Coloring in the Emotional Language of Place

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Making educational places more inviting to learners is a key aspect of Invitational Theory. This paper introduces a simple technique for sensitizing learners and instructors to how their environment affects their feelings and ability to learn. It describes a learning exercise that may be used to assess, evaluate and transform places, to promote either calm reflection or creative energy as well as some experience based on three years of application in a college-level Geography course. The approach, founded in the Sāmkhya–Yoga conception of the three modes of material nature, asks learners detect the roles of Sattva (peace, harmony, tranquility, awareness), Rajas (energy, action, creativity, destructiveness) and Tamas (inert, veiled, ignorance) working together in their habitat and to think about how this balance may be adjusted to positive effect. Learners found the approach novel but many welcomed this new way of envisioning their world.

Place is one of the five arms of Invitational Education; one of its "Powerful Ps" (Purkey and Novak, 1996). It is also a central concern for the ecology of education and critical to the creation of places conducive to thinking, study, and reflection (Biggs, 2003). For better or worse, educational environments, especially the microenvironments of the campus and classroom, "make a difference in learners' lives" (Moos, 1979, p273). Hence, it is worthwhile having those same learners reflect upon how their habitat affects their feelings and about what they might do to change them for the benefit of themselves and others. This paper offers a simple technique that might be used by learners and instructors for the evaluation of learning spaces and, indeed, all places and situations.

Normally, the impacts of places upon our feelings and behavior are overlooked. For example, many university instructors work away in their offices amidst heaps of paper, largely oblivious to the stress this clutter causes. Then, one day, the mess is removed;

magically, they feel more positive, more calm (Boniwell, 2006). Of course, similar processes work in the outside world. The places that we inhabit "speak to us" and they affect the way we feel. Sometimes, these messages are deliberate: retailers entice us to buy, banks to convince that they are trustworthy, overpriced hotels that they are 'high class' etc. Sometimes the messages are not deliberate, like the litter and dilapidation that speak of neglect. Our habitats are full of signs and signals, many of them transmitting subliminal messages. Indeed, there is an industry, both within academia and without, devoted to the creation, manipulation and interpretation of these signals—semiotics, marketing, etc (e.g. Twitchell, 2004).

Geography is a discipline deeply concerned with landscape and place, not least the *sense of place*, meaning its personality (Tuan, 2004). In the process, it has evolved a sub-discipline, *Psychogeography*, part of Cultural Geography, which explores the emotional impact of places (Coverley, 2006). This paper concerns an out-of-class experi-

ence; a *Psychogeographic* exercise that encourages learners to consider the ways that places affect their emotional state, to develop empathy for the places they inhabit and, because the exercise is created as team activity, to build up their emotional intelligence by considering the way these places affect the feelings of others.

This exercise, called "The Speaking Stones" is set in Oxford, England, and aims to alert learners to the ways that nonverbal signals affect their feelings and to engage them in constructive thoughts about remaking their world by creating places that promote either energy and action or peace and reflective contemplation.

Of course, the design of this exercise is affected by its context—not the "dreaming spires" of Oxford, but rather the legacies of Empire, the economy of the New Europe and the growth of the international market in Education. England has become a multicultural place and classes—a cosmopolitan mix of different ethnicities and religious groups. However, curricula remain British to the core, rarely straying beyond the Anglo-American or West European (Haigh, 2002). This creates a mismatch between the cultural range of the learners and the curriculum that is beginning to worry instructors. Their responses, often headed "Internationalization of the Curriculum" or "Widening Participation," are about engaging with other cultures. One route is to include ideas from outside the Western pale and promote intercultural understanding by allowing time to ideas from minority communities.

Here, this approach has a practical advantage. The Speaking Stones exercise is part of an advanced level UK undergraduate course, called *The Ethical Geographer*, taught jointly by the author and colleague, Dr. Adrian Parker, which enrolls 60-90 final year undergraduates annually. The course aims to help Geography learners become reflective practitioners, to draw together their undergraduate learning, to understand their self and its worlds, and help them prepare for transition to the world of work (Teichler, 2003, 2004). Constructed on four pillars: ethics, empathy, environment and employment; the special role of this Speaking Stones exercise is to support the empathy pillar (Boyd et al., 2008).

However, this course's learners come from diverse academic backgrounds. Some begin with a strong grounding in Cultural Geography but many are Physical Geography or Environmental Science specialists with little experience of Cultural Geography. How to invite a whole class without showing preference to those with prior training in Cultural Geography? How to invite a whole class without showing preference to those with local British roots? Well, the thought is that a small step outside the Western cultural tradition might solve both problems.

