

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI

A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600

**Building Circles of Mutuality:
A Socio-Cultural Analysis of Literacy in a Rural Classroom in India**

by

Urvashi Malhotra Sahni

**M.A. (University of Lucknow, India) 1984
M.A. (University of California at Berkeley) 1990**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Education - Education in Language and Literacy

in the

GRADUATE DIVISION

of the

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA at BERKELEY

Committee in charge:

**Professor Anne Haas Dyson, Chair
Professor Herb Simons, Chair
Professor Glynda Hull
Professor Margarita Melville**

1994

UMI Number: 9529478

**UMI Microform 9529478
Copyright 1995, by UMI Company. All rights reserved.**

**This microform edition is protected against unauthorized
copying under Title 17, United States Code.**

UMI
300 North Zeeb Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48103

The dissertation of Urvashi Malhotra Sahni is approved:

Urvashi Malhotra Sahni June 1, 1994
Chair Date

Mark Driscoll 6/2/94
Chair Date

Allyn Hall

Margarita E. Melville

University of California at Berkeley

1994

**Building Circles of Mutuality:
A Socio-Cultural Analysis of Literacy in a Rural Classroom in India**

Copyright © 1994

by

Urvashi Malhotra Sahni

Abstract

Building Circles of Mutuality: A Socio-Cultural Analysis of Literacy in a Rural classroom in India

by

Urvashi Malhotra Sahni

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California at Berkeley

Professor Anne Haas Dyson, Chair

Professor Herb Simons, Chair

This dissertation provides a socio-cultural description and analysis of literacy as it is practised in a 2nd grade classroom of a rural primary school in North India. The study examines the literacy practice in a classroom setting, focusing on the nature and variety of literacy events, children's participation in these, the social lives experienced by the children in the classroom and the ideological, social and cultural factors shaping the practice. This study is a micro-ethnography, taking an emic view, it focuses particularly on the children's perspective, guided by the concern that, though children are the chief target of the educational enterprise, theirs has been the most neglected perspective in all planning, discussion and research concerning educational processes.

Ethnographic methods of inquiry and observation, including hand written fieldnotes during participation, audio-taping of classroom interactions, formal and informal interviews were used. A participation phase was included during which I

adopted the role of teacher-researcher and participated actively with the children in the construction and initiation of literacy activities in the classroom. The study takes the form of a case study of the classroom life in general and four focal children in particular. The final objective of the study is to provide a coherent picture of the children's socio-culturally embedded purposes, conceptions and needs for literacy as they are played out in their classroom lives in answer to the main research question: What is a culturally responsive literacy for the child members of this community and how is it constructed? This study aims at adding to the growing body of research trying to understand and describe children's perspective on literacy in its universality and particularity both.

Anne Lhas Dyson
Anne Lhas Dyson

I dedicate this dissertation to my daughters
Shibani and Nidhi
who taught me to value and respect children's perspective

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| CHAPTER I: The Problem Stated and Situated | 1 |
| CHAPTER 2: The Theoretical Ground | 18 |
| CHAPTER 3: Research Methodology | 43 |
| CHAPTER 4: Failing the Children | 61 |
| CHAPTER 5: Tell Us a Story | 106 |
| CHAPTER 6: Children Appropriating Literacy | 144 |
| CHAPTER 7: The Children Show the Way: Reflections and Directions | 207 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 233 |
| APPENDIX A: Caste in India | 244 |
| APPENDIX B: Photographs | 248 |

List of Figures

| Figure | Page |
|--|------|
| 3.1 School layout..... | 45 |
| 4.1 The institutional participant structure | 72 |
| 6.1 Shakun's friends playing hopscotch | 153 |
| 6.2 Once there lived a peacock | 154 |
| 6.3 Monkeys in the garden | 156 |
| 6.4 Shakun's picture story | 158 |
| 6.5 Shakun drawing her meaning | 160 |
| 6.6 Rajesh: Moves toward independence | 171 |
| 6.7 Rajesh finds a symbolic support in drawing | 174 |
| 6.8 Sheela's saree border | 182 |
| 6.9 Sheela's parrot..... | 184 |
| 6.10 Holi — Sheela using drawing to organise and express meaning | 187 |

