore’s instructions to take care of the Japanese student “Hori”:

The task of looking after the Japanese student Hori should be given to Rathi or some special student...or the senior students should take turns in rotation...at the proper time they should make inquiries about his needs...If Rathi is made to do all this the first few days, then the other students should feel no hesitation. (Tagore, 1902, as cited in O’Connell, 2002, p. 141)

Therefore, these simple *ashram* procedures provided the opportunity for revitalizing the principles of cooperation in daily life. Further, through the acceptance and welcoming of a “different” outsider, like the student Hori, who was not Brahmin nor Indian, the children’s feelings of kinship, regardless of difference, was cultivated at the school. Also, the idea that children had to do

something for Hori physically as a “living experience” was to Tagore the best form of learning. This was a point he illustrated in his stance on “Direct Experience” and “Kinesthetic Education,” in which he argued that the best way to teach children was by asking them to get fully and physically involved in a task happening in the now. Whether that be learning about the difference between “tearing” and “to tear”⁴⁹ or disunion vs. union, “constant contact with new things, while the inwards and the outward man go forward in step with one another, keeps the awakened mind alive with curiosity” (Tagore, date unavailable, as cited in O’Connell, 2002, p. 215).

Guardians at Santiniketan.

Since Tagore’s school was residential, the teachers, caretakers, and administrative staff filled the role of guardians. They were responsible for stimulating, encouraging, and supervising the children and for ensuring that the benefits of home life, affection, and careful attention to small bodily needs and troubles were available (Neogy, 2010). Nevertheless, the children had a “special day” to write postcards to their guardians (O’Connell, 2002, p. 138). Parents could meet their children at stipulated and regular times at the schools. However, once at the school, the children relied largely on the school’s adults whose main role was to create a supportive and nurturing context in which creative and spontaneous learning happened.

The teachers were encouraged to be emotionally enthusiastic. In addition to their teaching, they had to cooperate with the children completing *ashram* tasks. In other words, they were to operate as “sympathetic instructors in a family setting” (O’Connell, 2002, p. 203). Teachers were encouraged to be open-hearted, and guardians, including Rabindranath himself, tried never to speak down to the students but addressed them as equals (Neogy, 2010). In this type of scenario, children were nurtured towards using their creative surplus,

⁴⁹ When giving a lesson on the verb “tearing,” Tagore, instead of asking his pupils to tear a leaf from a book, asked each of them to climb the top of the nearest mango tree and tear off a leaf and bring it back to him. The whole process of tearing, when it was accompanied by such full body movement, signified for him a living thing or experience (O’Connell, 2002).

independent thinking skills, and critical analytical skills to learn and live together in a thriving community.

Discordance among peers.

At Tagore's residential school, discordance, as it is likely to exist in any setting, did exist among peers. For example, when Santiniketan was first opened and Tagore had admitted a Japanese student named Hori (as named above), he was especially concerned about his inclusion. He was worried that the rest of the boys may not behave amicably towards Hori, and for whatever given reason, needed to appoint an "example student" who would lead the way. Later on, the other boys would not hesitate to take care of Hori. Around the same time, in his letter to the school administrator, Tagore emphasized the importance of children sharing their everyday chores and responsibilities by overlooking issues of caste, creed, and religion. However, he was concerned with the fact that caste could create problems for full cooperation and that some *Brahmin* students might object to being served food by a non-*Brahmin*. He wrote: "At mealtimes it will be good if the students take turns serving one another. If the server is not a *Brahmin*, then there may be some opposition. So concerning this, the established arrangement should be followed" (Tagore, 1902, as cited in O'Connell, 2002, p. 142).

Caste consciousness or the presumed role of belonging to a certain caste got in the way of children practicing kindness and brotherhood. However, Tagore believed in self-government and said that the boys should be left as much as possible to themselves and manage their own affairs without any interference from outside (O'Connell, 2002). Therefore, every Tuesday the students would elect a captain for a week. He would act as the chief magistrate and make notes of misconduct inside and outside the class. He would bring these cases to a student court held in the evening on certain appointed days. The children themselves would then deliberate on these cases and resolve the problems. The cases were not brought before Tagore or other adults at school. In this way, children learned how to show leadership, but even more importantly were answerable to one another for acts of disobedience including disruptive behavior and non-

cooperation. However, despite this self-governance founded on ideals of kindness and brotherhood, in 1909 one of the male students who was having problems committed suicide. The *ashram* schools went into mourning and it was around this period that Tagore's attention shifted towards moving to a Model School in Kolkata.

Exemplary role modeling to combat other issues.

This is a difficult motif to distil through Tagore's teachings, as "lying, taking⁵⁰ and *faki*"⁵¹ are not points of direct discussion in the scholar's work. However, there are a few relevant elements that make room for some discussion.

For example, teachers were required to act as role models in front of the pupils, modeling the kinds of behaviour that was expected of the children. They had to practice austerity and restraint in the front of the children and advise the children to follow in those footsteps. Children were encouraged to dress simply and own very few material objects in order to lead a life in which pleasure-seeking and pride over wealth were abandoned. (Chakrabarti, 1993; Gupta, 2005; Neogy, 2010).

Teachers also had to be very careful to always arrive at their designated space of learning before the children did. They had to be courteous to one another and never act in an insulting way in front of the children. They had to practice exactly what they taught and embody to the children the values of living in harmony with nature and one another in socially responsible manners.

The school's administrator was assigned to be especially attentive to the orderliness of the children's possessions and had to be highly vigilant of not letting outsiders fraternize with the school's pupils (O'Connell, 2002). If books and other materials were borrowed from the school, they had to be returned in a proper way. In general, rules of austerity, simplicity, honesty, integrity, and

⁵⁰ Taking as previously mentioned in Chapter 6 has to do with children's interpretations of what occurs when another peer "borrows" something from them, sometimes with and at other times, without permission. This is discussed in detail under the dislikes section of concentration 2: relational aspects.

⁵¹ *Faki* is a general term that denotes avoiding responsibility in Bengali. The word also carries an undertone of a lack of commitment. In this context it means, "skipping or not showing up to school" and generally practicing absenteeism.

respect were to be followed among the children and adults, including teachers, caretakers, and administrative staff in the tightknit school community.

Preventing marginalization by giving freedom.

At Tagore's schools, freedom was a key value. Tagore believed that freedom is necessary for both mental and physical growth. He also maintained that the students were his equals and freedom was essential for student satisfaction and happiness. His primary aim of education was to free people's minds from all kinds of parochial thinking (Mukherjee, 2015).

Therefore, at the *ashrams*, children had the freedom to choose how to learn. They did not have to listen to adult-imposed rules and regulations. As self-reliant participants and decision makers in their learning and living processes, they were always encouraged to have a voice and decision-making power in how *ashram* affairs were run, how study plans were made, what their schedules dictated, topics of study for any given lesson, and even exam development (O'Connell, 2002; Gupta, 2005). Creativity, dance, art, and drama were of equal value in this student-centered way of life, where the child and the adult lived and worked in mutually trustworthy and equitable relationships—and where marginalization of voice and ability was highly discouraged. Children were taught to think of themselves as whole individuals whose minds were without fear and whose heads were always held high (Mukherjee, 2015). Their learning and thinking process were not to be broken up into fragments, their voices choked, their ideas marginalized. Rather, through education, their minds would be liberated and expanded, flowing like a clear stream of reason stretching towards perfection.

Table 7.2. Tagore and Relational Motifs

Tagore's main thought in summary as related to each <i>relational</i> motif emergent from children's voices
School diversity is important. Tagore advocates that whatever human knows the soul of another within one's own soul, and knows one's own soul within the other, this person has authentically experienced truth. The importance of harmonious relations and the inclusion of all social and religious groups at his schools are stressed.
The role of teachers , rather, <i>gurus</i> , is central to the success of a school. Gurus are hard to find because they embody certain key qualities such as being able to recognize the unique personality of each child or being able to emotionally encourage pupils and at the same time transmit a love of the material. Gurus must be devoted to their profession and be ready to make sacrifices for the betterment of their students with whom they share a sacred relationship.
Children must learn to help one another. They must consciously be ready and willing to support one another in order to live, learn, and work together creatively.
The roles of guardians apply not only to the parents, but also to the teachers. The guardian is responsible for creating a supportive environment filled with understanding and care.
Discordance will be a reality in any given school context. Children should be allowed to lead themselves out of discordance. They should be given time and space to analyze any given situation of discord and choose peer leaders who can help them out of the dilemma.
Lying, taking, faki were not discussed themes at Tagore's schools. This is perhaps because children had exemplary role models as their teachers. These teachers were required to behave in certain ways, lead by example, and enlighten the children on what was acceptable behavior at the schools. An austere lifestyle was encouraged by all where children were always encouraged to be truthful, be giving, and be aware of the repercussions of their actions.
Marginalization was countered in Tagore's schools by giving children the freedom they needed for mental and physical growth. Students were treated as equals and had the freedom to choose how to learn. They did not have to listen to adult-imposed rules and regulations.

Inclusive practice and relational motifs.

In terms of diversity, helping hands, and the role of guardians, the linkages between what Tagore advocated and the children stated in terms of their perspective of each at their schools is pretty unambiguous. These are all motifs wherein the relational inclusivity factor in terms of current practice at BRAC is going relatively well as shown in Chapter 6. For example, the children also valued diversity in the classroom and did not even notice the “differences” that labeled them as abled or disabled. The children's minds were still largely untouched by the issues that divided their peers in the “outside world,” displaying the

“freshness of their senses” (O’Connell, 2002, p. 202). In terms of helping one another, like Tagore, the children valued building friendships. Often cooperation and help was the key attribute that built the first layer of their relationships. “Helping each other study” was the key factor in becoming another’s best friend at the BRAC schools. The role of guardians was also important. Children valued parental support and wanted parents to care about their education and be inquisitive about their learning processes. Some parents did so, but others were not as involved. As such, those children whose parents paid less attention did not feel as supported, and since the teacher and program officers are not fully engaged with the children in “sympathetic instruction,” this gap remains to be filled.

The remaining motifs for relational aspects of schools are areas where constructive changes are required to improve the inclusivity of BRAC schools. First and foremost is the issue of teaching. At the BRAC schools, the teachers were valued by the children. Tagore maintained this is necessary to not only motivate the teachers, but to also create grounding for the start of their sacred relationship. For example, the children recognized their respective teacher’s kind behaviors and appreciated the love she demonstrated towards them. Most admired their teachers and felt that their teacher taught with creativity, kindness, and devotion. To a certain extent, these qualities reflect some of the traits of the start of a *guru*-disciple model in which the children humbly accept the knowledge their teacher imparts. This is even further possible in schools like BRACs where one teacher stays with the same set of pupils for four years. However, as revealed through my time spent at the schools, this process is stifled and often ends even before it starts.

This is because, despite orchestrating a system of education, which aims to achieve the goals of IE, BRAC school operations, in terms of its administration and management of teachers, is not fluid. As noted below:

The teachers at BRAC are recruited from the local community, and are all female. Teachers are expected to have completed grade ten, though in cases where a suitable teacher cannot be found, teachers with a lower level of education may be accepted. There is a 12-day initial training for primary school teachers followed by a three-day orientation. The program focuses

on basic child psychology, the BRAC program and curriculum, classroom management, and forming relationships with parents and children. Once assigned a school, teachers are visited by a program organizer two or three times each week, for at least 40 minutes each time. These are followed by a monthly refresher training, during which teachers review the curriculum for the following month and discuss problems and challenges from the previous month. BRAC's Head Office develops and prepares detailed lesson plans for each day of the 276 day preschool program and the 1,104 day primary program. The teachers are expected to follow the plans. (Acasus, 2014, p. 1)

It is clear here that teachers do not need previous teaching experience to get hired (Haiplik, 2002). As a result of this, at BRAC, a lot of rigidity is maintained when it comes to instructional guidelines for teachers. Unlike at Tagore's schools, BRAC teachers do not have the capacity to innovate and must adhere to strict teaching guidelines. All primary schools have a prescribed teaching method, which each teacher must follow very closely. In contrast, at Tagore's schools the work of the schools was left to the teachers as much as it was left to him and they had the freedom to conduct themselves as they saw fit. Teachers were not considered subordinates to the administrative staff. Conversely, teachers at BRAC are subordinate employees who receive continuous pre-service and in-service training on how they should teach at the schools. Through the program officers, they are guided towards maintaining class conduct, subject orientation, timetables, student relationships, and so forth. Thus, individual teachers do not have the freedom to transmit knowledge in ways that capitalize on their own individual capacities as related to the abilities of specific children in their school. To a great degree, the success of BRAC and its rapid growth can be attributed to this system of rigid, prescribed, and "perfectionist" conduct, in which consistency and quality is key. Yet, this mechanism does stifle spontaneous creativity because over the years, the teachers and program officers get complacent in this set system. Moreover, many teachers do not display enough confidence to make curricular adaptations. Further, many of the teachers, educated in very rigid school systems themselves, are not fully aware of creative teaching and learning methods. As a result, they are unable to see and practice lesson delivery that goes beyond prioritizing rote memorization.

In addition, they view the extracurricular activities as “extra,” not as an equal or even greater learning material. For example, singing and dancing is promoted at the schools, but not at an equal par as Tagore advocated. As the teacher at school “U” said: “I always emphasize to the children that even if they enjoy dancing and singing more, they [still] have to concentrate on their books. How else will they get an ‘A’?” Therefore, the teachers are highly focused on achieving the goals of the curriculum and take great pride in making sure the children are prepared to achieve a high mark on yearly tests and at graduation. By emphasizing books, the teachers create a hierarchy among the subjects, wherein creative subjects almost always lag behind. The practical necessity of doing this is due to the rigid educational system in Bangladesh; however, focusing on prioritizing books and examination performances is not aligned with inclusive thinking. Further, can a curriculum be “child focused” if it only creates space for extracurricular activities but does not value them as integral to children’s learning? If the teachers were better trained on using their creative surplus at the BRAC schools, the children (who are with them over a four-year span) would definitely benefit from a more widened idea of what constitutes learning, schooling, and most importantly, thinking.

The teacher’s role is also important to address the next motif, of lying, taking, and *faki*, which is currently a problem at the BRAC schools, but was not at Tagore’s schools. At the BRAC schools, especially at School “U,” I observed that the teacher herself was sometimes late and absent from school. Although none of the children mentioned her in relation to their dislikes to school *faki*, perhaps her tardiness and occasional absenteeism justified them doing the same. The other problems the children faced, in relation to lying and taking, had to do with their lack of communication skills between each other and also their sense of ownership of their items. If the children were better acculturated with the value of sharing their items they would not consider borrowing as “taking.” If the children were assured that if some of their items got lost in the process of sharing, they would easily be replaced, perhaps they would not feel so possessive about them. Further, if children understood that learning could happen without those materials, they would feel less nervous about losing the items and focus on

learning more than acquiring materials while at school. In other words, their vision on education, and what the value of learning is, without acquiring materials, needs to be instilled more carefully at BRAC. The curriculum and everyday interactions at BRAC schools need to move towards making the educational system more focused on responsibility, simplicity, and austerity. It can be argued, herein that perhaps, when catering to very poor families, wealth or the prospect of it, is a driving force that keeps children in schools. However, this cannot be the most important “selling” point for inclusive schooling, rather the value of education *as an end* needs to be cemented in the children’s minds.