So, the Speaking Stones exercise borrows a little from India's culture and philosophy. Of course, Western thought is grounded in the material world and derives consciousness as its product, while the starting point for much Indian philosophy is consciousness and from this the material world is derived (Jacobsen, 1992). In truth, this idea of a mind-made world meshes nicely with perceptual approaches like Invitational Theory and Cultural Geography. However, the Speaking Stones exercise comes from Sāmkhya, one of six major Schools (*Darsana*) of Indian Philosophy; one closely linked to Yoga and Hindu scripture, especially the Bhagavadgita—a text often caricatured as the

Hindu New Testament (Larson, 1979). Now, this may sound formidable and arcane but, in fact, the ideas borrowed are very simple. The essence is that Sāmkhya considers the whole phenomenal universe to be the product of just three qualities, modes, or strands. These are the three "Gunas." Sattva Guna is the essence of everything light, serene and pure, Rajas Guna of everything active, every desire, passionate, creative and destructive process, while Tamas Guna is the essence of everything inert, heavy, banal, obstructing, and dull. The easiest way of understanding this is to consider a color photograph, which is created from pixels of just three primary colors. It does not matter what the photograph portrays, be it jelly beans, jaguars or Jacksonville, the three colors are the same. Similarly, these Gunas act as the primary colors for the whole of material creation.

Sāmkhya argues that the Gunas construct, control, and compose everything. All the Speaking Stones exercise does is to invite learners to share with their peers an exploration of their local habitat that identifies those places that promote peacefulness and reflection (Sattva), energy and creativity (Rajas), or inertia and depression (Tamas). The task is completed by their explanation of why and how these feelings are stimulated by the places they observe and a consideration of what might be done to change these places for the better?

Three Gunas in Food, Art and Education

Possibly, the Guna concept needs more illustration? Here follow three: the Gunas represented as food (according to Ayurvedic medicine) and as manifest in artistic creation and learning.

First foods, these are Sattvic if they are fresh, juicy, nourishing, sweet and sustain the body without stress (e.g. fresh fruits, vegetables, fresh milk and butter, sprouted beans, grains, nuts, pulses). By contrast, Rajasic foods are energising and challenging; they are bitter, sour, salty, pungent, and spicy (fried, curried, shellfish, salsa, chips). However, Tamasic foods are lazy, devoid of nutritional value, pre-processed and/or unhealthy (e.g. anything in a can, *instant* food, snack pack, caffeinated, alcoholic or fatty like red meat) (Johari, 2000).

Second actions, these are also conditioned by the three Gunas working in concert. Suppose a Sculptor feels invited to make a figurine of Gaia, the Greek Goddess of the Earth, who is honored in the word Geography. First Sattvic inspiration appears—the vision of a final perfect form. Inspired, the Sculptor engages Rajas and selects a lump of stone. This is inert, formless, an obstacle to be overcome—so it represents Tamas—so does the feeling that, "I remember my last attempt, it was hard work, it may not turn out well—why bother?" With luck, Rajasic creativity comes to the rescue and the sculptor goes to work, shaping the stone with hammer, chisel, hard-work, determination and sweat. Finally, success, an image of the Goddess is claimed from the stone. The sculptor and sculpted are at peace; the goal is realized, serene, beautiful, Sattvic (Prabhavananda and Isherwood, 1948). Note that here, all three Gunas play a part. Sattva in isolation might remain a pleasant but unrealized dream, while Rajas without Sattva would be merely undirected energy. Similarly, Rajas without Tamas, would be like a lever without a fulcrum—it needs something inert but malleable to struggle against.

Third, yes, even learning may be explored in

terms of the changing balance between the Gunas. The process begins in Tamas: ignorance, inertia, hopelessness and lack of self-belief; everything that discourages learners from creative thought or study. To overcome this negativity, some Sattvic inspiration is required and so is a great deal of Rajasic enthusiasm and energy. Rajas is motivated action; it involves focus, classification, analysis, the development of skills and projects. Eventually, however, learners need more than Rajas, they need to grasp the big picture. A Sattvic vision sees things as a whole; it guides creativity, synthesis, and overview. Sattva offers appreciation of underlying unities and recognition of the transitory and changing nature of all material things (cf. Bhagavadgita 18.20-22 in Prabhupada, 1972). Clearly, you could dream up a whole curriculum based on these ancient foundations (e.g. Haigh, 2009).

