

Only Connect

Jasmeen Griffin

Jasmeen Griffin graduated from Athabasca University with an MA in integrated studies, cultural studies focus. She has a BA in English from Dalhousie University. She is particularly interested in postcolonialism, feminism, and fairytales. She lives in the Cowichan Valley, where she has spent many happy years raising her two sons as well as studying, teaching, and writing. This essay is dedicated to her mother, a valiant immigrant, who managed to forge connections in a new homeland.

Because it appropriates ideas from various disciplines, integrated studies reminds me of a crow, indiscriminately grabbing bright, shiny objects. Integrated studies is a series of articulations spanning the arts, the social sciences, and the humanities. Its broad-ranging concerns (which include community development and adult education, issues of globalization and of equity, historical and cultural studies) attract students with diverse goals and interests. Integrated studies has enabled me to reconcile the two cultures that illuminate my life, and to weave together my disparate interests into a coherent quest to make a difference in my community.

I have uneasily straddled two very different cultures ever since I left India at the age of eight, eventually settling in Canada. Working to become fluent in English quickly, I lost the ability to speak Urdu. I was embarrassed by my affinity to crows and my love of sequins, beads, and glitter because I heard others attribute this love of bright, shiny things to my Indian heritage. My studies have taught me that the liminality borne of inhabiting two cultures is a complex source of strength and richness. I have shed my limiting desire to see home as a concrete location. Home is a state of mind; many tesserae of shifting possibilities; a sense of belonging that resides within me. This understanding was further enhanced by my study of postcolonialism, whose theories I applied to fairytales. These narratives of otherness—of lonely heroes leaving for strange lands and embarking on hazardous quests—have long enthralled me. I want to write fairytales that explore gender roles and relations, that articulate otherness and marginalization, and help us make sense of our world.

By rigorous contextualization of theory and experience, integrated studies fosters a praxis of critical reflection that strives for innovative solutions to advance social change. For me, integrated studies' commitment to using knowledge for the amelioration of society is one of its most alluring attributes. I also like its recognition of hitherto marginalized voices and pathways to knowledge and perception. Its many theoretical approaches engage the mind; its attention to pragmatic material conditions

affirms the experiences of the body; and its holistic approach addresses the mind, the body, and the heart, thereby promoting entelechy in its students.

Integrated studies incorporates multifarious interests, it articulates ideas from many disciplines, its attitude is holistic, and at Athabasca University its online delivery accommodates those who are constrained—as I am—by the exigencies of time and geography. In an unsettling and diasporic world, such inclusivity has an appealing plangency. “Only connect,” E. M. Forster’s (1910/2010) epigraph to *Howards End*, is an exhortation that integrated studies has taken to heart by distilling its multifaceted knowledge into a discipline in which students learn to forge harmonious connections that bridge differences.

Reference

Forster, E. M. (2010). *Howards End*. New York: Longman. (original work published 1910)