Finally, when it comes to marginalization, this is definitely an aspect that requires a lot of attention from BRAC in order to improve the current experiences of children. As I discovered through what they said, the children were marginalized at school by their peers and their teachers. Most of the time, this was apparent when they were not paid any attention. A majority of children recognized this happening to them, but some did not. At other times no one recognized it was happening but marginalization still took place. The first step towards this, in reflection of what Tagore said, is for adults to recognize that marginalization is a reality at the BRAC schools. Related and very importantly, it is to also let children have the freedom they need to recognize that marginalization is a reality in their classrooms. The goal in any inclusive school is to engage with and minimize episodes of marginalization, using sensible and accessible tools in a contextually appropriate manner (Messiou, 2002). At BRAC, this form of sincere recognition of marginalization is desperately needed. The POs and teachers’ normative responses of “no, this does not happen,” right after it actually happens, or asking the children and then nodding “no” themselves, only glosses over the current situation.

Therefore, at BRAC, the adults habitually “spoke over” the children, glossing over poignant issues that reflected the existence of marginality in the classroom. For example, if a child took too long to answer, an adult would give the opportunity to answer to a team leader. The program officers at both schools, each stated to me at least once, when a child was about to answer, “What does s/he know...Please ask me the question.” Both times, this resulted in the child

getting silenced, changing his or her mind about speaking to me, or changing the answer. I observed how this was a common practice, in which the POs and teachers often opened the space for children to participate, only to withdraw that space “quickly” or limiting it to certain outspoken students. The team leaders followed this trend during group work, in which they helped their peers, but did not always give a slower peer enough time to formulate his or her thoughts properly.

The first step to counter this would be to recognize this practice as a problem. Next, give children (regardless of whether they are leaders or not) the time they need in order to speak or ask questions. As suggested by Tagore, the adults have to role model this behaviour to the children when they interact with their students. Then perhaps everyone could slowly transition to listening carefully, and thereby minimize episodes of marginalization. However, this will be a lengthy process. Even though the school labels itself as “inclusive,” the school administration does not value children’s freedom of participation and voice at its core. As a result, children do not share any decision-making responsibilities and have no room to share their thoughts and ideas about study plans or creative endeavours. At BRAC, there is currently a need to value children’s existing knowledge, on par with adult knowledge.

Transitioning Distillations of Tagore and IE: Applications to Bangladesh

Tagore’s education ideals are based primarily on his childhood, ongoing life experiences, and scholarly collaborations. For example, in 1913, Rabindranath Tagore became aware of Maria Montessori’s work and commented briefly on the education of children with special needs (O’Connell, 2002). His works were further influenced by a number of progressive humanist educators such as Jean Jacques Rousseau, Johan Pestalozzi, and Frederich Froebel. His school in Santiniketan has even been labeled as “the most complete of all, [of the New Schools] that have existed and the first in the Orient” (Paz, 2013, p. 31).

In the previous section, I have discussed in detail how Tagore’s educational thought can be applied to the context of BRAC. In the next section, I

will directly use Tagore’s teachings to discuss how his philosophy can improve the overall education system in Bangladesh. To do this, I will address some general points and then comment on how UNESCO’s definition of IE in Bangladesh can be made more “inclusive” if it is filtered through Tagore’s teachings. This is my attempt to expand the applicability of IE out of the context of BRAC and provide solid grounding to move IE forward by using Tagore’s knowledge in Bangladesh. For this reason, in Table 7.3, I have restated UNESCO’s definition of IE in Bangladesh and then provided a list of Tagore’s educational theories and models. A note about presenting Tagore’s theories and models, is that they are based on several key spiritual and theoretical underpinnings. Some of these are concepts which characterize his thoughts as a whole, while others are concepts through which he realized the structure and methods of his school. Not all of these are relevant to inclusive education in Bangladesh, nor as IE is framed in this dissertation and especially not to the motifs generated by the children. In between and through overlap of these ideals lie the applicable lessons.

Table 7.3. Definition of IE in Bangladesh and Tagore’s Theories and Educational Models in Summary

<p><u>Definition of IE in Bangladesh</u></p> <p>Inclusive education is an approach to improve the education system by limiting and removing barriers to learning and acknowledging individual children’s needs and potential. The goal of this approach is to make a significant impact on the educational opportunities of those: who attend school but who for different reasons do not achieve adequately and those who are not attending but who could attend if families, communities, schools and education systems were more responsive to their requirements.</p> <p>(Ahuja & Ibrahim, 2006, as cited in Ahsan, 2013, p. 16)</p>	
Tagore’s Educational Theories	Tagore’s Educational Models
<p>Spiritual Development: The idea that the consciousness can be expanded into the “super-personal” world of humanity. Hence, development involves a reverence for all creation, for the “spiritual</p>	<p>1. Subliminal Learning in Nature: The <i>Tapoban</i> Model: This model is based on Tagore’s belief that a school’s curriculum should revolve organically around nature, where classes are held in the open air under the trees providing for an unstructured appreciation of the plant and animal kingdom and seasonal changes. This type of</p>

splendour” of a world, which exists behind the obscurity of fact.	education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life harmonious with all existence.
Nature as a Living Reality: There is a transcendental side of nature and an essence that one can feel intimacy with. For children, it is easier to feel intimate with nature and the appreciation of nature is the basis of his education at Santiniketan.	2. Sympathetic Instructors in a Family Setting: The Guru Model: Students should live in close association with dedicated teachers of high aspiration who recognize the unique personality of each child and are able to guide their pupils according to the child’s capacities. This type of teaching is far more important than following a particular teaching method as teachers were to be in touch with their own primal child and realized and practiced the ideal that “to teach is to learn.”
Personality: A self-conscious principle of transcendental unity within man, which comprehends all the details of facts that are individually his in knowledge and feeling, wish and will and work.	3. Spiritual Integration: Students should be taught genuine spirituality by not adhering to a particular dogma or creed, but rather in the direct perception of life in all its variety. Children had to recognize the connection between the world and their consciousness, and between themselves and others.
The Physical and Spiritual Evolution of Humanity: The human exists in two modes: the individual and the universal. The individual mode is concerned with its own immediate needs such as food, clothing, shelter, and other external activities. The universal mode of existence transcends the individual and finds meaning in terms of an ideal, the universally or generic human.	4. Education for Direct Experience: Students should learn through practice and simple <i>ashram</i> procedures that do not depend on unnecessary paraphernalia and be provided with the best educational opportunities through which children learned the value of cooperation in daily life and at the same time were able to preserve their unique personalities.
The Creative Surplus in Humanity: The idea that it is not in human nature to remain solely restricted to that area which is essential to his existence. It is necessary to have a great deal of space to move freely...this matter is also related to education. The perfection of the [human] personality does not principally consist of qualities that generate cleverness or deftness or even accuracy of observation, or the rationality that analyzes and forms generalizations. It depends mostly upon our training in truth and love, upon ideals that go to the root of our being.	5. Educating the Aesthetic Imagination: The Jorasanko Model: For Tagore, the aesthetic development of the senses was as important as the intellectual. Therefore, at his schools, Tagore tried to create an atmosphere in which the arts (music, literature, art, drama, and dance) would become instinctive.
Mukti: The transcendence of freedom, liberation, deliverance, release, and salvation towards even greater forms of freedom. The degree of freedom was to be measured by our realization	7. Relevant Linguistic Medium and Curriculum: English was important as a second language, but school instruction had to be in Bengali. Bengali was locally relevant as the vernacular and most definitely worth fighting for.

of the Infinite whether on the outer world or in the inner life.	
Absolute Brahman: A concept like Absolute Truth (the impersonal It) is beyond distinctions of this and that, the good and the evil, the beautiful and its opposite,	7. Kinesthetic Education: Practical and physical training were just as important as intellectual training. Students had to be acquainted with gardening, carpentry and weaving. Games, gymnastics, <i>lathi</i> (stick) play, jujitsu, and dance opportunities were integrated into students' learning situations.
	8. Education for Freedom: Atma-Shakti: Tagore emphasized that pupils had to be self-reliant with critical thinking abilities. From their early days, children were required to take care of themselves and others as much as possible. This was encouraged by allowing children to play a decision-making role in the school's internal affairs, practice challenging question-answer sessions, and role-play.
	9. Education for Social Responsibility and Global Linkages: Tagore wanted to create an experiment in human living where diverse individuals could come together in a non-aggressive natural setting to study the highest aspects of each other's culture.

Tagore's educational teachings can be very useful for IE in Bangladesh for several reasons. First, engaging with his philosophies allows moving beyond the postcolonial theoretical dilemma of continued ignorance of indigenous scholarship. Second, it solidifies an indigenous knowledge base for inclusive education in Bangladesh. Third, it provides a historical perspective of the problems of IE in the subcontinent, which can inform current problems of IE evolution in Bangladesh. And finally, as explained by Mukherjee (2015), it provides "an opportunity for enhancing broader theoretical understanding of the democratic underpinnings of inclusive education, rather than its narrow definition transferred through policy documents" (p. 60).

Suggestions for an Indigenous Knowledge Base on IE Through Tagore

Tagore's philosophy is useful because it expands the curricular aims of the school, which are not based on gauging and testing student achievement, but rather on endorsing and empowering students by allowing them to explore their creative and instinctive potentials. Each child is seen "like a unique bird," special

in his or her own way, with varying needs. This child is perhaps ignorant in the beginning but is very much capable of learning all by himself/herself if well supported by a curriculum that is centered on the natural world, effective and caring teachers, direct educational experience, and the endorsement and practice of aesthetic imagination. This type of thinking helps supplement the current understanding of IE, which is moving towards making schools more enjoyable, engaging, effective, and empowering. In addition to Tagore's theories and models, he gives tangible, tried, and tested practices that can be incorporated in day-to-day school practices. His theory-based teachings are useful for the conceptual supplementation of IE, but his focus is largely on practice (e.g., how children can be skilled with more autonomous leadership tools in schools). Furthermore, Tagore's educational approach considers what activities pupils can engage in to build a greater sense of camaraderie and kindness. Moreover, children are taught to value that the individual exists in two modes, and that without helping or serving others they cannot access the wholeness of their beings. These are appropriate practical tools, backed by solid philosophical and theoretical understandings that generally supplement IE. However, for Bangladesh in particular, they are contextually appropriate and useful, holding the possibility of being highly effective. Further, they break down many of the roadblocks currently plaguing the IE movement in the country.

For example, his teachings highlight the fact that IE, or at the very least vestiges of it, was part of the educational thought processes of past Bengali scholars and educational systems. Thus, for the South Asian context, it “demonstrates an alternative trajectory of child-centric socially inclusive education within the early 20th century colonial India” (Mukherjee, 2015, p. 57). Small changes for development and improvement can therefore be drawn from these past “Bengali” practices, rather than drawing entirely from Northern conceptions of IE. This, in turn, can help create more momentum for the movement, rooting it closer to Bengali culture and history, and perhaps even counter some of the political laziness that has been associated with IE. Additionally, the Northern-based human rights conceptualization of the child as mature and capable, that is being advanced in Bangladesh today, can be

supplemented and bolstered by Tagore who also saw similar attributes in a child. Tagore was accustomed to the Bengali culture, *somaj*, however, within the boundaries of that, he gave his students ample freedom of expression and thought. Why is this not possible in today's time is not only a central question to ask, but to address, and also to try to answer through the implementation of a child-friendly attitude in thought, process, and direct action related to IE. Like Mukherjee (2015), I maintain that engaging with Tagore's educational ideas allow for both analytical (ideological) as well as hermeneutic (affective historical) engagement with issues of inclusive education within the Bangladeshi context.

For example, one of the major barriers to IE in Bangladesh is at the philosophical level, in which the purpose of education is to produce competent individuals who can contribute to the economic growth of the country in return for their education. This is based on various different factors, but the core of this perspective lies in the concept of "human utility." As explained by Hill and Rahaman (2013), given the tenuous nature of democratic governance in the history and culture of Bangladesh—and the prevalence of instrumentalist relations driven by patron-client politics—Bangladesh is considered a "franchise state." Hence, it is a state where essential public services are being run by NGOs with extensive donor backing. This makes it difficult for the country to overcome the human rights versus human utility divide in education. The authors explain how on the one hand, there is the ratification of human rights treaties and existence of inclusive educational policies, while on the other hand, the dominance of instrumentalist relationships mixed with a weak tradition of participatory democracy have made "ideal inclusion" difficult. Education, in this light, is seen as more of a cost than an opportunity (Hill & Rahaman, 2013). In such a scenario, it seems that the weight of the "human utility" system is stronger than the push for human rights-based debates on education in Bangladesh. Drawing from Tagore's educational postulations in which the purpose of education is not one of mechanical causation but rather of value, kinship, and mutual respect, if topics such as relational functionality and interconnectivity with others can be popularized and utilized in policy documents, then debates on human rights can be strengthened. In turn, this can help move Bangladesh

towards implementing a “thicker version” of IE, in which education fosters co-operation rather than competition. However, utilizing Tagore’s words should not only be limited to policy documents, because if his teachings are to be adopted they must be amalgamated into the dialogue on inclusive education in Bangladesh as a vision that is fully Bengali, coming from a Bengali scholar, and therefore applicable to the Bengali people. In this manner, the second philosophical barrier, in which IE is considered an “adopted Northern” concept, can also be lessened.

Tagore not only provides philosophical lessons, but also practical tools teachers can use in the classroom to make their individual spaces more inclusive. These changes would not cost a great deal and would teach children to think indirectly yet meaningfully about inclusion and exclusion. For example, NGO schools, especially those of BRAC, are often located in remote villages next to paddy fields or rivers. To integrate nature into the curriculum, BRAC teachers could be given permission to hold classes outside their schoolhouses on an occasional basis. Bringing the children closer to nature would help them understand and tangibly feel how humans are actually a part of the natural world. By letting young children be one with nature, they can be given the opportunity to relinquish the central roles us humans have assigned ourselves in the larger scheme of things. Furthermore, by being in nature, children can understand that nature does not discriminate between rich and poor, the privileged and marginalized, or abled and disabled. In scenarios where this is not possible, especially in city and in non-BRAC schools with limited space, teachers can build a “natural corner” in the classrooms. To build a “natural corner,” (which can potentially grow into a small classroom garden) children in pairs can be tasked with bringing in a small plant or seed planted in soil that they can nourish and grow together over the course of the school year. The “natural corner” of the classroom can be dedicated to teaching young children about nature, while at the same time instilling in them the ability to collaborate on an on-going basis in order to foment kinship and friendship between one another. If there are disabled, vulnerable, or variably diverse children in the classroom, pairings should be made carefully and lessons should be taught on how with a little help

everyone can achieve the final goal of nourishing and growing a plant from a simple seed. This activity, in which the children collaborate and create something together, will be much more effective over time in helping them build relationships of kinship rather than memorizing lessons from textbooks on topics such as “loving thy neighbour” or “respecting your environment.”