"Name that Guna": A Preparatory Exercise

Meanwhile, back in the classroom, despite such illustration, a class needs to work with this new idea ahead of trying to apply it in the field. Of course, it is nice to be able to teach with a song (or some music anyway). In this case, class preparation involves music, helpfully sourced from a Batman movie sound track. Snippets of 3-5 tunes are played. One is punk rock (*Smash it Up!*), one is painfully romantic (*Kiss from a Rose*), another is very calm and meditative (*The Temple*).

"OK, please tell your neighbor in class, which Guna or Gunas do these tunes most represent?" Tamas with Rajas, Rajas, Sattva, come the answers. Fine, except one student is deaf and feels left out. "So, please turn round and watch the class with me, you'll be

amazed." When the punk rock is played, the class is loud and jittery, when the ambient music plays they are quiet and relaxed, and when the romantic music is played, they are focused but distracted. No sound is needed to prove the point—those Gunas are in control.

The Speaking Stones: An Out-of-Classroom Experience

So, since everything and anything may be explored through the three Gunas, why not ask learners go out and try to understand which Gunas control their own habitats? Of course, the Geography discipline is about the self and its places; Geographers endlessly eulogize *landscape* and are fixated upon maps (Tuan, 2004). So, a geography class is easily persuaded that really, deep down, they would like to create a map, even a mental map. (A mental map is a one based on perception rather than land survey like Steinberg's famous "View of the World from Ninth Street" cover for *The New Yorker* (Steinberg, 1976)). In this case, they use the map as the core of a poster that depicts the expression of the three Gunas in some of their own places (Table 1). The Gunas express feelings, so this task asks learners to see selected local and campus places using empathy as their torch. In the fashionable jargon of the day, they are invited to deconstruct their habitat in terms of its dominant emotional message. Does it signal harmony, peace and well-being (Sattva), energy, passion, power and/or creativity (Rajas) or dullness, inertia, delusion and depression (Tamas)?

Of course, different people see the world in different ways, so the class is formed into small teams and asked to work together. If they cannot negotiate a collective view then,

at least, they should try to explore the range of views that exists among them and the reasons for their differences. Here, the exercise touches on some rather fundamental issues about whether the individual is the one who makes the *sense of place* or whether the place is truly affecting the individual, and if so why? Is it something to do with its appearance, its history—which may be a personal matter of good or bad associations, or its cultural significance, or the utility of something it contains? Are there aspects of this that are shared or is the effect primarily personal?

When the poster and its map are completed, individuals prepare written reports. There are three tasks to consider. First, they evaluate the differences in viewpoint experienced within their team with the reasons for them and the ways they were resolved. Second, they consider how the character of the place they evaluated might be changed. A third part of the exercise asks them to suggest how they might redesign part of their own habitat, either to encourage peaceful contemplation and serenity (Sattva), or engaged action and energy (Rajas).

Perceptions, Places, and Psychogeographic Situations

Invitational theory is one of very few theories of education that recognize the importance of place in the ecology of education (Purkey and Novak, 1996). However, getting the emotional signals of a place right should rank among the more important considerations in the constructive alignment of education (Biggs, 2003). Learning places should feel inviting; they should help learners (and even instructors) feel welcome, comfortable and at home within them. They should not be physical contradictions of the messages from the instructors if they are to provide a positive psychosocial environment where learners can thrive (Boniwell, 2006; Haigh, 2008).

Table 1
The Speaking Stones—Exploring the Emotional Language of Place: Team Exercise Brief.

1. Please sign yourself into a team of 3-5; preferably, of people you do not yet know very well, i.e. not those you sit next to in class. (You will find *different perspectives* useful in this exercise).
 2. A list of target areas follows – please have your team sign for ONE of the following on this list... (The list of areas used includes: different parts of the college campus, the local shopping centre, the city centre, a housing estate, an industrial area, a recreational area, river bank etc).
3. Please prepare an A2 sized poster (or web-page) to show the dominant emotional colours (Gunas) within your selected locale. Hint: remember your environment includes the insides of building as well as the world outside.
4. Your presentation should include a mental map that depicts the dominant Guna(s) in different parts of your area and captions that justify your depictions, which could be supplemented by illustrations (photographs, sketches, diagrams). Your work should be ready for class presentation in two weeks.
5. When you create your Poster, as a team please, consider how the places you have studied may be made more inviting and positive, either for Sattvic reflection or Rajasic creativity, and be prepared to discuss your conclusions in class.