List of Tables

| Table | Page |
|--|---------|
| 1.1 Gross-enrollment ration at primary and upper primary level | 6 |
| 1.2 Proportion of children attending school | 7 |
| 1.3 Drop-out rates at primary and middle schoot stages | 8 |
| 3.1 Data collection procedures | 47 |
| 3.2 Age, gender and caste of focal children | 54 |
| 5.1 Varieties of literacy events | 133 |
| 6.1 List of topics..... | 201-202 |

Acknowledgements

Amongst the many things I learnt in the course of writing this dissertation, I learnt most importantly, perhaps, that learning is a collective process. I could not have completed this dissertation without the help and support of several people, all of whom I thank. First of all, I thank my adviser, Professor Anne Haas Dyson, for her interest and faith in my work, her respectful response, the untiring, painstaking guidance, and the intellectual support and challenge she provided all through my four years of graduate study at Berkeley. I was privileged to worked with her so closely and to have had the benefit of her fine mind and person. I thank Professor Herb Simons, and his wife Liz Simons, for their encouragement, supportive guidance, and hospitality, which helped me find my way and feel comfortable in a foreign country. I am grateful to Professor Glynda Hull for the enthusiasm, warmth, and interest with which she received me and my work. I thank her, too, for her understanding of the constraints facing me in a foreign country and for the many practical ways in which she helped me through the difficulty of writing this dissertation here. I express my gratitude to Professor Margarita Melville for her willingness to serve on my dissertation committee and for the encouragement and support she provided.

I thank all my friends and colleagues in the Graduate School of Education, Paula Crivello, Judy Kalman, Susan Weinberg, Mark Jury, Jim Lobdell, and Antoinette Mitchell who helped and supported me generously throughout my years of graduate study here in Berkeley. I thank Andy Bouman who helped me generously with my computer problems. I thank, especially, Walter Masuda for his friendly support, the unstinting loan of his time and books. He edited and proofed my entire dissertation with patience, skill, and care, and to him goes the credit for the physical face of this dissertation. The many conversations I shared with Walter, Steve Thorne, and Rakesh Chandra fueled and

sustained my own ideas and thoughts. I thank Karen Benson for her unwavering faith in my work which helped tide me over many bouts of self-doubt.

I thank, especially, my friends Marcia and Bob who gave me a sense of home in this country in more ways than one. Their friendship and support sustained me through several difficult times.

I express my deep gratitude to my friends, Geeta Kumar, Rakesh Chandra, Ashok Ahuja, Dr. Vinita Wanchoo, Col. V. S. Wal, Raj, and Naina Bisaria, in India, without whose support and encouragement I could not have sustained the long times away from home.

I appreciate the trials and travails endured by my daughters, Shibani and Nidhi, my husband Sunil, my mother-in-law Shakuntla Sahni, my mother Rajinder Malhotra, my father Satpal Malhotra, and my sister Pooja all through the years of my graduate study, and I express my deepest gratitude to them for supporting me. Without their support, this dissertation would not have been possible.

Above all, I am grateful to my focal children: Sheela, Ravi, Shakun, and Rajesh for the warmth with which they received me into their world. I thank also their teacher for sharing her classroom with me and the members of the community for making me so welcome.

Finally, I thank the University of California, Berkeley, for providing me with the Myrtle L. Judkins University Fellowship, the Dr. Ned Flanders Fellowship, and the David H. Russell Fellowship to enable me to pursue graduate work at Berkeley, culminating in this dissertation study.

PREFACE

“Who is your audience?” I asked myself this question several times as I tried to position myself while writing this dissertation. Though the context described in this dissertation is specific to India, the issues are globally relevant. Gender, race, class, power inequalities, cultural dominance and subordination, are global issues. Public schools all over the world are hierarchically structured. They have built in their structures ways of inclusion and exclusion, such that some people are helped to move up the social power ladder, while some are effectively crippled at the very beginning, some voices heard more than others, some silenced completely. There is a universal concern about the fact that schools are increasingly becoming alienating places, rather than the intended sites of nurture and growth.

In the Western context, scholars like Rist, Giroux, McLaren, Fine, McLeod, and Greene describe and analyse the insidious politics of schools and their agency in the reproduction and perpetuation of social and political inequities. This dissertation lends its voice to the protests voiced by the scholars referred to above, making salient the point that *universally* children occupy the lowest position in the power hierarchy in schools, their voices are least heard and they are non-participants in an endeavour that concerns them so closely. Perhaps the context described appears more stark and grossly oppressive than others in the Western context. I argue that the starkness of the setting helps in highlighting the issues because they are difficult to gloss over with polite academic subtleties, as is often the case in other settings which, though equally oppressive, are less apparently so.