Another arena where Tagore’s teachings would be especially useful is in teacher education and training in Bangladesh. One of the major barriers to IE in Bangladesh is teacher attitudes. Several studies conducted by scholars over the past five years show that teachers are not fully motivated towards IE (Ahsan, 2013). Some feel confused about it, while others do not feel they have enough resources to implement curricular and pedagogical changes on a practical level. Some are more confident, such as the male teachers, as female teachers feel socially deprived and less confident towards IE. Another study revealed that school teachers’ positive perceptions of IE practices have a considerably positive, direct correlation to its satisfactory implementation (Mullick, Deppeler, & Sharma, 2012). In this sense, drawing from Tagore, teacher education in Bangladesh, accompanied with the practical and pedagogical changes required for inclusive education, should focus more on the teacher-student relationship and on how to foster respect in teachers for diversity education. As previously explained, in Tagore’s education system, the *guru*-disciple relation was one of a deep connection. Just like in the classical Indian tradition, teachers and students put their differences aside and developed a deep bond, where the “teacher was like a gardener who gave tender care to the plant so that it might slowly and steadily grow, flourish, and fructify” (Samuel, 2010, p. 350). This is a difficult task given the scenario in Bangladesh, as many of the teachers being trained are far from creative themselves, having been educated under a rigid education system based on rote-memorization. Therefore, they feel very frustrated when asked to foster creativity in their pupils.

I suggest that teacher education, hence, needs to move away from traditional forms of teaching, currently conducted with manuals and lectures, to more creative forms of engagement and collaborative, incremental work. Teachers need to be shown how they, like artists, can bring about initiation and

creativity in their pupils. They need to be shown how to facilitate and guide, be role models, and how not to impose or direct; just telling them is not enough. Like Tagore, they need to start viewing teaching as a “labour of love.” However, they need to be equipped with the tools that enable them to see that love. Teachers must be willing to dedicate themselves 100 per cent to teaching, to achieving the fulfilment of knowledge for the pupil and for themselves, as an evolving, transforming, growing, and ever-changing vocation. It should not be treated as stagnant or routine. In doing so, examples from Tagore’s poems, stories, and books, in which he transcribed and recorded actual lessons, can be very useful for trainers. Likewise, collaborating with Vishva-Bharati University in Santiniketan to recruit teacher trainers is something the government, IGOs and NGOs can look into.

Tagore’s teachings can also inform the current definition of IE more specifically in Bangladesh. For example, UNESCO’s formulation of a definition for IE in Bangladesh, as discussed in detail in Chapter 4, is anaemic, which can be supplemented and improved through the application of Tagore’s philosophy. I am in no way claiming that the definition is a stagnant one that has not transformed or does not have the potential to change in future years; rather, I am simply asserting that viewing it through these lenses would be interesting and useful.

According to the definition provided in Table 7.3, “*IE is an approach to improve the education system by limiting and removing barriers to learning and acknowledging individual children’s needs and potential.*” If this is an intention for IE in Bangladesh, how can Tagore inform this intention for example? One integral way to achieve this goal, drawing from Tagore both theoretically and practically, is to not only endorse a child-friendly curriculum, but also make sure that child-friendliness is actually practiced on a day-to-day basis in the classroom. At schools where it is practiced, the selection of team leaders can be a more democratic process. For schools where this is not practiced, children can perhaps be given more responsibility in the classroom to resolve peer conflict with limited adult involvement. This way, children who have the potential to take on leadership roles, or children who are able to handle conflict

situations, can be identified. These personal and social skills should be encouraged to take shape naturally in the classroom and be given as much importance as reading and writing skills. This way, a broader, more diverse student body can feel involved in the daily practices of the school, and a shift from acquiring only academic skills can be made. In Bangladesh, the curriculum is still deeply entrenched in academic skill development, with very little opportunity for social skills, sports, or creative arts. However, the repeated, intentional valuation of diverse skills by supporting children who lack academic skills, but excel in other facets, can help expand the curriculum. In light of this, the testing and examination system also needs to change, which would require a re-evaluation of the actual meaning of a child-centered curriculum. Tagore has framed all his teachings, experiments, and experiences within the Bengali culture and has also shown how a *sincere* belief in the ability of children to learn on their own, and an integral *valuation* of their creative potential, unlocks their optimal potential while disregarding differences in class, wealth, ability, and gender.

Another part of the definition states, “*who [children] for different reasons do not achieve adequately and those who are not attending but who could attend if families, communities, schools and education systems were more responsive to their requirements.*” This is a very interesting statement, because these “different reasons” for not achieving or attending can be vast or loosely inclusive. Further, although the definition requires identifying those reasons, it does not state a way those different reasons will be identified for more inclusive schools. This is another space in which Tagore’s teachings can address this definition. By familiarizing themselves with Tagore’s work on education, stakeholders can start reframing their understanding of children and childhood. This re-framing may allow children to be directly asked about their requirements when it comes to school improvement strategies for IE. Moreover, by speaking directly to children to uncover their reasons, the system not only becomes more responsive to their needs, but change also occurs on two levels: inclusive instruction and conceptualizations of childhood. Through this process children are empowered, and are able to help in the development of the curriculum as well

as suggest continuous and future improvements. School can become more about and for the children, as it is envisioned in IE.

The conceptualization of Tagore's work in relation to the current movement of IE in Bangladesh is complex, multi-layered, and difficult. As previously mentioned, his educational work is barely known in Bangladesh. Further, when it comes to the novel and nascent IE movement, shrouded in contradictory and often under-developed understandings, the associations of his educational philosophy and practice to inclusion are even more difficult. However, the associations are necessary and the reasons why are very clear. In the next segment, I discuss a scenic representation of Tagore's school, juxtaposed with a scene from a BRAC school, to further cement the need to make this move.

Scenic Representations of Santiniketan and BRAC

Below are two scenic representations. Scene one is an excerpt from a morning session at Santiniketan written by Tagore scholar, Jnanendranath Chattopadhyay (1947, p. 9), while scene two is something I personally observed.

Scene 1.

The year is 1910, or thereabouts. This is Santiniketan. At the outskirts are cottages, small and simple, setting off a large green field. Tall Sal trees mount guard on either side of a gate and the creeper *Madhavi* arches over it with her luxuriance and spreads her fragrance in every direction. Close by, a mango grove, yet young, a riot in foliage, creates an impression of coolness and shade.

It is quite on all sides. The morning has advanced far towards the noon, and the place may have been asleep, for all one knows, but for the small clusters of children studying under the trees.

A bell rings-the strokes are eleven. The classes up, and the children, a hundred or so, scatter all over the place, but the repose noticed a moment ago is hardly broken. There is joy in their movements, in their beaming faces; there is depth in their joy, so it does not brim over.

[When Gurudeva] developed his own school [this one, he wanted to make sure] it was one from which no child would run away. (p. 9)

Scene 2.

The year is 2013. It is 2 pm on a Monday afternoon in the middle of November. I am at Uddayon: a bustling, crowded, and noisy center-city locality of Dhaka. The school is an approximate 350-square-foot brick structure, with four windows and a roof. The walls and the roof are made out of tin. It is located next to a car garage and a petrol pump just off a main street.

Outside, the open gate of the school, a round circle of neatly placed shoes adorn the entrance. One can hear children's recitations upon the entrance. A signage indicating the school number, class level, and locality hangs loosely on the side.

The teacher stands in front of the blackboard. Her face sweaty and hot even on a relatively cool winter afternoon. Around her sit 36 children on a burlap mat. They each have neatly piled school materials: a slate, few pencils, several books, and a scale, including some other materials in front. The children look content, happy to be following along in the lesson.

The noise in the classroom is audible. A loud consistent hum of recitations of multiplications fills the air. There is the occasional interruption by a question, a comment, or an outside noise. Some of the children can't keep pace. The teacher stops and asks if everyone is following. All 36 hum a constant "Yes *Apā*" in harmony. As she directs them again, all try to give their full attention to the text.

"My students are so good at following my instructions," says the teacher.

These descriptions reflect the reality of a class session at Santiniketan compared with a BRAC class session. There are obvious differences in terms of the location, mood, and overall objective of the session. The Tagore session emphasizes child freedom and happiness, while the BRAC session focuses on rigor and direction. The scenes also emphasize how the latter can perhaps benefit from moving towards the former, as IE is more about freedom and expression than rigor and direction. Hence, the main purpose of depicting the scenes is to *show*, rather than continuously report, disparities between Santiniketan schools and an "inclusive" school in Bangladesh today. However, I do not want to set them up as being too different, even if in time and space they most definitely are.

Moreover, if the two excerpts are read closely, similarities appear (i.e., children feeling happy to go to school is evident in both scenes).

Possible Counters to Tagore

Tagore and his family members, both male and female, were revolutionary thinkers on the frontlines of change. His work today can still offer positive, innovative change for Bengali education. However, one might argue that Tagore's work is better suited to a Bengal of the early 1900s, and not to a modern, more Islamic Bangladesh. A close reading of his work, nevertheless, illustrates that the highly forward-thinking Tagore kept both of these issues at the forefront of his educational debates. He foresaw many of the sub-continent's imminent problems through the partition of Bengal and advocated for religious tolerance and international education.

Tagore's work is highly influenced by the *Upanishads* and Hindu way of life, although he himself practiced a reformist form of Hinduism. Over the years of his life as Tagore's travels increased, he moved away from the insistence on Hindu nationalism and revivalism. He continued to advocate austerity and denounced luxury seeking in his students but during the partition his idealism of the Hindu *somaj* diminished. He supported the *Swadeshi*⁵² movement when it started, but once it degenerated into factionalism, terrorism, and Hindu-Muslim communalism, he withdrew his support (Neogy, 2010). During this time, he produced some literary pieces (i.e., "*Gora*" in 1907 and "*Ghaire/Baire*," "*The Home and the World*" in 1914) that reflect his changing attitudes towards Hindu tradition (O'Connell, 2002). In *Gora*, he explained how religion was about service, love, compassion, self-respect, and respect for all of humanity—and not about dividing men into classes and separating them into sects. At his schools, he always advocated religious tolerance, invited children from all classes, races, and religions, and eventually worked with both genders. His school may have started as a "forest hermitage," but it needed to expand in its role, capacity, and

⁵² The Indian one country own country movement emphasized the focus on acting within and from one's own community, both politically and economically.

outreach, prompting Tagore to work tirelessly with global leaders, thinkers, and scholars. In his 1919 educational idiom, his changing thoughts are evident and his vision for his school expands:

...to one which is able to consolidate the cultures of India and beyond in an effort to create a humanistic outlook and global cooperation...[providing] the students with an identity which was Indian yet had sufficient scope and resilience to connect with other races and cultures. (O'Connell, 2002, p. 171)

This also translated into practice through his various educational innovations at Sriniketan and Santiniketan, in which student activities included work in the villages with Hindus, Muslims, and tribal people.

These are the same racial and religious divides that are prevalent in today's Bangladesh, where 89.5% of the population is Muslim, 9.6% is Hindu, and 0.9% represent other tribal groups (CIA World FactBook, 2015). However, in today's Bangladesh, Hindus fear for a safe future as Islamic religious group violence grows and Hindus are targeted for their ownership of land, political reasons, and their religion. In this scenario, education needs to be based on humanism, religious tolerance, and inclusion in Bangladesh. To achieve IE, acceptance of diversity, practice of tolerance, and respect for the other must be established as a key principle in schools. Children have to be taught the value of going beyond mere divisions. Tagore's ideals can help IE stakeholders of IE achieve this, not only because they have a humanistic philosophical grounding but also practice one that is based on equity, autonomy, and child-centeredness. These are far more important as lessons for direct and constructive educational improvement than the simple fact that the philosopher's ideals were influenced by Hindu philosophy. And if his ideals, beliefs, and practices must be given a religious connection, it would be humanism rather than Hinduism. As Anwaruddin (2013) explains,

[Tagore's philosophy, religious and otherwise] also teaches us to go beyond traditions and establish an unmediated, joyful and organic relationship with [one another and] the Supreme Being. In this way, it enriches us with valuable insights into our own religious and ideological thoughts and, at the same time, empowers us with a better understanding of those who adhere to a different value system. (p. 35)

In addition to tackling religion, as explained by Samuel (2010), the genius of Tagore's thought is that he foresaw the international educational emergence at the very beginning of the 20th century. Although his thoughts were grounded in an Indian milieu, he understood through his travels the essentiality of human connectedness that bridges racial, cultural, and social differences. In the school curriculum he advocated the inclusion of topics that reflected how human misunderstandings, lack of communication, and cooperation have resulted in oppression, war, and violence. Moreover, Tagore pushed to illustrate both in theory and practice the benefits of cooperation at home and internationally. He advocated that the only way to overcome such miseries was through a multifaceted form of education. Therefore, in addition to strains of what we define as IE today, one can find in his works several implications of other modern relevant social implications such as multiculturalism, environmentalism, or the cooperative principle (Mukherjee, 2015). As emphasized by Mukherjee (2012), O'Connell (2012), Samuel (2010), Anwaruddin (2013), and many others, Tagore's views have relevancy in diverse facets of life. This has resulted in a resurgence of interest in his work in the past decade as scholars pursue the search for alternative and more effective educational mechanisms as schooling systems continue to inhibit children's sense of creativity and sensitivity. As Mukherjee (2012) points out:

Tagore's educational ideas had deep and powerful roots and did not originate, as it were, in mid-air. In fact,...it is one of the great merit's of Tagore's educational thought that it reflected within a single compass, so much of the best educational thoughts of the world (p. 441).

Founded within the compass of these thoughts, from the mind of a multi-faceted man, that lessons for IE in Bangladesh have been offered in this dissertation.

One critical issue to underline here finally is in relation to the point that Tagore's work was a melange of the "best educational thoughts of the world." It in fact was, as Tagore always wanted to bridge the East-West divide. Hence, the extent of his thoughts being "indigenous" can be questioned and since I used this word broadly throughout this thesis, it essential for me to unpack this point a bit.