However, getting these signals right is a difficult task with problems that the Speaking Stone exercise's more thoughtful participants also address. Places are personal. Psychologists find that individuals screen their views of place through three filters: attachment to valued places, familiarity, and identity—the link between a person's self-image and their habitat (Fullilove, 1996). Others recognize the impacts of wider transferred experience, social attitudes, and behavioral intentions—the personal utility of a place (Stedman, 2002). A place may also contain icons of personal or cultural significance, perhaps unrecognized by others. Auburn and Barnes (2006) call this the 'problem of sociality' and protest that current understanding does not cover the processes by which places achieve agreed social value. Their partial solution, based on Schutz's phenomenology of the social world, addresses inter-subjective understanding, the *We-Self* rather than the *I-Self*, and the social construction of place ethos through typification (Auburn and Barnes, 2006; Coward, 2000).

Meanwhile, in Geography, concern about the *sense of place* spawned Psychogeog-raphy. Early Situationist Psychogeographers likened a city walk to the experience of a cinema or circus spectacle (Coverley, 2006). Like actors, each building performs a character defined by money, prestige, success, or failure. It speaks of hopes and dreams, and its costumes send quiet messages that concern power, dominance, enthusiasm, satisfaction, decay, grief, and so forth. Recognizing the subconscious impacts of these messages, the Situationists sought to cultivate an awareness of the ways that such signals conditioned and manipulated minds and emotions (Plant, 1992). They also wondered how the spectacle could be transformed, humanized for social benefit (Ford, 2005).

Their first problem was to create awareness. This involved detaching people from their everyday preoccupations and helping them see their habitats with open minds. Detachment has long been considered a prerequisite for understanding the world (Huppes, 2001, pp 77-78). In fact, Sāmkhya's core text, the 4th Century Sāmkhyakarika, verses 57-61 runs as follows:

> 57. Just as non-conscious milk is secreted to nourish the conscious calf, so the material world (Prakriti) is manifested for the purpose of enlightenment. 58. Just as people perform acts to relieve their anxieties and longings, so Prakriti is energized for the purpose of enlightenment. 59. Just as a dancer will conclude her performance after displaying herself on the stage, so Prakriti displays herself and then withdraws. 60. The benevolent Prakriti consists of the three gunas. She has no interest of her own to fulfill…61…When she recognizes "I have now been understood" she withdraws...(Larson, 1979, pp 272-274).

In sum, to understand, you have to detach yourself sufficiently from the mundane to see things as they are. The Situationists' technique was the *"Dérive"*. In the 1990s, our local version involved having learners use dice to direct their path through the city. In France, others tried to navigate using a map from some other place. The intention was to help the observer experience the city with new eyes and gain detachment sufficient to detect and critique its subliminal messages; to see the city as a system of desires and emotional colors.

> We begin to walk. We feel the ground beneath our feet, the wind in our face. And as we do, we leave

traces. We are involved in the landscape … the unintentional, the random, the intimate … places without firm boundaries, places which perhaps only the poet can map (Pearson and Shanks, 2005, p1).

Of course, these days, such work can be emulated from the desk top, simply by surfing through the bizarre suburban chimera of the virtual world of Second Life. Here, as in Sāmkhya, you gain enlightenment when you stop wasting your time and switch the illusion off.

However, there are less drastic ways of dealing with negative environments; you can simply make them better. *Détournement* was the Situationist technique for *turning around* the negative qualities of an environment. This included spray painting billboards to expose their inherent nature and reconstructing hostile or threatening spaces into positive social environments (cf. Haigh, 2004).

Well, Psychogeography is called many things: arty, elitist, lefty, occult, French, Marxist, bourgeois intellectual, and ultimately unsuccessful (Plant, 2005). All of this is true. However, it remains influential and survives as an interesting toy box of strategies for exploring human habitats (Hart, 2004). This paper adds one more toy.

Learners' Voices

So, at heart, the Speaking Stones Exercise is an old fashioned exercise in Psychogeography. It tasks participants to empathize with a physical place and recognize the ways it interacts with their feelings and the emotions of others. It explores the affectiveness of the material environment, both intentional and unintentional. It suggests to learners that, if only they make the effort, anyone can detect these impacts and understand how they work. Further, it suggests that they may also discover what to do to make places more inviting and more positively affective for those who live and work within them. The exercise asks them to represent the results of their studies as a team and through individual reflective statements on their teamwork and upon their ideas for creating a better, either energizing or reflective, environment. The only novelty is the tool they use for this work—the three Gunas.