Writing about my own culture in a foreign university posed special problems, ones whose complexity I had not fully appreciated until I began writing. This dissertation

straddles two worlds, separated not only by several thousand miles, but also by history and culture. These two worlds occupy different historically constructed power positions in the globe, and I am aware of the difficulties of positioning myself in the politically constituted, complex nexus of power and knowledge which emerges. With my dissertation, I enter into a cross-cultural conversation and, at the very outset, I attempt to define the terms of this conversation. The grounds of readership are the same as the central thesis of this study — mutual responsiveness and respect. The only way for cultures occupying different power places to interact is by transacting respect. I agree with Paulo Freire who has written tirelessly about the power of dialogues, envisioning them as mutual encounters which inform, educate and liberate both interlocutors. I believe that they help, too, to deconstruct historically constructed barriers and stereotypes, and, perhaps, it is with these mutually respectful dialogues that historically constructed inequalities can be deconstructed.

CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM STATED AND SITUATED

The Report of the Committee for Review of the National Policy of Education (1990) states:

The continued failure since independence to fulfill the constitutional directive of providing education to all children up to the age of 14 years is a teasing reality. Undoubtedly this problem qualifies for being ranked as the most fundamental problem of our educational system. (p. 134)

The failure of primary education manifests itself in low attendance and alarmingly high drop out rates. The problem, a complex construction of historical, social and political factors, continues to concern educational planners, policy makers and educators, resulting in a plethora of reports, policy appraisals and plans of action, drawn up in the effort to develop effective solutions. This study is motivated by a similar concern, though it adopts a different approach. The problem and the construction of solutions is contextualised in the daily practice of a classroom in a rural primary school in the state of Uttar Pradesh (rated one of the most educationally backward states in India), considering chiefly the much neglected perspective of the most affected party — the children.

Agreeing with Berlin (1976) that “problems are intelligible and soluble only within their own socio-historical context” (p. 41), I briefly sketch the historical background of the problem before situating it in the present socio-political context in order to show how the present predicament is a historical construction, in large part an outcome of an unprudent colonial legacy. This is followed by a methodological rationale and, finally, a detailed statement of the problem.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT: A BRIEF SKETCH

On October 20 1931, Mahatma Gandhi argued at Chatham House, London, demanding the restoration of a culturally appropriate education for all the children of his country from the British colonizers:

We have the education of this future state. I say without fear of my figures being challenged successfully, that today India is more illiterate than it was fifty or a hundred years ago, and so is Burma, because the British administrators, when they came to India, instead of taking hold of things as they were, began to root them out. They scratched the soil and began to look at the root, and left the root like that, and the beautiful tree perished.

In the earlier decades of the nineteenth century, William Adams, a British missionary wrote three exhaustive reports about the extent and nature of the indigenous school system existing in India in the nineteenth century. According to him, there existed an extensive, healthy, vital and efficiently functioning school system before the British rule, the literacy rates comparing with most European countries (Nurullah and Naik, 1964).

According to Di Bona (1989),

the indigenous system of education boasted a number of features which even today would be considered exemplary. . . . It was locally supported . . . personal - the average school being small and centered around a single teacher who taught what he knew for as long as it took the student to learn. . . . The local schools were deeply embedded in the social life of the community and but one aspect of a rich cultural life that characterised India before Western colonization (p. 81).

Historians Nurullah and Naik provide descriptions of the literacy curriculum which reflect its embeddedness in the purposes of the rural males for whom it was meant, since female children were not sent to school. According to their accounts, the literacy activities took the form of writing letters, drawing up forms of agreement, composing grants, leases and other legal documents, reading fables and legendary tales, and memorising various kinds of poetry.