Tagore drew from the world. Hence, Tagore, has often been referred to as the “world’s poet” who saw the world as a huge terrain of give and take of ideas and innovations. Despite this, I would like to suggest that indeed his thoughts were indigenous. They were indigenous not in the traditional definition of what is considered indigenous, as many of his concepts and ideas were influenced by the global terrain of education. However, when he first started his work on education his philosophy was guided by reviving older, ancient educational practices of India. Further, the way he creatively contextualized and parceled whatever he drew from the globe into one applicable and meaningful thought process specifically created for and catered to Bengal is indigenous. The global influences were there, but the way he put it together for Bengal was original and native-born. The nativity of his thoughts lies in the way he contextualized and applied it locally to Bengal, keeping all the cultural tools, strengths and weaknesses in mind. It lies in the ways in which he intertwined the teachings from the *Upanishads* and those of the ideal guru amongst many others. Therefore, his thoughts, had at the core of it a very strong, committed, and clear local agenda both philosophically and practically, but at the same time prioritized the global as a part, for its successful fruition. The need to highlight the nativity aspect of his thoughts, regardless of how they were influenced by the world during formation and ongoing reformation, is very important for the movement of IE today, wherein Southern scholars are largely ignored.

Final Comments

Through children’s voices, several motifs in relation to their physical and relational aspects at the schools were presented in the previous chapter, and in this chapter, these motifs were distilled through Tagore’s lenses. This was done to illustrate which issues resonated with the scholars’ thoughts and which issues required more work if IE is to be better contextualized for BRAC and Bangladesh. It was necessary to conduct this form of in-depth discussion to show the need to re-integrate local scholars’ ideals into the IE movement in Bangladesh. In addition, the goal was to demonstrate that children, who are generally perceived as incapable of contributing meaningful lessons, are actually able to share many

fresh perspectives. The next chapter, which ends this dissertation, charts the way forward with this type of thought process through recommendations and suggestions for future research, while at the same time bringing this conversation on Tagore, inclusive education, and children's voices in Bangladesh to a close.

CHAPTER 8

DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

General Comments

I started this dissertation with the intention of mapping out a way forward for the evolution of inclusive education in Bangladesh, in which children's voices would have particular value. By tying together their voices and that of Tagore, I illustrated through my findings and analysis how that is possible. Nevertheless, my journey on this path was long and meandering. In this section, I outline in brief a review of the chapters that marked the milestones of my research project. There, I discuss whether or not I have achieved the goal of answering each of my research questions. Then, I reflect on the limitations of my study and outline some suggestions for future research. Finally, I reemphasize some of the policy implications of my study, with a final anecdote from the field ending the dissertation.

Review of Chapters: Answering the Research Questions

Again, my research questions were:

What do children in nominally inclusive primary schools operated by the NGO BRAC express when asked what they like and dislike about their school?

Sub-question 1. What central motifs, with regard to IE, emerge from children's pictorial, spoken, and written perspectives?

Sub-question 2. If the children's voices (derived through data collection) are distilled through Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy of education, how can lessons be offered to better contextualize IE in Bangladesh and, more specifically, in BRAC?

I began Chapter 1 with an anecdote from the field. This anecdote of a mother and her disabled daughter Namoni was chosen intentionally, as it illustrated narratively BRAC's work and the progresses made towards inclusive education in Bangladesh. However, more importantly, it highlighted how very personal the experience of schooling actually is and how intrinsically linked it is to individual's future plans, hopes, and dreams. The story also emphasized how

moving towards inclusive education, even in small increments, is beneficial not only for the children involved, but their families and communities. Perhaps most interestingly is the fact that this point was stressed to me by the people I worked with in Bangladesh, and—since this dissertation is largely about presenting voices from the field and working with a traditionally marginalized group—this story opened the door to the way in which I rationalized, framed, and presented my inquiry. In the rest of my Chapter 1, I took on the following tasks: presenting my rationale, situating myself in the study, unpacking essential underpinnings, scrutinizing the objectives of inclusive education, problematizing the issue of children’s voices in Bangladesh, explaining how my research questions addresses those problematic aspects, and lastly pointing out a number of contributions this study makes. I ended the chapter by giving a brief overview of plans for each of the following chapters.

In Chapter 2, I explored the various literatures on inclusive education, as they were relevant to my study. Inclusive education is a global “buzzword” that is laden with multi-faceted and complex debates. It is at once a philosophical and a social debate, contextually understood across the globe, but without a single, guiding definition. It is a major, global, and growing response to the need to educate the children of the world. However, the question of education can hardly be articulated let alone answered if framed just within the rhetoric of inclusion. Therefore, in Chapter 2, as it is especially relevant to a country of the global South like Bangladesh, I analyzed and critiqued IE through a postcolonial lens. I also examined IE by unpacking the “cult of efficiency” and questioned whether IE too is currently serving this cult to the detriment of its larger, key social purpose for equity, equality, and quality in the education of young minds. I argued that, whereas global discussions on IE (in the sense of EFA) do include ethically attractive language related to the purpose of education, this language tends to serve as rhetorical window dressing, while playing a limited or negligible role in influencing actual policy and practice in local contexts. What we need to develop are more organic, local, and relevant understandings of IE in countries of the South, especially through the inclusion of children’s voices and local education philosopher or scholars of the past and present. Therefore, in this Chapter, after

doing an overview of the movements for IE in countries of the North, I moved towards discussing the evolution of IE in countries of the South. I drew especially from the literature on India and Bangladesh and mapped the movement of special and now inclusive education from the ancient Vedic period, to disability education in nineteenth century India and colonial imposition, up to the present time. I illustrated how by having been developed in the shadows of the Global North, IE in the Global South now faces several roadblocks.

In Chapter 3, which is also a review of the literature, I moved towards the discussion of children's voices and the integral role they play in the evolving meanings of inclusive education. I reviewed various studies from that field and made a case for the place and significance of children's voices in inclusive education and research. I reviewed the "new social studies of childhood," and the CRC, and how those influence the role children have had in the development of IE in Bangladesh. At the end of the chapter, I discussed some of the barriers that currently hinder the consideration of children's voices in Bangladesh.

In Chapter 4, I conducted a more in-depth, contextual review of IE in Bangladesh by going over the current challenges the movement faces. This chapter, therefore, started with an examination of the current status of IE, which is linked to the brief history of primary education in Bangladesh. I then shifted the focus to NGO operations, which provide a parallel education system in the country. In the next section of the chapter, I briefly discussed the various types of barriers, especially those faced by children with disabilities in Bangladesh. At that point, I argued that the only way to overcome these dilemmas in IE was by promoting a "Southern Inclusive Vision" (Mukherjee, 2015). Engaging with the works of Rabindranath Tagore, one of Bengal's most prolific educational scholars is central to developing this vision. His works remain ignored in current debates on IE in Bangladesh, however, an in-depth review of Tagore's life and educational philosophy, in the last part of this chapter, highlights the many valuable lessons he has to offer.

In Chapter 5 I unpacked my methodological journey. Therefore, I started the chapter with an explanation of the diverse and complicated methodological decisions that impacted my qualitative inquiry. Guided by strategies from visual

arts-informed and phenomenological approaches, I employed the following methods at two BRAC primary schools (School “U” and “M”): unstructured observations, photovoice, questionnaire, *addas*, free associative writings, and memos. The first was a Grade 3 urban school with 36 children located in the *Mohammadpur* vicinity of central Dhaka, whereas the second was a Grade 2 suburban school with 30 children located in the *Tongi* vicinity. Both had a mixed student population including differences in age, ability, and religion. I started the chapter with a broad overview of the essential aspects, which helped shape and inform my inquiry, including reflexivity and the evolution of qualitative research. Through this discussion, I explained how my study was informed by three different epistemologies: constructivism, phenomenology, and advocacy/participation. I also conducted an in-depth discussion on the usage of visual images and phenomenology as approaches that take qualitative measures even further and explained how they are especially suitable for working with child participants. This brought me directly to exploring the study at hand and in detail; I reviewed all the steps involved, including sampling, negotiating access, translating and piloting materials, and then conducting the methods with participants through several data collection instruments. The next section of this Chapter was dedicated to unpacking in detail the phenomenological data analysis processes that was conducted on the massive amounts of data resulting from this study. This resulted in central themes on children’s experiences. I then went on to discuss the issue of trustworthiness and ethics. Throughout these discussions, I maintained a reflexive stance, whereby I explained my position, my biases, and my role as essential, and how these impacted the research process. In each stage, I showed, through examples, the different types of hurdles that impacted my study, and the measures of resolution I adopted along the way. This led me to the essential discussion on the issue of voice as a salient methodological struggle in Bangladesh. In this final section, I illustrated the organic and permeating manner in which the issue of voice laced this study and how, at certain times, the meanings of voice in that specific context created challenges that required careful reconsideration of my role as a researcher.

In Chapter 6, I set out to answer my Research Question and Sub-Research Question 1. In other words, in this chapter I presented my major findings. Therefore, the focus of this Chapter was on exploring the central 9 like and 5 dislike themes (renamed *motifs*) from the data. The motifs were divided into two major concentration areas of physical and relational aspects of school, and children's likes and dislikes were compiled and presented under each of these concentration areas. Throughout the presentation of the findings, literature on inclusive education was referred to in order to critically engage with and reflect on each of the motifs and what they revealed about children's experiences at these schools. I also discussed some of my reflexive thoughts regarding possible conclusions drawn from the findings on students' likes and dislikes. The findings exposed many issues, but generally revealed that children fostered feelings of belongingness and inclusivity at their respective BRAC schools, although they wanted more autonomy and responsibility as individuals with voices that are heard and valued. Many more such findings in that chapter answered my Research Question and Sub-Research Question.

Chapter 7, the final chapter preceding the present conclusions chapter, was dedicated to exploring Sub-Research Question 2. I answered the question by drawing links between the findings presented in the previous chapter with Rabindranath Tagore's educational teachings. Hence, I went into detailed discussion on Tagore's teachings, insofar as they are and could be related to inclusive education, and, more particularly, insofar as they could be related to each of the motifs generated by the children, such as belongingness, collaboration, meaningful relationships, or the role of teachers. I drew mostly on Tagore's own writings, but conducted a critical analysis of each of the motifs in relation to the writings of Tagore scholars. As such, I illustrated how a distillation of children's voices and his educational philosophies can offer lessons for the contextualization of IE in Bangladesh. Towards the end of the Chapter, to bring the conversation to a close, and to *show* rather than tell, I quoted a narrative scenic depiction of a class session from Santiniketan, comparing it to a BRAC session. This led me to discuss some critical differences and points of contention that a Tagore inspired school system would face in Bangladesh. These included

topics such as religious and practical differences, especially those related to applicability in “modern” times. However, I argued that within Tagore’s vast writings, he already offers resolutions to these problems and an in-depth study of his work will resolve many of the dilemmas IE development faces in today’s Bangladesh.

Limitations

As with all research, this project had its limitations, which I address in the following sections. This includes methodological hurdles, school sampling, the dilemma of the authentic voice, and lastly, time periods and sporadic engagement.

Methodological hurdles.

As was outlined in Chapter 4, I encountered numerous methodological hurdles throughout my study. The first of these was assuming that children would be comfortable taking “dislike” photographs in the classroom and planning that as a central part of the project. As I explained, once I went into the field, I realized that children were not “comfortably open” about their dislikes. There was a lot of initial resistance to speak about them, which affected the use of the camera to portray that topic. This was due to several complicated reasons ranging from children’s social status at the school, and their relationship with the adults at home and school, to their understanding of the pressure to be “obedient” students, and, for many, due to their heightened sense of gratitude for getting the opportunity to attend school. Having worked previously with BRAC students, I should have known that perhaps this would have been a problem.

Regardless, I wanted my study to be one of engagement and creativity, which was what the photovoice method offered. Therefore, I still fully endorse using this methodology, as children did show engagement, creativity, and interest in using cameras and then discussing their photos. They fully enjoyed the photo activity regardless of what they photographed. What I could have done differently, in order to better address the problem of children being unresponsive to identifying their dislikes through the photographs, was instead of asking them

to take photos right from the start, I would first discuss “potential methods.” From these potential methods, which could range from speaking, writing, or drawing, I could have mentioned that photography was also one option. Then, as a class, they could have reached a consensus on one method they could all use comfortably to portray both likes and dislikes. For example, children displayed their interest towards writing, but this was only discovered in hindsight. However, if I had started out the study by giving children the option, then this discovery could have happened right from the beginning of the study, giving it greater organization, conformity, and data management.

The dilemma of the authentic voice.

My identity as a diasporic researcher, affiliated with a research-intensive university of the global North (advanced, western industrialized nations) returning to my native country to conduct research in the Global South, posed subjective challenges as to how I engaged with my research participants in this context. This positioning was two-fold. The first was that as a qualitative researcher with my specific background, because of which I brought certain biases and assumptions to the field that impacted the study. The second was that my positioning was also viewed by my participants in a certain way, and, even after rapport was established, the biases they held towards me impacted the study. In previous chapters, I illustrated through reflexive measures how I navigated and countered the two-sided biases that enveloped my work with the children. I used several mechanisms such as repeatedly establishing rapport, as well as allowing the children to take more decisions, giving them flexibility in the way they participated, and establishing the point that I was only interested in their perspectives no matter how much or little they had to say. Regardless, no matter how much I counteracted them, biases and assumptions are part of being a living, breathing human person. Therefore, it cannot specifically be considered a limitation.

What can be acknowledged as a limitation is the dilemma of the authentic voice that results from having two-directional biases between yourself and the participants. The children viewed me as an *Apa*, or older sister, and as

established by the personnel at BRAC, one who they had to respect, cooperate, and engage with. They understood I was flexible and open to speak to them about any topic at school, yet at the same time knew I was doing research under the authority of some “higher” institution. This impacted whether or not they were always fully engaged in an authentic manner. I explained this point earlier that researchers need to not only represent children’s voices, but also explore the “authenticity” of that voice by more deeply scrutinizing the realities of the exchange that occurs between researcher and participant, allowing for the “emergence of voice” in the first place. Furthermore, in childhood studies, we must be able to deconstruct the very notion of “voice” and be careful of how much autonomy, rationality, and intention the child’s speaking voice actually has (Komulainen, 2007). In this sense, there were some instances in which “creating situations” where the children “had to speak” perhaps undermined some of the authenticity of their voice. They were given the chance to re-visit the same issues through other methodological engagements. However, often by that time their response had changed as a result of them having more time to think or consulting their responses with the others. There were also instances in which some felt compelled to respond, and resorted to simply agreeing or repeating what their peers had stated before them. This highlights the myriad of ways voice has the potential to be compromised in research settings, and as a reflexive qualitative researcher I must recognize that this is a significant limitation that resurfaced throughout my project, although I was often able to mitigate it.