Thus far, in three years of replication, 22 student teams, around 90 individuals, have tackled this task. Their map-posters have, of course, varied in quality. There have been gleaming, glossy, brochure-style productions, some socially-conscious junk-models composed of thrown away paper plates and litter, and some slapdash collages. There have been posters that impressed with a dramatic visual concept and others no better than essays pinned to a poster board. There were posters that demonstrated deep reading and reflection and some containing no evidence of any personal investment in scholarship. Finally, there were some that were the result of careful teamwork and cooperation, some that were predominantly the work of a single team leader, and some that were confused and haphazard demonstrations of a team's failure to gel.

For the first two years especially, most teams focused on the character of the university campus and engaged quite fully with the Gunas concept. Unfortunately, in year three, several teams produced weaker posters that favored the shopping streets in Oxford's suburbs. In one case, a telltale list of irrelevant references made it clear that

thinking had been unhelpfully cross-fertilized from a lower level course that dealt with the regeneration of retail areas. Meanwhile, poster content has remained fairly predictable. In general, shops and busy roads are loaded heavily on Rajas, gardens, and churches on Sattva, car parks, graffiti, litter and dereliction on Tamas. Several higher quality posters showed how the Gunas work together while others tried to classify every situation into one or another.

In the first year, two groups innovated by introducing a clock to their posters. In one case, this showed that one wooded part of campus, considered peaceful and Sattvic during the day, became busily Rajasic in peak hours but threatening and Tamasic after dark. Another team extended the thought to everyday life, pointing out that people also exhibit different dominant Gunas during different phases of their daily and weekly routines.

Similarly, many of the recipes for change were predictable and familiar: paint, clear litter, repair, plant trees in concrete places, light dark alleys and corners at night, clear away clutter, improve the soundscape with Nature or running water rather than car engines, reduce motor traffic, clean up the air, open up vistas and cover up the fading concrete of campus buildings. If there was a general pattern, it was that the plans emphasized the human experience rather than any architects dream The focus, for on-campus teams, was learners' needs for quiet places to think, discuss, read or study; for off-campus teams, their wish for safe, energizing, social places to meet, eat, interact, and plan (Table2: S2.1 and 2.2).

These same themes were echoed in each learner's individual prescriptions for making changes in their own places—usually their room—sometimes the campus or city. One of the six elements of Invitational Education is empowerment (Schmidt. 2007). This is addressed in that part of the exercise that invites learners to change their personal places to meet their needs for either peace and reflection or energy and activity. Although, for at least one, all they sought was a place for some Tamasic rest (Table 2: S2.3). The Table 2 samples emerge from a cacophony of ideas, some developed with plans and photographs, about how personal spaces could be changed to strengthen their Rajasic or Sattvic effects (Table 2: 2.4-2.8).

Evaluation

At the end of each run of "The Ethical Geographer" participants complete a one-sheet, Course Consultation questionnaire with a small number of open questions. Its first question is a request to describe, as fully as they can, their experience of the course. A total of 88 responses have been retrieved with comments, both positive and negative, some expressing general feelings and some discussing particular aspects of the course.

Apparently, most found the course different to any experienced previously, the first to focus on their personal self and to ask them to reflect on their feelings. Thankfully, most call the course an enjoyable experience; the word *enjoyable* remains its most common epithet and *enjoyment* is one of the six key elements of Invitational Education (Schmidt, 2007). Assessed teamwork was its least popular aspect but common among the negative comments were those of the "I cannot see the point" variety. Sadly, several could not imagine how ethics or empathy might relate to either Geography or their future life. There were relatively few com-

plaints about the importation of ideas from outside Western culture. However, there remained a constituency in the course that did not *enlist* (Boyd et al., 2008; Schmidt, 2007).

As for the positive comments, naturally, most found those aspects of the course that most overtly sought to prepare them to approach future employers most valuable. More than half recognized that issues connected with ethics, empathy and environment had some bearing their future, while a similar number valued the *novelty* of having space created for them to reflect and think about themselves and their responsibilities. Another course exercise, which involved tree planting, was much mentioned, appreciated for its novelty value and future-oriented environmental message, while the Gunas exercise ranked third in comments both positive and negative (cf. Haigh, 2004).