Adam argued persistently that the best plan of action for the British government was to build a national system of education on the foundations of the indigenous schools:

All schemes for the improvement of education, therefore, to be efficient and permanent, should be based upon the existing institutions of the country, transmitted from time immemorial, familiar to the conceptions of the people and inspiring them with respect and veneration. (Nurullah & Naik, 1964, p. 25)

The British government turned a deaf ear to the exhortations of Adams, convinced that British ideas were better. Macaulay's famous minute of 1835, in which he recommended the dissemination of Western learning through the medium of the English language, declares that

the dialects commonly spoken among the natives of this part of India contain neither literary nor scientific information, and are moreover so poor and rude that, until they are enriched from some other quarter, it will not be easy to translate any valuable work into them. . . . A single shelf of a good European library is worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. (Nurullah & Naik, 1964, p. 61)

Thus, the indigenous schools were either killed by ill-planned attempts at reform by the British, destroyed by exploitative economic policies, or allowed to die of sheer neglect. The results were disastrous for Indian education, with the result that, in 1921, the educational position of India was hardly better than it was in 1821 (Nurullah and Naik, 1964; Di Bona, 1989).

The concept of "downward filtration" was instituted, according to which a select group of people received a Western education, the benefits of which were expected to percolate to the masses. Warden, a member of the Governor's council in Bombay, was the earliest author of this view, and Macaulay lent his weight to it. Nurullah and Naik quote him:

It is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern - a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. To that class we leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population. (p. 86)

In this way, the British not only destroyed the indigenous educational base of the country, they also fostered the beginning of the rural-urban divide that dogs the education system even now. The British government put all their efforts and money into college education, where loyal servants and clerks would be trained to help administer the affairs of the empire. Primary education was virtually destroyed, and the effects are evident today.

In 1910, Gokhale, another Indian stalwart of the freedom movement, raised the issue of universal elementary education on the highest national forum, the Central Legislature. Nurullah and Naik quote him:

With universal education, there will be hope of better success for all efforts, official or non-official, for the amelioration of the people - their social progress; their moral improvement, their economic well-being. (p. 16)

The British government turned his proposal down on the grounds that they did not have the funds.

There was very little "downward filtration," rather, there was added one more layer to the multiple layers of class, caste, gender and religion in an already stratified society, adding to the existing indigenous forms of oppression. A new power elite came into being, consisting of urban centered, western, English speaking college educated Indians, who occupied most of the positions of administrative power. It took the place of

the British in post-colonial India, establishing an “internal colonialism” (Di Bona, 1989), which followed the seemingly universal and perennial forms of domination and subordination. In what developed into a highly centralised system, this dominant class authored plans of development and resource allocation, which served to protect their own interests and was detrimental to the interests of the rural villagers, who, though they constituted over 80% of the population, lacked the power to make their numbers felt. With reference to education, like all dominant or “mainstream” groups the world over, they defined the curricular content and standards in terms of their own circumstances and group interests, thus ensuring the success of their group members and the failure of the “minority”/subordinate groups.

Much recent research in the USA is aimed at revealing this hegemonic practice of the mainstream, which maintains existing relations of dominance and subordination, inclusion and exclusion in societies (Bowles & Gintis, 1989; Giroux, 1989). Researchers in both the Indian and American context (Ogbu, 1987; Gore, 1982; Di Bona, 1989) have pointed out that the hegemonic control exercised by dominant groups is largely responsible for the problems of education, manifested in schools in terms of poor achievement and large drop out rates, predominantly afflicting members of subordinate groups. Having traced the historical roots of the problem, the next section provides a description of the current situation of primary education in the Indian context.

THE PRESENT PREDICAMENT

In 1994, India is still struggling with the historical burden of an alien education system and an unequal educational and social structure, nowhere near the goal of universalisation of elementary education. Guided by the widely prevalent scholarly and popular belief that literacy is a critical causal factor of modernisation, political

democracy, scientific thinking, social equality and economic growth, the Indian government has made an enormous effort to promote literacy in the four decades post independence. Schools were recognised as the chief vehicles of literacy and the importance of elementary education for national development was recognised. The constitution enunciated the following Directive Principle of State Policy regarding universalisation of elementary education:

The State shall endeavour to provide within a period of 10 years from the commencement of the Constitution for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years. (Article 45)

There was a rapid quantitative expansion of educational facilities and a corresponding increase in school enrollment. The records of the Fifth All India Educational Survey of 1989 show that schools have grown in number, from 220,000 in 1951 to 530,000 in 1986, and that school enrollment for the total estimated population in the age group 6-11 has increased from 42.6% in 1951 to 93.6% in 1986.