Time period and sporadic engagement.

The months of August 2013 to March 2014, during which this research was conducted, were politically tumultuous and unpredictable in Bangladesh. Week-long curfews, civilian protests, violence, bombings, and political unrest caused me to lose close to three months in the field upon my arrival in Bangladesh. As stated in the Guardian:

For most of last week, Dhaka was paralysed by violent protests launched by the opposition party to mark its hostility to the current government's plan to hold an election in January without installing a neutral caretaker administration first (Burke, 2013, p. 1).

Paul (2013, p.1), Reuters, also writes:

Violence has gripped the country as [Prime Minister] Hasina and her ruling *Awami League* press ahead with vote... more than 200 people have been killed in political violence this year... rolling strikes staged by the opposition and blockades of roads, rail lines and waterways are also hurting the [economy].

In this type of a scenario, my mobility in Dhaka was limited. Throughout October 2013 to January 2014, there were sporadic days when I was able to travel to the schools and spend time with the children. This inconsistency, coupled with children's resistance to photograph "dislikes," brought about unexpected changes during which I had to make fast, on-the-spot decisions regarding methods. Some of these I had prepared for before arrival, but most I could not have expected and thus had to be creative along the way. This is the reality of fieldwork—a messy, disorganized, and evolving process. Again, it was reflexive reconsiderations that helped me counter these issues in such a way that I was able to collect very useful and rich data.

Implications for future research

The data I gathered provided rich and nuanced depictions of children's perspectives from the two BRAC schools. This resulted in a multi-layered, complex and meaningful inquiry that can offer a meaningful contribution to the scholarship on IE, Tagore and children's voices.⁵³ However, more can always be done. In this section, I outline the several implications for future research, which can take the work I did even further.

Implications for the literature.

One of my major intended contributions was to build on and take the current literature on inclusive education further, and suggest ways forward for the evolution of IE in Bangladesh in a more contextually relevant and organic manner. As previously stated, IE is still a work in progress, its meaning

⁵³ The contributions of this study have not been recapped here. They are discussed in detail in Chapter 1.

continuously and constantly evolving in the context in which it is situated. However, the rhetoric of IE, especially in countries of the South, often overpowers the contextual realities at hand. This is due to the global forces of IE, but also to the dearth of knowledge on that specific locality. For Bangladesh, this is the case in most school contexts.

I tried to fill a very small part of that gap by focusing on the stories of children enrolled in NGO schools, which are at the forefront of the IE movement in Bangladesh. However, most of the remaining enrolled students are at schools in the public, private and religious educational sectors. Therefore, to make IE a major priority in those sectors, more research of and with children enrolled in those schools is required. In identifying the issue in the NGO sector, which is a particularly developed one in Bangladesh, I discovered that there is quite a lot of room for the representation of children's voices in all the other educational sectors of Bangladesh.

In this respect, studies that further probe into children's experiences of inclusive education over a range of different schools can be conducted. Experiences of IE do not only have to be understood in terms of likes and dislikes, as a plethora of other questions can be asked. For example, with an older cohort, it is possible to search for the definition of inclusive education from the participants themselves, and ask how they view the changes on offer. Researchers can perhaps also refer to the very popular capabilities approach and utilize that in their understanding of IE in Bangladesh. For example, one can design a study in which comparisons are drawn between children who are graduating from an inclusive school, to those who are graduating from traditionally non-inclusive schools. This study could map the children's perspectives on their *capabilities* to generate a nuanced discussion around the impacts of inclusionary educational practices. A lot of the research on IE in Bangladesh is source oriented rather than result oriented. In other words, most research in Bangladesh is currently going into building appropriate IE programs, especially by targeting teacher training and staff development. However, few are gauging the successes of programs in school in which staff is already trained. Nussbaum's list of ten capabilities provide a solid grounding in terms of what government's are viewing as essential

life abilities for citizens of the future world, and it would be interesting to gauge how effective an inclusionary form of education is towards achieving that goal by speaking to children about them.

Contributions to the literature can also be made in the future by delving deeper into Tagore's educational thought to find lessons for inclusive education. In my study, I limited my discussion of IE, and the lessons offered by Tagore, to the emergent motifs. Tagore's teachings are so vast, however, that there is much more to be said in terms of lessons for IE. For example, Tagore explains in detail the role of creativity in education. The evolution of IE in Bangladesh could benefit largely from creativity-oriented curricula. There is a lot of research that shows the implications of child-centred curricula in schools, but the essential topic of children's creativity, and the place it should have in child friendly curricula is not explored. This is because, even at inclusive school where IE values are at the core, creative practice is only seen secondary or "extra" to academic subjects. Academic subject development and knowledge accumulation is prioritized even for children who voice the need to feel more creative through the practice of art, drama, dance, or sport. More research needs to be conducted on the evolving IE curricula across Bangladesh that challenge the idea of creativity as "extra." Referring to Tagore, who was a Bengali scholar, can perhaps create a more solid case for stakeholders in the field today to move in that direction.

Methodological propositions.

The methodology of this study draws on three epistemologies: constructivism, phenomenology, and advocacy/participation. Hence, I posited, through reflexive engagement with children, that meaning, or truth, cannot simply be understood as "objective" but it is constructed; in other words, "the world and the objects in the world may be in themselves meaningless; yet they are partners in the generation of meaning and need to be taken seriously" (Crotty, 1998, p. 44). Furthermore, for us to reach this type of meaning two other aspects are essential: engaging the self and other participants fully in the research process. This methodological journey, involving reflexive negotiations with participants in the field (even more so with the self), should be seen as a

continuously evolving, meaning-making, multi-faceted vessel within the messiness of the rarely conducted research processes in the context of Bangladesh. Ahsan (2009) is the one researcher who has successfully conducted reflexive fieldwork in Bangladesh with children; however, future implications of reflexive work can involve various other stakeholders of education.

Studies can also involve the reflexive use of traditional or arts-based methods. Through collage inquiry, for example, researchers can gauge how parents shape the dreams and aspirations of their children. This study could inform schools on how to bridge educational gaps that result from children's engrained ideas of self, constructed at home, to their evolving ideas of self developing at school. This is especially true for an older age group, although often children may feel torn between why their parents send them to school and why they think they should be at school. Studies need to explore this gap further in Bangladesh, so that school inclusive school curricula can better address the problems that arise from it. Reflexivity as a method could help such a study, which again would be necessarily qualitative and steeped in the idea that meaning is constructed through multiple actors in any given field. Making the case for future research with children involving qualitative and reflexive methods is especially important for Bangladesh, where quantitative, generalizable, number-oriented measures of research are conducted more frequently, and have traditionally had more value.

Practical, field-level suggestions.

The goal of this study was defined by my three research questions, in which I wanted to explore children's likes and dislikes, glean central motifs from their words, and distil those through Tagore's teachings. Throughout this process, I was able to not only outline children's voices, but also connect them to Tagore's teachings, and, as such, demonstrate their importance for the development of a Southern vision of IE for Bangladesh. This, however, is just the beginning, as within Tagore's teachings, there are many practical, visible, and implementable implications that schools such as BRAC can consider for small to

large-scale changes in the near future. Interestingly, as my findings highlighted, the children would also like to see many of those changes.

As a way forward, a practical future implication would perhaps be to implement some of the changes suggested by the children at School “M.” This school still has two more years in session, and the children’s suggestions coupled with those of Tagore can possibly illuminate a way forward that, if proven successful, can even be implemented in neighbouring and similar schools. I would suggest, always before any such implementation, a few workshops and meetings with the children. These mechanisms would allow BRAC to survey what new cohorts of children prefer and re-distil those with Tagore’s lessons. The organization can then move forward with implementing small, but constructive changes, as I suggested in Chapters 6 and 7, in the schoolhouses. In line with this, some of Tagore’s teachings can also be slowly implemented at rural BRAC schools, where there is more geographic space and environmental tranquillity.

Not only BRAC, but other organizations can also explore the applicability of Tagore’s teachings in their school’s policies and practices. For that, more research needs to be conducted on his work vis-à-vis the educational endeavours in Bangladesh. This will pave the way towards Bangladeshi-based school practitioners, officers, and stakeholders engaging with and becoming interested in Tagore’s educational legacy. Therefore, a study to similar mine can be conducted with teachers in different types of school’s in Bangladesh, in which they can be equipped with some of Tagore’s teaching tools in the classroom for a predetermined period of time. Then the researcher can carry out a discussion, in focus groups, with the teachers on the successes and failures of those endeavours, and whether the teachers would like to continue to use them in the future.

Policy Implications

One of the main intentions of my study was to outline recommendations for the improvement of IE policy in Bangladesh. These recommendations are applicable to the context of education in Bangladesh in general, and not only to BRAC. In Chapters 1, 2, 4, and 7, I made some direct and indirect suggestions for improving policy, which were:

Chapter 1

- Developing holistic inclusion policies at both the national and school levels.
- Strengthening teacher training at both the national and local levels.
- Creating model and experimental IE “schools” to find out best practices.

Chapter 2

- Framing IE in a bottom-up fashion, where contextual realities from the field dictate relevancy and appropriate action for IE.
 - First, thoroughly examining the historical and indigenous knowledge in education and advocating for it as an integral part to the process of contextualization.
 - Second, acknowledging that elements of the IE philosophy were practiced in schools in the past in Bengal.
 - Third, respecting and valuing local practices, rather than always prioritizing Northern- based lessons. Hence, school improvements and model schools do not have to be “adapted” from other countries.
 - Lastly, directly incorporating indigenous philosophies and methods in school culture, policy, and practice.

Chapter 3

- Acknowledging the desire of children in Bangladesh to participate and have their voices heard in educational debates. It is the only way to learn from them in the hopes of improving IE and safeguarding the present for a better future. Some policies have started to include children’s voices (i.e. 2004-2009 NPA), while others need to follow suit.

Chapter 4

- Essential strategizing for better collaboration and networking between the GOB and NGOs in order to broadly and effectively reach out to the many vulnerable children.

Chapter 7

- Addressing, improving, and amending the current definition of IE in use in Bangladesh by re-assessing the intricacies of its plan and goals, and specifically enhancing how both are measuring through the application of Tagore's philosophy.

In taking these policy implications a bit further, I would like to suggest that the policy implications emanating directly from my work are specific and do not cover the whole IE sector. However, I wanted to re-emphasize the need for a strong holistic policy, built on a clear understanding of IE with a collaborative approach amongst stakeholders, departments, existing policies, and schools. This is because, without such an approach, efforts will fall short. Further, positive policies based on local indigenous knowledge can directly impact and change how IE is understood and practiced in Bangladesh.

Ahsan (2013) points out that currently there are many discriminatory and confusing clauses in the policy documents, including the CPEA of 1990, the NCP of 2011, and the PED II and PED III programs. For example, the CPEA took a discriminatory position against children with severe learning disabilities. Furthermore, in the PEDII and PEDIII program, mild and moderate disabilities have been generalized into one group, although it is clear that the degree of their disabilities varies. First, these discriminatory clauses have to be removed. Second, the confusing position in relation to different types of disabilities needs to be addressed. Further, the position of the Acts on IE versus integrated or special education needs to be clarified. With this done, a cooperative and collaborative approach between those educational sectors in specific application to Bangladesh can be developed. Going a step further, the focus on ameliorating shortcomings needs to be shifted towards whole school development. Essentially, while disability is integral to IE, strategies to improve the access, engagement, and empowerment of a diverse student population, through fundamental and clear school policies, need to be strengthened. Here, Tagore's knowledge on school improvement strategies can help.

In addition, the Early Childhood Care and Development Act and the Person's with Disabilities Rights Act 2011, which are currently stuck at the developmental and parliamentary approval phase, need to be approved and implemented with haste and urgency (Ahsan, 2013). The first of these Acts, for example, puts forth a coordinated and collaborative method of inclusion, by targeting issues such as early intervention, curricula, and teacher training and development at the pre-primary level—a high priority sector for ensuring early detection and early intervention for the most vulnerable. The second aims to significantly improve the educational opportunities of disabled children by addressing issues of public awareness, parental and family roles, and school administrative and staff discrimination against children with disabilities (Ahsan, 2013).

Policies that impact administration and culture at local schools, also have to be re-evaluated and reformed. There are, for example, 64 integrated schools in 64 districts, and several special schools in every town operated by the Department of Social Services (Ahsan, 2013). However, these schools, even though they are representative of government initiatives, often fail in displaying and achieving their inclusive targets. This is because the schools still follow a very bureaucratic system of management and have little freedom in decision making (Ahsan, 2013). Further, neither do they have adequate support from experts in the field nor do they cooperate amongst one another for support, development, and improvement.

In order to address this barrier, the policies that outline school action need first to be more flexible. Second, the policies have to give officials at all different levels the incentive to be more open to give and receive support. Collaboration among special and inclusive education practitioners need not be an exception, but a commonplace practice stipulated by the school policies. The schools' challenges need to be approached with a mentality of responsible reform towards inclusive measures, wherein stakeholders are able to work together by maximizing on each other's strengths. Together they can develop a collaborative method to address issues of enrolment, dropouts, resource management, and teacher development. In short, each school left to fend on its own with stringent

top-down methods of administration needs to be replaced with collaboration, community building, and a culture of “helping hands.” This is a sector where Tagore’s school management systems can definitely enlighten practitioners, as Tagore built democratic, open, and collaborative communities of learning in which all stakeholders, including children, shared a sense of equity, and individuals were given the tools they each needed to succeed to the best of their abilities.

In fact, applying the knowledge that Tagore has to offer to inclusive education in Bangladesh can help:

- 1) in creating policies that allow schools to operate with more flexibility;
- 2) in teacher training, on how to be *gurus*;
- 3) towards the prospect of building model schools;
- 4) children have valued input in curricular development;
- 5) disabled children serve as role models for their peers;

and in several others areas, which would strongly benefit from this *first significant step* in acknowledging, valuing, and championing local indigenous educational bodies of knowledge on education. This has to be done by all stakeholders, but most urgently by local practitioners, thinkers, and “movers-shakers” in the education sector in Bangladesh. Nothing will happen without their support and political will.

Final Thoughts: An Anecdote from the field

In concluding this thesis, which has been a long and arduous yet productive journey, I have chosen an anecdote from the field, which I recorded during one of my informal conversations with a group leader. The case of this pupil, and especially her version of her role as a leader of “School U,” neatly echoes the main essential themes I have presented in this study: children’s voice, contextual relevance, and Tagore’s perspectives for the development of IE in Bangladesh.

Being one of the tallest students in the classroom, Shamim-Ara stands out from her classmates. At age thirteen, she falls into the older children's bracket at School "U." She is the leader of the group named, "Rose," but unlike many of the other leaders, she is surprisingly shy and soft-spoken. There are six other members in her group. They include the boisterous and hyper Fahim, Shamim-Ara's best friend and confidante, and the joyful Sabiha. The group also includes Farin and Yamazir, one of the most quarrelsome duos in the schoolhouse. In addition, there is the moody and unpredictable Tohura, and the quiet Sunaiana.