Positive comments came from learners who recognized the importance of human feelings in social behavior and that this may be

Table 2 **Redesigning Learning Spaces: The Learners' Voices**
S2.1. "A Tamasic learning environment might have little natural light, include damaged furniture and so have a negative influence…"
S2.2. "A Sattvic environment would incorporate light reflecting surfaces such as chrome and glass and include flexible furnishings…"
S2.3. "My room is Tamasic... it is where I sleep. The lighting is dim. I have black and white pictures on the wall and the furniture is dark wood…"
S2.4. "My Tamasic room… benefits from no sunlight, it is surrounded by taller buildings and just outside my window is the place where all our rubbish is left. It is devoid of energy. . [Instead, I would create] an environment full of energy, passion, and creativity. The walls would be painted a bright color pictures and drapes would cover up the Tamasic and Sattvic… The pictures would be of energetic situations such as free climbing rock faces and surfing and also of inspiration al figures such as Che Guevara to inspire me to achieve all I can…"
S2.5. "... the strongest element of the new design is a prominent red wall, which acts of a focus point for my room. This increases Rajas by bringing energy and passion. Adding too much Rajas … would lead to an unsettled and restless mind… having lots of light and cream walls adds a calm and peaceful element... Tamas is often seen as negative but in fact it weans us from the old and lifeless…urging us to move on… so I have included pictures, which were of events that were fun and happy events and happiness is an element of Sattva".
S2.6. "My room has a relaxed calm feeling. The walls and carpets are a neutral cream/beige and the furniture is all light pine… To energize, it needs the injection of bold colors, bright rugs… plants, as they add a sense of life".
S2.7. "Sattva is associated with the color white and serenity. By embedding Sattva in a learning space, a calm productive environment can be created…. the incorporation of plants and flowing water features would soften the atmosphere".
S2.8. "My room is Sattvic... I am fortunate to have a large room which is spacious and light... The color scheme is white and crèmes and I have large windows. Its walls display photos of tranquil places. It has a calm and relaxing atmosphere... I would not transform it in any way.

affected by the qualities of place and from some who valued the other-cultural element. Negative comments came from those who required *objectivity* and a few who found the introduction of non-Western ideas to be inappropriate.

In 2007, the Course Consultation sheet also contained questions specifically about the exercise. These asked what do you believe was the intention of the exercise and what did you learn from your experience? The 36 analyses received find several learners recognizing an intention to make them more aware of the emotional impact of environments (Table 3: S3.1). Some went further to think about how they could control this impact (Table 3: S3.2).

Despite this, a majority of comments focused on mechanical aspects of the tasks. These suggested that the intention of the project was to help them build teamwork or presentation skills. A small group focused on the issue of interpersonal understanding: how others see their world and how different humans experience their worlds in such different ways. However, less than one in four addressed the issues of place, self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and habitat de-

sign. Suhotra (1996) tells a brief parable of a teacher, who seeing that the full moon is rising, directs a disciple to look toward a tree. The learner looks at the branches and worries that the light behind makes them silhouettes. It is not unusual in education, for method to obscure wider purpose.

Thankfully, the message was not lost to all. It resurfaced in the classroom during the student-lead discussion that was part of an informal peer-evaluation of posters. Here, several learners tried to link to the aims of The Ethical Geographer course. As Blackburn comments,

> Humans are ethical beings…We grade, evaluate, and compare and admire and claim and justify…We prefer that our preferences are shared; we turn them into demands upon on another…We hope for lives whose story leaves us looking admirable (Blackburn, 2001, p4).

In this case, class discussion turned, unbidden, toward linking the Gunas with issues of personal choice: where you live, how you live, what you read, and how you spend your

Table 3
The Purpose of the Speaking Stones Exercise: Some Learners Voices
S3.1 "It is about the attempt to understand, to experience, to feel things as another human person understands them. It is unlikely that a person ... will, or ever could, know what others actually feel. However, it is extremely important the action is made as it expresses a desire to try… The Gunas exercise taught me to evaluate the world in a more complex way"
S3.2 "... we learnt about empathy in a much less common context, that of empathizing with the environment… we need to empathize with our environment and realize that we have an obligation and responsibility towards its well being"
S3.3. "This aspect of the course encouraged me to analyze and more importantly empathize with my learning environment… enabling me to understand other external factors that may impact upon my ability to learn effectively".

time. What parts are Sattvic, Rajasic or Tamasic? Finally, as the class ended, talk turned to thoughts about the self and personal relationships at home and at work. An echo from this found its ways into one learner's personal statement as follows:

> I think the ability to empathize is very important… this section of the module has been my favorite… In my first year at University, I was a Tamas learner, however, in my second year I became very motivated to do well and became more of a Rajas learner and since coming back for my third year, I believe I am more of a Sattvic learner.