TABLE 1.1: GROSS ENROLLMENT RATIO AT PRIMARY- AND UPPER-PRIMARY LEVEL

| Year | Primary (1-5) in % age | Upper-primary (6-8) in % age |
|-----------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1950-1951 | 42.6 | 12.9 |
| 1955-1956 | 52.8 | 16.5 |
| 1960-1961 | 62.4 | 22.5 |
| 1965-1966 | 76.7 | 30.9 |
| 1970-1971 | 76.4 | 34.2 |
| 1975-1976 | 79.3 | 35.6 |
| 1978 | 81.7 | 37.9 |
| 1986 | 93.6 | 48.5 |

Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Education, 1989.

TABLE 1.2:
PROPORTION OF CHILDREN ATTENDING SCHOOL: 1981(PERCENTAGE)

| Population | 6-11 Years | 11-14 Years |
|--------------|------------|-------------|
| All | 47.15 | 51.96 |
| Male | 54.53 | 63.81 |
| Female | 38.45 | 38.67 |
| Rural | 41.23 | 45.69 |
| Rural male | 50.57 | 59.52 |
| Rural female | 31.23 | 30.12 |
| Urban | 68.83 | 72.93 |
| Urban male | 72.70 | 78.32 |
| Urban female | 64.72 | 66.98 |

Census of India, 1981.

Impressive as these figures are, spot studies have shown that enrollment figures and attendance figures do not correspond, as is evident by comparing the attendance figures in Table 1.2 with the enrollment figures in Table 1.1. It can be seen that almost 53% of the children in the 6-11 age group do not attend school.

The problem of non-attendance is further compounded by the enormous drop out rate. According to varying estimates available now, almost one-half of all children and two-thirds of the girls in the age group of 6-14 either do not enter the school at all or drop out at an early stage or are "pushed out" of the school system (see Table 1.3). The total drop-out rate was recorded at an alarming 64.42 %, with girls at 70.04%, in 1985-86. The table also records lower enrollment and attendance rates and higher drop-out rates for rural children. It is evident, too, that fewer girls in both rural and urban areas attend school and more drop out than boys.

TABLE 1.3: DROP-OUT RATES AT PRIMARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL STAGES

| Years | Classes 1-5 | | | Classes 6-8 | | |
|---------|-------------|-------|-------|-------------|-------|-------|
| | Boys | Girls | Total | Boys | Girls | Total |
| 1981-82 | 51.10 | 57.30 | 53.50 | 68.50 | 77.70 | 72.10 |
| 1982-83 | 49.40 | 56.30 | 52.10 | 66.04 | 74.96 | 69.57 |
| 1983-84 | 47.83 | 53.96 | 50.26 | 66.10 | 75.27 | 69.76 |
| 1984-85 | 45.62 | 51.41 | 47.93 | 61.83 | 70.87 | 65.39 |
| 1985-86 | 45.84 | 50.27 | 47.61 | 60.70 | 70.04 | 64.42 |

Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Education, 1990.

The National Educational Policy (1986) expresses its concern over the high drop out rates, recognising school failure as a serious problem:

Low retention and high drop out rates continue to erode the gains from educational expansion. The magnitude of wastage is emaciating the educational development in the country. (pp. 21-22)

This study is motivated by a similar concern for school failure, defining school failure as the failure of schools to provide a socially, culturally and intellectually nurturing environment for children, thereby failing to retain them.

“Irrelevance” of the curriculum is mentioned as one major factor for the low rate of school success by Indian research studies and policy appraisals (SIE, 1986; Gore, 1982; Newman, 1989; Rao, 1985; Nep, 1986, and Report of the Committee for Review of NEP, 1990). Since a larger proportion of school drop outs belong to the urban lower classes or to the rural populations, Gore (1982) describes the special nature of this “irrelevance” well:

Our education is still largely relevant and responsive to the aspirations of the urban middle class. When it is considered irrelevant it is in terms of its lack of relevance for a large number of lower level occupations in the urban areas and most occupations in rural areas . . . the social background of the educational planner and policy maker is an important source of irrelevance in education. (pp. 47-48)