In charge of this band of six, Shamim-Ara, has an unwittingly calm demeanour. Whenever given a task, in their small group, she manages to bring her peers together to complete that task well. Over the course of a few weeks, I observe how it is always a bit difficult to keep Fahim on task, as he usually finishes first, then gets fidgety, distractive, and talkative. Shamim-Ara has, therefore, made Fahim second in-charge. He helps those falling behind in the task after he has finished.

When I sit down to ask Shamim-Ara what she enjoys most about coming to school, she instantly replies that she loves leading her small groups, as she envisions herself becoming like *Apa* (a school teacher) when she grows up; she enjoys the task of "teaching" and "leading" her peers. Shamim-Ara explains, "I really enjoy being a small group leader. I can help my peers who do not understand. They believe in what I say. I think they believe me when I show them how to do work or memorize texts. I understand what they want. For example, two of my group members do quarrel often, but if I ask them to pay attention during a task, they do that also. So we understand each other well I think." She pauses for a minute to think some more, "As a leader, I am also helping *Apa*, not only my friends. If *Apa* does not have time or cannot explain something to all of us at the same time, if I grasp that lesson, then I explain it to my group members. If I have trouble understanding, I usually ask *Apa* or Sabiha or Fahim. Sabiha and Fahim are also very good at their school work and help me in the small group a lot."

I probe Shamim-Ara a bit more for her to explain how she deals with quarrels, or those unwilling to participate in the small groups. She thinks about this question for almost five minutes before answering, "Quarrels, well we have two members who do not always get along. I usually ask Sabiha to sit in between them if I see they are about to start fighting. Then I ask each of them to pay attention and tell them I will tell *Apa* if they do not. If they continue, *Apa* steps in usually. For my quiet members, as we memorize the materials, I ask them many times to read and re-read. If they are not happy, I ask them why they are not happy. Usually they tell me. Sometimes they do not. I often ask them to repeat after me also, just to make sure that they are actually memorizing."

As a leader Shamim-Ara, therefore, is well aware of her role. She takes responsibility for her teammates and leads them in and out of course requirements and helps them navigate the social dynamics that exist in their schoolhouse. Sometimes, though she wishes her contributions were better

recognized and adults at the school could entrust her with more responsibilities. She states, “Whatever work *Apa* asks me to do, I do it well, I think. If she wants...I can do more, but as a team leader we are only required to help our friends...and not that much more.”

Shamim-Ara’s story sums up in detail the ability of children to manage themselves if they are given the responsibility to do so. For example, her method of placing a student between two other who quarrel shows her ability to think carefully about the relationships that sustain her group’s success. At the age of thirteen, in Bangladesh, most children are still considered immature. However, at School “U,” Shamim-Ara’s skills demonstrate quite the opposite. There were several other students at the BRAC schools who displayed this form of behaviour, and when given the platform to speak about their experiences at school, they were able to participate fully and meaningfully.

To put it in terms of Rabindranath Tagore’s teachings, as I demonstrated in great detail earlier and reiterate here, if children are given the authority to have power they will be able to lead themselves, make decisions, resolve problems amongst themselves and depend on one another to make coming to school an experience of joy and success. Teachers only need to give them a helping hand and guide the way. Child-centred curricula, which supporters of IE advocate, need to focus on that in Bangladesh. Further, if education is conceived as the “commons of the mind,” as the exploration of ideas, as a journey of understanding then inclusion entails *inclusion* in this *journey* of learning. In a country like Bangladesh, regardless of difference, this has to be made a more serious consideration—that being included in the *process* of learning is a core element of inclusive education.

Through the example of BRAC—one of the pioneering organizations of and for educational change, diversity, and inclusion in Bangladesh—we can see, however, that this shift still has not been made. Therefore, a change in the mentality of stakeholders towards a more wholesome approach to working with

children and their voices, and trust in their abilities visions for themselves needs space to grow and expand in Bangladesh.

In addition to this core shift, for the rethinking of IE in a country like Bangladesh, current practitioners in countries of the South need to take charge in defining what inclusive education could mean for them in their contexts. I suggested that for Bangladesh, the often unheard voice of Rabindranath Tagore must be revived in inclusive educational debates. His scholarship cannot be forgotten for the simple fact that it constitutes an important part of Bengali heritage and that the current context of inclusive education can benefit largely from this retracing. Postcolonial and neoliberal forces may still create pressure for national policies and practices, but an acknowledgement of the heritage of knowledge that exists in the Bangladeshi context can help lessen some of those pressures. Furthermore, keeping global agendas as a priority does not mean that local agendas cannot be placed on equal footing. Stakeholders in the field need to first become aware of those local voices, and then take the necessary steps to make inclusion not only about access for all children to an inclusive education, but also about the empowerment of their voices, their abilities, and the prospective of their meaningful and appropriate contributions to making their *own education* a reflection of their needs and wants.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I – Approaches to Ghostwriting

Ghostwriting, as explained by Rhodes (2006, p. 514)

[is an approach that] is used to refer to a practice where a researcher engages with a research participant and, as a result, creates a new text that both tells a story of that participant and implies the involvement of the researcher.

It is different from the traditional method of writing up interview results, as it does not make invisible the role of the researcher in how we “stage the text...[or how we] bestow meaning and promulgate values” (Richardson, 1992, p. 131) relative the lives of those we write about.

In this sense, based on our casual conversations, I “ghost-wrote” the narratives in my dissertation. The steps involved are outlined below:

- Read and re-read notes taken.
- Type notes in Word.
- Highlight (boldface) key words and phrases.
- Group/Demarcate participant’s words/phrases into relevant sections.
- As per Rhodes’s (2000) *ghostwriting* method, unpack, reorganize, and reframe the participant’s words into a coherent narrative while making yourself simultaneously “invisible” and “present” within the text. Use observation memos to help this process.
- Allow yourself room for the practice of some “creative non-fiction”, narrative contiguity, and emotional prose for each story.

Although my goal was to remain as close to the spoken words and observation notes as possible, while ghostwriting, I found that as my emotive self got moved by and involved into the stories, I was better able to frame the narrative prose. Definitely, at times it revealed my positioning and through my word choices or text organization. In other words, I represented through my writing a certain image of others (Rhodes, 2006), but as a reflexive researcher I own that position.

Therefore, I am not “absent” from Namoni’s story (or the rest of the stories presented) at all. As an example, in Namoni’s story I broke down what her mother said in certain categories. But I chose those categories myself in relation to my topic on inclusive education, as I wanted the story to be related to the topic of inclusion. Perhaps, from a different angle, the same story could be about the struggles of early motherhood or even just disability in Bangladesh. In this sense, every narrative in this dissertation, framed

within lines relevant to debates on inclusive education, certainly shows my role as presenter and filterer of the data.

Furthermore, my goal to search for “inclusive” elements in the schools I visited—be it in the attitudes of the teacher or the beliefs of and interactions with parents and students—therefore, my conversations were always conducted with that frame of mind. Naturally, it impacted and shaped the kind of data I gathered. Perhaps, someone with a non-inclusive lens, not impacted by the global debates on inclusion, by a previous masters degree on a similar topic, by Rabindranath Tagore, or the *Index for Inclusion*, would see the same situation rather differently. In addition, there are some words and phrases in the narrative accounts I wrote in Namoni’s story that her mother did not explicitly use in our discussions, such as “painfully,” “no signs of improvement,” or the “walk to the clinic was long”. However, from her body language and from the other expressions she used to convey her message, I got fairly clear insight to her struggles between the time her daughter was born to the time she managed to get her admitted at school.

Appendix II – BEP’s Activities in Brief

<p><u>OVERALL IMPACT</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Across the country, almost 1.1 million children participate in BRAC schools each year. • To date, over 3.8 million children have graduated from BRAC schools. <p><u>LEVEL IMPACTS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than 2.3 million children have successfully completed the pre-primary school level. • 98% of all students transferred to a primary school after completing the pre-primary course. • Around 93% of all graduates from primary school transferred to secondary schools. <p><u>MARK IMPACTS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 96,177 students received 90% on their Primary School Certificate (PSC) examinations • There was a 99.99% pass rate recorded on the PSC exams. <p><u>SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A total of 32 CSN students participated in a scouting conference, from which the exposure helped to develop their social skills and boost their confidence. • Currently, a total of 46,261 CSN students are enrolled at BEP schools. <p><u>GROWTH AND EXPANSION</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since 2012, the number of operating urban schools has doubled from 2104 to 4106 • BEP launched 257 new boat schools in hard-to-reach areas. <p><u>FOCUS ON THE PRIMARY LEVEL WITHIN BEP</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The flagship component of BEP is BPS (BRAC Primary Schools). • First started in 1985, at the very beginning of BEP’s existence. <p>Features</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one-room rented house • a local SSC (Grade X) graduate female teacher • 25-33 children in a school • Government curricula • flexible school timings • children seat in small groups in four corners • children are lead in the groups usually by yearly inter-changing <i>female</i> team leaders • proximity to students’ homes • no costs to parents • close involvement of parents and communities in school management • schools are established with permission of nearest GPS/RNGPS Head teacher • close monitoring and supervision of program • The one-teacher school is operated by the same teacher, for the same cohort of children, for the entire four-year period to cover grade 5 and deliver lessons in all subjects.
<p><i>Target Children</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age 8-12 • Children from poor families • Children with special needs • Children from ethnic minorities
<p><i>Course Duration</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 years • 3-4.5 hours in a day • Six days in a week
<p><i>Curriculum and Materials</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BRAC curriculum is the same competency-based curriculum that is used in the GPS. The Bangladesh National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) defined the desired outcome of primary education in terms of 53 terminal competencies covering specific subjects—Bangla, mathematics, social studies—and domains—cognitive, affective, and psychomotor.

(BRAC Annual Report, 2013; Dfat, 2015)

Appendix III – Formal Letters



October 11, 2012

To whom it may concern:

This is to confirm that Ms. Tahiya Mahbub has been accepted as an intern at BRAC under its education programme. Ms. Mahbub will work with the BRAC Education Programme (BEP) as a part of her PhD research, which will be based on BRAC's inclusive schools and its students, teachers and other affiliations.

Her internship period will be of 6-8 months and will start anytime between March-August, 2013. During her internship she will work under the supervision of Ms. Limia Dewan, Senior Manager (CSN), BRAC Education Programme.

As she has been formerly informed, this internship is going to be unpaid but we will be supporting her institution-wise by providing her access to all the relevant official resources of BEP, arranging field visits to our schools, arranging focus group meetings to interview and observe and allowing her closely to work with other BEP members and affiliates as per her needs to make her research successful.

We welcome her at BRAC and hope this internship will be meaningful to her and helpful for her research.

Sincerely yours,

Rakib Mohammad Avi

Rakib Mohammad Avi
Officer, Communications

BRAC

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April 10, 2014

To Whom It May Concern:

This is to confirm that I, Erum Marium, Director BRAC University-Institute of Educational Development (BU-IED), had supported Tahiya Mahbub as her host country supervisor while she was in Bangladesh completing her fieldwork for her doctoral research. Her research explores children's voice in inclusive education and through me she was affiliated to (BU-IED) and BRAC.

Her research work period in Bangladesh was intended for August 2013-December 2013, however, extended till the end of mid March 2014, due to ongoing political strife and violence in Bangladesh. The violence impacted Tahiya's ability to access her chosen schools and slowed down her work in Bangladesh. Nevertheless, she completed all the methods as planned including observations, photo voice project, *adda* (in-formal focus group) sessions and questionnaire at her chosen schools. Following some of my guidance, she may have also conducted some informal interviews with her participants to speed up and complete her data collection process.

Tahiya has now completed all her required data collection work in Bangladesh and before leaving, she conducted some data analysis too. Now in Canada, she will complete her remaining analysis and start writing her dissertation.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

With regards,



Dr. Erum Marium

Appendix IV – BRAC BEP CSN Senior Manager’s Consent

Study Name:	Rethinking inclusive education in Bangladesh through an examination of children’s voices and Rabindranath Tagore’s pedagogical philosophy ⁵⁴	
Researcher: Contact	Tahiya Mahbub, Graduate Student, MCGILL UNIVERSITY, Canada 01922110301; tahiya.mahbub@mail.mcgill.ca	
Supervisors:	Dr. K. McDonough	001-514-398-6949;
	kevin.mcdonough@mcgill.ca	
	Dr. R. Ghosh	001-514-398-5398;
	ratna.ghosh@mcgill.ca	

I give permission to Tahiya Mahbub, of McGill University Canada, to conduct her project titled “Contextualizing inclusive education for Bangladesh: a journey through children’s voices and Tagore’s educational philosophies”. In signing below, I give her permission to work with the children at her purposively sampled BRAC schools: Uddayon BRAC Primary School & Morkun BRAC Primary School. I will support her fully, as my role at BRAC permits to conduct her planned research methods of observations, photo voice, *adda* sessions and questionnaires at the above-mentioned school during the months of August 2013 to February 2014. In my role as the Senior Manager, I understand that I may be asked to speak with her at occasional moments to clarify certain issues or questions pertaining to her project. I also understand that through her project, although the school or location of the school will not be directly identified, BRAC will always be identified in all public presentations and writings produced. For further information regarding this project, I can contact the Tahiya’s supervisors. For even further inquiries or concerns regarding the participants welfare in this research study, I can contact Lynda McNeil, the McGill Manager, Research Ethics at 001-514-398-6831 or at lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca.

Limia Dewan
Official’s Name

Sr. Manager (CSN)
BEP, BRAC
Official’s Designation


Official’s Signature, DATE 10.9.13

Tahiya Mahbub
Researcher’s Name


Researcher’s Signature, DATE 10 Sept 2013

⁵⁴ During the final year of my research, the title of the thesis changed slightly. Hence, there is a difference in the header and the signed section of this form.

Appendix V – Teacher’s Consent Form

Sample

Date: _____

Study Name:	Rethinking inclusive education in Bangladesh through an examination of children’s voices and Rabindranath Tagore’s pedagogical philosophy	
Researcher:	<i>Tahiya Mahbub</i> , Graduate Student, MCGILL UNIVERSITY, Canada	
Contact	01922110301; tahiya.mahbub@mail.mcgill.ca	
Supervisors:	Dr. R. Ghosh	001-514-398-5398;
	ratna.ghosh@mcgill.ca	
	Dr. K. McDonough	001-514-398-6949;
	kevin.mcdonough@mcgill.ca	

Purpose of this Research

This research is being conducted as a part of the dissertation to fulfill the requirements of a PhD in Education from McGill University. Through an exploration of my classes childrens’ likes and dislikes at school, the researcher aims to understand how my pupils understand, interpret, and experience inclusive educational practices at this BRAC school. As the teacher, I am an integral part of this school. Hence, this research project requires some of my involvement in it.