Discussion

Place is one of the five powerful "P's" of Invitational Education but, to create a more inviting place, you must first understand how that place makes people feel and what they need from it. Purkey and Novak (1996) identify three assumptions in their perceptual psychology approach. First, people behave according to their subjective perception of the qualities of their environment. Second, perceptions are learned, that they can change given new information and experience. Third, though reflective self-awareness, this change will be reflected in different behavior. Empathy, a kind of emotional intelligence, is central to understanding social behavior and the way it changes (Mayer and Salovey, 1993). However, empathy begins with self-awareness.

Sāmkhya and perceptual psychology agree: we create our own world and believe our personal world to be absolute reality. In fact, society accepts a wide array of these personal realities; they are negotiated norms, which differ from place to place and culture to culture but within boundaries. Those who stray beyond are ignorant, mad, dangerous, etc. Naturally, these personal realities massively affect individual and collective decisions about how to behave and, again, these issues worry folk in Geography. Elsewhere, the author helped colleague Jon Hellin explore the rationalities that encourage farmers in Central America, wisely it seems, to ignore the land management prescriptions of professional Soil Conservationists; and in another case, tried to help learners understand why the redevelopment of despoiled coal-lands in Wales causes controversy (Hellin and Haigh 2002; Haigh, 1996). Once again, the key is empathy, the ability to see the world a little bit as another may see it and to understand how that reality feels to them. Ultimately, every person's actions are guided by what they perceive and the feedback they receive from their habitat (Purkey and Novak, 1996).

As for ourselves, many teachers feel stress: "Stress is when your mouth says yes, whilst your guts are screaming no!" (Griffith, 2006). Currently, Britain's Higher Education is gripped by a pandemic of work-related stress, which the Unions attribute to management culture (Philips, 2007). This is creating a disinvitational environment for instructors, which exploits Tamasic feelings of helplessness and insecurity (Bachkirova, 2005). The sixth Powerful P may be *politics* but instructors are, typically, politically disempowered (Fink, 1992). However, in part, their problems are self-created—a Rajasic urge to do well pressed hard against an obdurate, Tamasic, reality (Haigh, 2008). If the world is mind-made, so also is stress. So, equally, are some remedies. Of course, instructors have limited room for maneuver but making small changes in the qualities of

that Powerful P—Place may be within reach. An easy anecdote comes to mind of a teacher who calmed the atmosphere in her classroom simply by putting lavender scent on the radiators each morning.

Invitational theory introduces its 'Five Ps' with the analogy of a starfish opening a clam (Purkey, 1999). This paper focuses on building up strength in just one of those arms through encouraging learners to reflect creatively on the arm of place. Of course, no starfish would attempt to achieve its goal with just one arm. Five arms make lighter work. Equally, this exercise and its Sattvic toolkit would likely be more beneficial were they part of a larger program. However, even in isolation, the approach seems to contain several benefits. First, it helps turns the spotlight of inquiry inwards; the exercise focuses participants on how they feel and why? Second, the teamwork element engages thinking about how others feel, act, and react. Finally, the exercise invites all involved to think about making their world a better place to live and empowers them by suggesting what they could do toward this.

In higher education, all many learners need is opportunity. They are Rajasic, self-motivated, driven by internal fires and self-belief. Others need help. Swami Vivekananda writes,

> Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in Humans. Therefore, the only duty of the teacher…is to remove all obstructions from the way....That is our duty, to clear the way. (Vivekananda, 1894, in Vivekananda, 1989, v4, p358).

For this writer, this is what invitational theory, this technique, and this Speaking Stones exercise is all about—removing Tamasic obstruction.

The question remains: does the approach succeed? At present, the answer is "somewhat." Of course, it is always difficult to ask busy people to slow down and think. Few of the learners, outside of the occasional New Ager, have been practiced in the arts of introspective reflection and several did not wish to be! Presently, most of our education is about purveying facts, theories, technical skills and engaging in the critical evaluation of 'others'. An important aspect of the critique of Western education from Neo-Vedanta Educators, such as Vivekananda, Tagore and Gandhi, is that it does not emphasize building personal character but rather instrumental, socially valued, capabilities and simple factual knowledge (Sharma, 2002). They say it produces automata by neglecting the inner self for the external world.

In this context, inviting learners to engage with their own feelings is an extraordinary thing. It asks for a personal response and pressures learners to find answers within themselves, which is often outside their comfort zone. So, it is not surprising that some do not want to be bothered and some become irritated because they cannot do what they usually do—read a couple of chapters, paraphrase them for an short term paper, regurgitate a few facts and quotations for an examination—familiar, easy, unaffective, activities that disturb them not at all.

One reviewer of this paper asks, in response to reports of students' enjoyment and avowed increased insight into their own values, if these positive responses came as a pleasant surprise? Certainly, they did, but

later this became mitigated by the realization only part of the class was pleased to accept this invitation to learn, while some regarded it as embarrassing or a waste of effort.

Of course, it is good to read positive evaluations and find that many, including most the more committed learners, found the Speaking Stones exercise a valuable opportunity to think constructively about making their world a better place in which to live. It was also nice to find that many learners found values in the course and this exercise that served their own career specific goals, which often include the ambition to succeed in a corporate setting. As for longer-term effects, anecdotal evidence suggests that some, especially those facing the trauma of annual reviews or working with new teams, later, recognized that this course had tried to give them a head start. A few took the Gunas to heart and began to use these ideas in their everyday lives. No doubt, others vaguely recall that "they did a strange exercise about the ways Indian people look at buildings," while, for some, this whole experience was "water under the bridge" by the end of the Semester, particularly among those who, for one reason or another, were not directly involved in the fieldwork.

Reviewers also ask: to what extent were colleagues influenced by this work and did it get them to reexamine their teaching? Well, times change. Years ago, my Department was a hot-bed of educational experimentation; staff never happier than when they had a new exercise to discuss or show off. Today, teaching has sunk down the agenda, overtaken first by research, later by administration and the need to find external funds to support a burgeoning bureaucracy. Now, experimentation is centrally planned, restricted to aspects of learning supported by funding, while the emphasis in teaching has shifted to processing the largest possible numbers with the least possible effort or angst, so creating time for other activities. Educational experimentation takes time and it is risky. In education, as in any walk of life, most innovations are not successful. Again, even the best experimental prototypes have problems—and sometimes learners react unsympathetically. In a system dominated by predatory administrators, an instructor would be well advised to take no chances. So, while echoes from some colleagues suggest that they find such work 'inspiring', the majority, wisely, keep to the beaten track. Fortunately, in this case, the core terminology is seductive; Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas are beginning to permeate the college vocabulary. It may be hoped that the larger message will follow.

Conventionally, constructive alignment means helping instructors align their curriculum with their desired learning outcomes, in terms other than those of subject knowledge, and helping learners to discover meaning in their work (Biggs, 2003). However, Biggs writes: "In aligned teaching, where all components support each other, students are trapped in to engaging in the appropriate learning activities" (Biggs, 2001, p 226), but *trap* seems too negative an image. The hope here is to create a positive ethos and a habitat that invites learners to engage themselves in quality learning. "As the means so the end…There is no wall of separation between the means and the end" (Gandhi, 1924; Richardson, 1982). Here, the goal is Sattvic self-awareness and reflection, enabled by the Rajas needed to effect change and, as that goal, so the means that the Speaking Stones exercise provides.

Invitations are a request for companion-

ship—a Sattvic signal. Invitational Theory may be rooted in John Dewey's democratic ethos and constructed through perceptual theory, but it is an applied field and hence, it is pragmatic and outcome oriented (Dewey and Ratner, 1939; Purkey and Stanley, 1991). Its intention is to shape the signals and signs that direct human self-belief toward better educational practice. One of this exercise's strengths is that it directs attention to the ways places affect human behavior. It provides a simple vehicle by which people can explore the effects of the environment on their own feelings. It exposes a self-created world to a key controller and embeds the aim of self-improvement.

Conclusion

Invitational theory is guided by Purkey's five 'Powerful P's of invitational practice that concern the people, policies, programs, processes and places, which together establish the ethos of education (Purkey, 1999). When these P's evoke positive feelings, a person is said to be "invited." In the ecology of education, invitational places are those that support positive learning.

The Speaking Stones exercise invites creative reflection upon place as one of those five powerful "Ps." Borrowing ideas from India's Sāmkhya Philosophy, it introduces the three Gunas, which are said to control and color everything in the material universe much as a photograph is created from dots of just three primary colors. These emotional primary colors are Sattva, which is light, pure, reflective, and serene, Rajas, which is active, creative, and dynamic, and Tamas, which is inert, veiled, and obstructing. Learners, formed into discussion groups, are invited to map their local environment in terms of its dominant Gunas and then, individually, to consider how their habitat may be made into more positive places for either Sattvic reflection or Rajasic creativity and interaction. Reports from those involved suggest that they enjoyed the task and that, in many cases, it initiated new creative thinking about the places they inhabit and the way they organize their lives.

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