What will I be asked to do in this research?

The focus of this research project are my students, however, from time to time I may be informally questioned and photographed as per the requirements of the research project. In total the researcher will spend approximately 4 months in my schoolhouse, during when, I will be asked to cooperate with the researcher and allow her to observe my classroom, myself and my students. Further, for this research I will be asked to allow my students one hour afterschool for taking photos, 30 minutes in-class for writing some paragraphs explaining their photos, 1-2 hours for *adda* sessions after school one day and another 30 minutes in-class for a follow-up questionnaire. During this time, I may be briefly questioned and spoken to informally.

Confidentiality and Risk

As I am the sole teacher of this school my identity cannot remain anonymous in this project. However, since I am not the focus of this study no risk is associated with being a part of this project. As the teacher, I will play a small role and hold minimum informal discussions with the researcher and be photographed briefly for this project. Whatever I say, will only be used to clarify and better understand certain phenomenon in the class but not as central data. I will rarely be quoted and if my pictures are used in her written work, my face will always be blurred. By the end of the project, if my participation is deemed more central to the researcher, she will take speak to me and take specific permission to use the concerned data/quotes in her published work.

Voluntary Participation

No incentives will be offered to me to be a part of this project. My participation in

the study is completely voluntary, and I am under no obligation to agree to being photographed or questioned regarding my role at this school. A decision not to volunteer will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship I have with BRAC either now or in the future, the researcher, and/or the nature of their relationship with McGill University.

Withdrawal from the Study

I can withdraw myself from the study at anytime. The decision to terminate my participation will not impact my position at this school in anyway. If I decide to withdraw from the study, all data generated as a consequence of my participation shall be destroyed immediately.

Questions

If I have any questions about this research in general, or my role in the study, I can call Ms. Tahiya during the duration of this project at 01922110301. In addition, I can speak to the field officer for any further concerns I may have. Field Officer, _____, contact number is _____. If I have any further questions or concerns regarding my welfare in this research study, I can contact Lynda McNeil, the McGill Manager, Research Ethics at 001-514-398-6831 or at lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca.

TEACHER'S CONSENT

Circle One

Yes / No : I agree to holding informal, sporadic discussions with Ms. Tahiya and for parts of what I say to be quoted in her presentations and publications. I also consent to my pictures being taken and published (with blurred face) in her work.

In signing below, I signify my understanding of this project and consent to being a part of it

Teacher's Name

Teacher's Signature, DATE

Researcher's Name

Researcher's Signature, DATE

Appendix VI – Observations

A day's observations utilizing Spradley's (1980) list of steps

-Adopted from Cohen & Manion (2007)

Date: February 19, 2014

Time: 9:45 am (my arrival time)-12:05 pm (departure time)

Place: School "M", Grade 2

space: the physical setting

- Weather: winter morning
- The school is a one-roomed square space with four large windows. It is a new school in that area.
- The school is well lit from the natural light streaming in.
- There is a field on the right side of the school and another BRAC school on its left across a small alley space.

actors: the people in the situation

- 1 female school teacher
- 1 female program officer
- STUDENTS:
 - 10 males, 20 females
 - 2 visually impaired children (female, age 12/male, age 9)
 - 3 Hindu students
 - 27 Muslim students

activities: the sets of related acts that are taking place

By the time I get into the school today the children are taking a math lesson. The teacher is going around and checking their classwork, which they have just completed in their small groups. The teacher stopped, said hello, and asked me to sit wherever I wanted to. The children got a bit fidgety with my arrival. Some were very excited to see me although it was not my first day in the class. The teacher asked everyone to settle down. Some of the children had made some errors and so the teacher mentioned that and continued on her "rounds" for about five more minutes. Then she went up to the blackboard and started re-doing parts of the lesson. She asked for answers out loud and the children replied back with zest and correctness. The shy students continued to refrain from answering. Their voices were not heard during this engagement between the teacher and her pupils. As this continued, the program officer, came into the school. She was a female officer, different from the program officer at School "U", who was male. Upon her arrival the children get excited again. She asks them to settle down, re-introduces me, and asks if children were cooperating with my study or not. The children respond in chorus that they are very excited and will do so as soon as the mathematics lesson is over. However, I interrupt the session and say we will wait until the day's lesson is over so as not to break the flow of the class. The teacher assures me she will finish everything that's on the agenda today and that we can proceed in about one hour. At this point the PO leaves. The next hour is spent on a lesson on the environment. Here the children learn about their neighbours and read a lesson from their text on how they should treat their neighbours with dignity, friendship, and love. Again the teacher reads, re-reads, and

explains the lesson from the text, the class is broken into small groups for pupils to complete a short task involving re-reading and repeating the lesson, finally the small groups reform into a whole and the lesson is discussed with everyone. The teacher asks questions such as: “What did you learn today?”, “How should we treat our neighbours?”, “What if someone has a different religion?” etc.

She then turns her attention to me and asks if I am ready to start working with the children? I reply yes, as today we commence on our first *adda* session at this school.

objects: the artifacts and physical things that are there

- Inside, the school is decorated with children’s artwork on the walls, wall hangings, a few paintings, banners, streamers, word and letter charts, and a blackboard.
- A burlap mat adorns the floor
- There is a trunk at the back of the room.
- There is one stool at the front of the room beside the blackboard
- Other items in the school include similar materials to all BRAC schools (students’ slates, pencils, textbooks, workbooks etc.)

acts: the specific actions that participants are doing

- Engaging in schoolwork (reading, writing, speaking)
- Fidgeting
- Smiling
- Laughing
- Talking to each other
- Being disruptive
- Paying attention
- Moving around the schoolhouse to group, re-group
- Engaging in *adda* session (speaking, answering specific questions)

events: the sets of activities that are taking place

- Class lesson on maths and environment
- Work in big and small groups
- Reading and writing in texts with one another
- Engaging with teacher
- Listening to teacher
- Engaging in *adda* session

time: the sequence of acts, activities and events goals: what people are trying to achieve

- Approximately 3 hours
- Order as explained above

feelings: what people feel and how they express this.

- Participants eager and happy
- Some participants stressed as they don’t enjoy speaking in large group
- Children with disabilities, however, are excited to participate
- Teacher willing to cooperate
- Teacher showing enthusiasm and positivity
- Researcher engaged and enthusiastic

Appendix VII – Photovoice Handout

**Please go around your school and close vicinity
and take 3 pictures with this camera.**

- First picture you take just to practice. It could be of anything/anyone at the school.
- Second one of something/activity/lesson/physical aspect of your school that you ***like***.
- Third one of something/activity/lesson/physical aspect of your school that you ***dislike***.
- If you do not want to take a certain picture of those listed above you do not have to.

Let us review the following points before you take the photos.

- **Shooting**
 - When taking a photograph, hold the camera steady and release the shutter carefully. Hold the camera with both hands, with your elbows against your body and feet spread apart. This helps to avoid camera shake or vibration, which leads to un-sharp pictures.
- **Composition**
 - Pay attention to how you arrange the people and objects in your photo.
- **Pay careful attention to the light conditions in your photograph**
 - Shoot the photo so that there is equal light distributed across the picture.
 - Try to place the sun at your back when you shoot the photo.
- **Other points to keep in mind**
 - Use the flash indoors always, even on a sunny day outdoors.
 - Avoid putting your finger in front of the lens.
 - Take the photograph in action, in natural settings.
 - Do not ask your subjects to pose.
 - Take pictures from a distance, so not all faces are visible in the photo.
 - Use your imagination to take the picture; you can take a picture from the back, from an angle, or just of an activity and not the people in it.

**Please keep the following in mind
before/as you take pictures:**

Before you take the picture, if it involves anyone outside of the school who we have not discussed this project with, please ask them if they are willing to be photographed⁵⁵.

⁵⁵ No one's photographs involved any outsiders.

Appendix VIII – Continuation of Table 5.12

Significant Statements from Schools U and M on children's experiences of what they like or dislike in their BRAC school	Formulated Meaning (What could this mean for IE?)	CLUSTERS/ KEY WORDS
21. I don't say I can't [do it] anymore, 22. At school, I learned that if I can't do it once then I try [one] hundred times. 23. School taught me I can do what fire can do... 24. School taught me what birds can do 25. I can light up [a] room 26. I can fly [with] wings 27. I am me and I am proud school taught me so many things I did not know. 28. The person who studies rides in cars and horses. 29. Let us study 30. Let us ride in cars and horses. 31. If you study, one day you will be someone. 32. If you study, you will get the affection of your parents. 33. Studying will help me become an <i>Apa</i> one day.	School instils hope for a better, brighter, and stronger future in the children. Children learn to depend on their own and each other's abilities at school.	DEPENDENCE STRENGTH CONFIDENCE COLLABORATION HOPE FOR THE FUTURE
34. I really like drawing pictures at school. 35. I really like to draw pictures of nature. 36. My teacher and my mother love me when I draw pictures. 37. I learn about colors from drawing. 38. One of the main reasons I love my school is because when I come here I get to sing and dance, aside from my studies. 39. I wish we had more paint at school because different types of paint are required for drawing pictures and wall magazines. Then we could have more drawing lessons. 40. I feel proud when my artwork goes up on the walls of the school. I think we all do.	The children enjoy being creative at school. They gain the affection of others when they are more creative. They want to explore creative avenues more often as a learning tool.	CREATIVITY INSPIRATION SUPPORT
41. Children are all supposed to come to school, " <i>choto, boro,</i> " and <i>chele mein</i> " (big or small, ⁵⁶ boy or girl).	Children, regardless of their	DIVERSITY IS APPRECIATED

⁵⁶ In the Bangladeshi context, "big or small" could mean two things: the actual age of the children, or the classification of the children depending on where each once feels he or she belongs in terms of

<p>42. This is a very nice place because I can be myself and my friends, both boys and girls, love me.</p> <p>43. I am a girl. I also have this leg problem. I used to go to a madrassa before but the teacher sometimes did not understand how hard it was for me to sit in one position the whole day.</p> <p>44. At this school, <i>Apa</i>, understands me better and I can sit or move as I need or want.</p> <p>45. They [my peers] accept my help in Bengali and Maths and that makes me...and this place very beautiful</p>	<p>ability, feel welcome at the school. Disabled children appreciate the adjustments that are made for them.</p>	<p>EVERYONE IS WELCOME</p> <p>HELPFULNESS IS KEY</p>
<p>46. <i>Apa</i> teaches us very well. When we come to school she teachers us many things.</p> <p>47. So our madam is very good.</p> <p>48. Whenever I have a problem at school—someone is pestering me, or I cannot understand a lesson, or I feel unhappy, sad, and am crying—I can talk to my teacher.</p> <p>49. I love my teacher.</p>	<p>The children value their relationship with the teacher a lot. She is their confidante and protector.</p>	<p>TEACHER CONFIDANTE PROTECTOR</p>
<p>50. I have taken the photo of “<i>Puplir Kotha</i>.” Pupli is a disabled girl. She is different from us but wants to come to school. We are different...some of us...but we can study together. I like that.</p> <p>51. When in school does it matter that Tamoni has a wooden leg? She still knows all the answers.</p> <p>52. Everyone should come to school. I have always wanted that, and Pupli is a brave girl who shows that. We can all learn from a girl like Pupli.</p> <p>53. Tamoni is my friend. Actually she is in my group. She had one problem, you know, with her leg and she had to be taken home and brought to school by her family. Now she has a wooden leg. But Tamoni is so good...in her studies and as my group mate. She helps me and the others!</p>	<p>Children do not view difference in (age, ability, gender) as a hindrance to their learning at school. They appreciate studying together, even if there are differences between them.</p>	<p>DIVERSITY</p> <p>DOES NOT SEE DISABILITY</p> <p>NO DIFFERENCE</p> <p>HELPFULNESS IS KEY</p>
<p>54. Why would we have classes outside? This school is here for us to have class inside isn't it?</p> <p>55. Even if we had some classes outside, so we did not have to be inside this room for all the hours of the day, there</p>	<p>Children enjoy having classes inside the school. They think it is their school and</p>	<p>PRIDE IN THE INSIDE OF SCHOOL HOUSE</p> <p>DECORATE SCHOOL</p>

their fiscal standard of living in relationship to that of their peers or people in their community. When I asked the participant to clarify, she explained that she referred to the latter.

<p>are so many noises outside like rickshaws, people, and hawkers.</p> <p>56. We would not be able to hear Apa.</p> <p>57. This is my school for me to be here. Why would I sit outside? My parents would not want that. Even Apa would not want that.</p>	<p>want to use the space they have.</p>	<p>HOUSE</p> <p>MY SCHOOL</p> <p>OWNERSHIP</p>
<p>58. I love my school. I love to see my friend's drawings on the walls.</p>	<p>The interior of the school keeps the children happy and secure.</p>	<p>INTERIOR BEAUTIFICATION</p>
<p>59. I like cleaning my school.</p> <p>60. It is a pure place that must be kept clean.</p> <p>61. The burlap, pencil case, trunks helps keep our school neat and tidy.</p>	<p>The children feel a sense of responsibility for keeping their school clean.</p>	<p>CLEANLINESS OWNERSHIP TIDYNESS</p>
<p>62. Mother tells me to study. Father tells me to concentrate.</p> <p>63. Madam says, "pay attention."</p> <p>64. My group leader asks me questions.</p> <p>65. I do not know. This is hard.</p> <p>66. I like looking at the clock to see when the time will come to run outside.</p>	<p>Concentration is a problem for some students at the school.</p>	<p>LACK OF CONCENTRATION</p>
<p>67. I don't like to quarrel at school.</p> <p>68. I don't like fighting at school and don't like it when others fight over school materials such as pens, sticks, or a scale.</p> <p>69. I don't like it when some children throw bricks at the school.</p>	<p>Children do not like it when their peers quarrel in the classroom.</p>	<p>QUARREL DISTURBANCES</p>
<p>70. I am the group leader but sometimes everyone in my group does not listen to me but just quarrels. Sometimes they even hit each other and I cannot help them if they do that. At that time I have to ask them to remain silent or ask <i>Apa</i> to talk to them.</p>	<p>Quarrelling is seen as a form of disobedience.</p>	<p>QUARRELLING DISOBEDIENCE</p>
<p>71. I don't like it when children shout at each other and call each other names at school. It brings me pain.</p> <p>72. I sometimes feel very sad when my friends quarrel and they do not remain friends afterwards.</p>	<p>Quarrelling is a cause of pain to the children.</p>	<p>QUARRELLING PAIN</p>
<p>73. Our parents and teachers look down on us if we quarrel, and they tell us it disturbs our studies. I agree. Good children are not supposed to quarrel and hurt each other.</p>	<p>Children are aware that quarrelling is looked down upon by elders.</p>	<p>QUARRELLING DISREGARDED</p>
<p>74. The burlap keeps us warm on winter [mornings] like today.</p> <p>75. I have taken a picture of the "pencil basket" at our school. I like that</p>	<p>The children feel supported by their study materials</p>	<p>SUPPORT STUDY MATERIALS INSPIRATION</p>

<p>everyone has one. It keeps the items at our school tidy.</p> <p>76. I have taken a picture of “counting sticks.” I love math. With the counting sticks my [group] leader...sometimes <i>Apa</i>...helps me practice plus [addition] and minus [subtraction].</p> <p>77. I have taken a picture of the “scale [ruler].” It helps us draw straight lines in the notebook and not write below the line. It keeps our books pretty. It helps us learn sharing.</p> <p>78. We can learn new letters of the alphabet from the chart.</p> <p>79. I love the colors on the <i>kolshi</i> (pot). When I feel bored, I can look at it and it gives me ideas.</p>	<p>and take inspiration from each one in different ways.</p>	<p>LEARNING</p>
<p>80. I want a many-page storybook (novel) in school. I always finish the reading assignments fast, then I wish I could read a storybook.</p> <p>81. [So], I would like to see better maybe have glasses? School can give?</p> <p>82. Everyone at school loves me but sometimes I wish for an extra pencil and rubber, but we have all the same [items] so it is ok.</p> <p>83. Another student tore a page in my Bengali textbook. That page is [still] torn. [So], I don't like this book.</p> <p>84. I want another clock in the school because I am scared that the one on the wall might fall and break, so another one should be put on the opposite wall.</p>	<p>Children yearn for more learning materials.</p>	<p>MORE MATERIALS</p> <p>MORE FLEXIBILITY IN UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN'S NEEDS</p>
<p>83. Sometimes I feel afraid to ask questions.</p> <p>84. I wish my teacher would pick me to answer questions sometimes, and not only the team leader.</p> <p>85. I like it when we just read our books in school.</p> <p>86. I don't like speaking in the large and small groups.</p> <p>87. I don't know what is the right answer.</p> <p>88. I like my slate and my books</p> <p>89. And our <i>Apa</i>, she is the best...she knows all the answers; I don't.</p> <p>90. I feel sad when no one hears me.</p> <p>91. I feel left out if my friends don't listen to my ideas.</p> <p>92. I feel sad if my friend tells me to be quiet.</p> <p>93. I don't like the big group because no one asks me to answer.</p>	<p>Children <i>feel ignored and lose their ability to speak</i> in the classroom sometimes. This happens due to the actions of their teacher and/or their peers.</p>	<p>LOSING ABILITY TO SPEAK</p> <p>TEACHER DOES NOT PAY ATTENTION</p> <p>PEERS IGNORE THE OTHERS</p> <p>SADNESS</p>

94. I raise my hand but <i>Apa</i> doesn't see me.		
95. <i>Apa</i> calls the girls more.		
96. We had a lesson, " <i>poribesh-o-amra</i> " "the environment-and-us," in which we learned that we have to do a lot of things to keep our environment beautiful, like planting trees and flowers, and not throwing trash. 97. I know in the village my father plants trees near our house. It is so beautiful. Birds sit on the branches and sing. 98. We do not have any trees near our school. That makes me sad. 99. We care for our school (<i>everyone nods</i>) and even the toilet. 100. We keep the school clean ourselves.	<i>The environment and its caretaking are a priority to the children.</i> Children like keeping their school clean. They want to have a green, clean study space.	CARE ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY TREES GREENARY CLEANLINESS














































APPENDIX IX -Questionnaire

























“MY SCHOOL” *with results*
(Translated into Bengali)

Do you agree or disagree? Please put a line on the face that shows what you think.

		I agree	I don't know	I disagree
		School U, M	School U, M	School U, M
1	I am happy at school.	34, 27	0, 0	0, 0
2	I look forward to coming to school.	34, 27	0, 0	0, 0
3	I feel like a part of a big community.	34, 27	0, 0	0, 0
4	I like the way the school looks.	30, 22	3, 3	1, 2
5	The toilets are clean and safe.	34, 27	0, 0	0, 0
6	I have good friends at school.	34, 24	0, 3	0, 0
7	Children are kind to each other at the school.	29, 26	3, 1	1, 0
8	Adults are kind to children at the school.	34, 27	0, 0	0, 0
9	I like my teacher.	34, 27	0, 0	0, 0
10	I like to tell my family what I have done at school.	34, 27	0, 0	0, 0
11	My family feels involved in what goes on at the school.	28, 26	2, 1	4, 0
12	I have been involved in making the school a better place.	30, 27	2, 0	2, 0
13	Any child who lives near the school is welcome to come here.	34, 27	0, 0	0, 0

14	When I first joined the school I was helped to feel happy.	29, 26	3, 1	1, 0
15	Boys and girls get on well together.	34, 25	0, 0	0, 2
16	It's good to have children from different backgrounds at my school.	33, 25	1, 1	0, 1
17	I have learnt how my actions impact others in the school.	31, 20	2, 5	1, 2
18	Children do not get hit or called hurtful names at school.	28, 20	2, 2	4, 5
19	I feel safe in the playground and in the toilet.	33, 25	1, 1	0, 1
20	If anyone bullies me or anyone else, I would tell my teacher.	34, 25	0, 2	0, 0
21	Teachers stop children from making a fuss during lessons.	32, 25	2, 1	0, 1
22	We learn how to settle disagreements by listening, talking and compromise.	30, 25	2, 1	2, 1
23	Children often help each other in lessons.	33, 27	0, 0	1, 0
24	Children often help each other in pairs and small groups.	33, 27	0, 0	1, 0
25	During lessons children share what they know with other children.	33, 23	1, 2	0, 2
26	Children are interested in listening to each other's ideas.	30, 27	2, 0	2, 0
27	If I have a problem I can ask an adult for help.	32, 25	1, 2	1, 0

28	Teachers do not have favorites among the children.	 32, 24	 2, 1	 0, 1
29	If I have been away for a day, my teacher wants to know where I have been.	 34, 27	 0, 0	 0, 0
30	I think the teachers are fair when they praise a child.	 34, 27	 0, 0	 0, 0
31	I think the teachers are fair when they punish a child.	 30, 25	 0, 2	 4, 0
32	I learn all sorts of interesting things at school.	 34, 27	 0, 0	 0, 0
33	When memorizing lessons it makes me feel.	 30, 25	 2, 2	 2, 2
34	I learn about what is going on in the world at school.	 34, 27	 0, 0	 0, 0
35	I learn about people in other parts of the world at school.	 34, 27	 0, 0	 0, 0
36	Children with special needs are respected and accepted at my school.	 32, 25	 1, 2	 1, 0
37	We learn to care for the environment.	 34, 24	 0, 3	 0, 0
38	I enjoy most of my lessons	 26, 24	 4, 3	 4, 0
39	We learn to care for the environment in the school and the area around it.	 34, 23	 0, 2	 0, 2
40	We learn to respect planet earth.	 34, 27	 0, 0	 0, 0
41	Teachers are interested in listening to my ideas.	 27, 24	 3, 3	 4, 0
42	I always know what to do in lessons.	 27, 24	 5, 3	 0, 0

43	Teachers don't mind if I make mistakes as long as I try my best.	 32, 25	 1, 2	 1, 0
44	At times children are trusted to learn on their own.	 16, 15	 13, 10	 5, 2
45	My work is sometimes put up on the wall in my school.	 34, 27	 0, 0	 0, 0
46	When I am given homework I usually understand what I have to do.	 31, 24	 3, 3	 0, 0
47.	If some of my school classes were held outside in the field I would like it.	 2, 4	 2, 0	 30, 23
48.	If the school decoration could remind me more of home or the village it would make me feel better.	 29, 20	 3, 3	 2, 4
49.	Apa comes to school on time and stays here the whole time we are here.	 30, 27	 2, 0	 2, 0
50.	Sometimes we children get to decide what to learn in the lessons.	 14, 15	 14, 10	 6, 2

TOTAL RESPONDENTS SCHOOL "U": 34/36
TOTAL RESPONDENTS SCHOOL "M": 27/30

Appendix X – Parental Consent Form

Sample

Date: _____

Study Name:	Rethinking inclusive education in Bangladesh through an examination of children's voices and Rabindranath Tagore's pedagogical philosophy	
Researcher:	Tahiya Mahbub, Graduate Student, MCGILL UNIVERSITY, Canada	
Contact	01922110301; tahiya.mahbub@mail.mcgill.ca	
Supervisors:	Dr. K. McDonough	001-514-398-6949;
	kevin.mcdonough@mcgill.ca	
	Dr. R. Ghosh	001-514-398-5398;
	ratna.ghosh@mcgill.ca	

Purpose of this Research

This research is being conducted as a part of the dissertation to fulfill the requirements of a PhD in Education from McGill University. Through an exploration of your child's likes and dislikes at school, I aim to understand how your child understands, interprets, and experiences inclusive educational practices at this BRAC school.

What will my Child be asked to do in this research?

If you consent to your child to take part in this study, he or she will spend taking some photographs, attending some *adda* sessions to discuss those photographs, and completing a short questionnaire for me. I will also be observing your child in the class and speaking to them while I am at this school between the months of _____ and _____.

Duration

- 4 months: total time
- Your child's participation: 1 hour for taking photos after school, 30 minutes in-class for writing some paragraphs explaining their photos, 1-2 hours for *adda* sessions after school one day, and 30 minutes in-class for a follow-up questionnaire.

Confidentiality and Risk

Your child's identity will remain in confidence at all times in any written work produced from the data collected through this study. All raw data including photographs, audiotapes and transcriptions, children's written paragraphs, and questionnaire answers will also remain in confidence with me and only be discussed within the limited audience of my supervisory committee and my transcriber. Only analyzed data and some of the students' pictures will be used in my dissertation and future papers and/or publications in other academic arenas. I may give some photos back to the class as a keepsake but only those in which no one is visibly identifiable.

There are only minimal risks associated with your child being a part of this project. These include some feelings of discomfort while speaking about experiences at school. No child will be required to speak about anything if they do not wish to. Nothing

a child will say will impact their grades or status at school. In essence, your child will benefit from this research by engaging in a fun project that gives them a chance to learn how to use a camera. This project will also help them better understand why their school is the way it is and how they can utilize the tools given to them at school in their respective futures.

Voluntary Participation

No incentives will be offered for your child's participation in this project. Your child's participation in the study is completely voluntary, and you are under no obligation to agree to give consent to your child being photographed or questioned regarding his or her school. A decision not to volunteer will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship your child (the participant) has with BRAC either now or in the future, the researcher and/or the nature of their relationship with McGill University. If you do not consent to your child participating, he or she will continue doing regular classwork and if interested they too will be given a camera with which they can take pictures. However, their information and snapped photographs will not be included in the project.

Withdrawal from the Study

You can withdraw your child from the study at anytime. The decision to terminate your child's participation will not impact him or her in anyway at the school, nor his or her relationship with me or the teacher or anyone at BRAC either now, or in the future. If you decide to withdraw from the study, all data generated as a consequence of your participation shall be destroyed immediately.

Questions

If you have any questions about my research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to speak to me about it at anytime during or after this meeting. You can also call me during the duration of this project at 01922110301. In addition, you can speak to the classroom teacher or BRAC's field officer for any further concerns you may have. Field Officer, _____, contact number is _____. If you have further questions or concerns regarding your/your child's rights or welfare as a participant in this research study, please contact the Lynda McNeil, McGill Manager, Research Ethics at 001-514-398-6831 or at lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca.

PARENTAL CONSENT

CIRCLE ONE

Yes / No: I agree for my child to be photographed and his or her information to be used in the research project with the other students.

Yes / No: I agree to my child's photographs to be used in presentations and publications (with blurred face and no name associated with it).

Your signature/thumbprint below indicates that you have understood all the information provided in the consent form above. With your signature, you freely and voluntary consent to your child participating in this qualitative research project and being observed, taking part in the photovoice project, *adda* sessions, and questionnaire.

Printed Name of Child Participant

Printed Name of Parent

Signature of Parent, DATE



OR

Thumbprint of Parent

Printed Name of Researcher

Researcher's Signature, DATE

Appendix XI – Children’s Consent/Assent Form

Sample

Date: _____

Study Name:	Rethinking inclusive education in Bangladesh through an examination of children’s voices and Rabindranath Tagore’s pedagogical philosophy	
Researcher:	Tahiya Mahbub, Graduate Student, MCGILL UNIVERSITY, Canada	
Contact	01922110301; tahiya.mahbub@mail.mcgill.ca	
Supervisors:	Dr. K. McDonough kevin.mcdonough@mcgill.ca	001-514-398-6949;
	Dr. R. Ghosh ratna.ghosh@mcgill.ca	001-514-398-5398;

What is this research about?

This research is about my experiences at school. It is about my likes and dislikes at school.

Why are you doing this research Tahiya Apa?

Tahiya Apa is doing this research because she is really interested in finding out about my everyday experiences at school and hearing directly from me whether or not I like school.

Why are you asking me?

Tahiya Apa is asking me because she truly believes I know the most about my experiences at school and she does not want to hear what I have to say from anyone else.

What will I have to do in this research?

Photographs and Writing



Addas



Questionnaire



How long will it take me?

- 1 hour after school one day to take photographs about my likes and dislikes at school.
- 30 minutes for writing paragraphs about my photos.
- 2 hours for *addas* sessions.
- 30 minutes in-class for questionnaires.

Will this research help me in any way?

This research will help me see my school differently. Through photographs I will be able to explore some hidden aspects of my school that I previously did not think about. This research will help me improve my school.

Will everyone get to know about this project?

People at McGill University and BRAC know that *Tahiya Apa* is doing this research project. However, whatever I say to *Tahiya Apa* will remain between us. She will never tell others who said what. If I want, I can choose a different name for myself to represent my words and pictures in her project. Otherwise, she will assign me a cover name.

Can I choose not to be in this research?

Yes, I can choose not to be a part of this project at anytime. This choice will not impact my grades and relationships at school.

Who do I contact for questions?

I can speak to *Tahiya Apa* at anytime if I have any questions. I can also call her on her mobile number when she is not present at school. Her mobile phone number is 01922110301.

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT/ASSENT

Circle one

Yes / No : My pictures can be used outside in public in *Tahiya Apa*'s presentations and publications. When my pictures are used my face will be blurred in them and I not be identified by my real name.

I understand what I have read above. By signing my name below, I freely volunteer to be a part of this project.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant, DATE

Printed Name of Researcher

Researcher's Signature, DATE