The issue of irrelevance is addressed as one of functional irrelevance in the Indian context, which view derives from a conception of literacy as having a predominantly functional purpose. There has been a continuous struggle to deal with the complex issues of difference and equity arising from the effort to develop curriculum for diverse groups of people related asymmetrically in terms of social and political power. As Gore (1982) points out, the main problem is that of formulating curricula relevant to the rural "masses" since 75.70% of the total estimated population of the country and 89.90% of the government primary schools are in the rural areas. Several proposals have been offered (Gokhale - Parulekar's model in 1939; Gandhi's Basic Education Model, implemented in 1956; Rajagopalachari's Double Shift System; Acharya Vinoba Bhave's One-Hour School System; The Education Commission's Neighbourhood School model; Naik's - Non-Formal Education System), many experiments tried, and the struggle is still on. I suggest that these have proved inadequate because in all cases the rural populations were not included in the planning process. Any plans formulated by the dominant groups for the subaltern groups without their participation are not only undemocratic, they seem to be doomed to failure.

Seeking to equalise educational opportunity, the NPE (1986) proposes a common core curriculum, stating that

To achieve the multiple but interdependent goals of personal economic, social, political and cultural development, it is necessary to make appropriate provision for integrated programmes of education for people who happen to be living at different levels of personal and economic development, possessing different linguistic, social and cultural attributes. Such programmes will have a common

core curriculum to strengthen unity within diversity and also to facilitate mobility from one part of the country to another. (p. 4)

Though the objective is laudable, such an approach can lead to a furthering of the gap between unequally positioned groups instead of closing it. Providing the same curriculum for groups with distinct differences in life-worlds, and material and social circumstances, can result in the very inequities that are to be avoided, since it involves using the same yardstick for groups of people with different historical and social advantages and disadvantages, therefore adding to the disadvantages of the already disadvantaged. On the other hand, treating differences differently could lead to exclusionary practices, fossilising the differences, thus perpetuating the unequal social structure. Scott (1988) cautions against a dichotomising view of difference and equality, saying that “equality is not the elimination of difference and difference does not preclude equality” (p. 38). This poses the complex issue of difference and equality faced by societies the world over (i.e., the problem of distinguishing carefully between kinds of differences and dealing with difference in a way that promotes equity).

In the attempt to make curricula relevant to diverse groups, the NPE has outlined a need for “area-specific and population-specific planning.” It emphasises decentralisation and states that the local community should be involved in all aspects of the planning. This is a healthy shift towards a more democratic form of planning, since “relevance” is construed differently depending on who is defining it, and the best construction would necessarily come from the insiders themselves. Yet there has been no research aimed at a careful understanding and identification of the purposes of the diverse communities, especially the rural communities, in order to include these in the planning of the curricula. As a result, when differential treatment is meted out, it fails in its objective, taking the form of a minimal reduction of the curriculum. As Gore points out,

What the planner tries to do is to introduce a new system of education suited to the rural agrarian masses. . . . This is what happened to the experiment with basic education. Basic education was regarded by the urban middle class as suitable for the rural children but not for their own. (p. 47)

Rightly enough the dominant groups in the villages — the landed gentry — rejected the new system, viewing it as exclusionary.

Complex as the issue of relevance is, I point out one more layer of complexity by asking the following questions: “Relevant to whom in the community? To the men? The women? The children? The adults? The upper castes? The lower castes?” The community is not a monolithic homogeneous entity, but a complex, multifaceted structure of multiple groups and individuals inhabiting different, overlapping socio-cultural worlds and having different purposes and different perspectives. Relevance has been conceived in terms of the rural adults, males generally, and directed towards their purposes as construed by urban adults. Despite the references in all policy documents to “child-centered” education, the perspective of the children has been the most neglected one in all planning, discussion and research concerning educational processes. Children have been viewed as objects of education, as “human resources,” their education necessary for national development. Even the term child-centered objectivises children, as what children should center their attention on is decided by adults. Curricular content, learning requirements, achievement goals are determined by adults without the active participation of children or any active engagement with children, the world over. There is very little research in the Indian context and more generally in the international context that makes close observations and studies of children in classroom settings seeking to understand their purposes, intentions and interests in literacy.

METHODOLOGICAL RATIONALE

The bulk of the research related to elementary education, in India, is focused on the problem of universalisation of elementary education. Out of 209 studies recorded since 1951, 30.2% deal with universalisation, with the current emphasis being on primary education in rural areas. School failure is the main focus of these studies — stagnation (detention), non-attendance and non-enrollment are the major problem areas defining the larger problem of school failure (Grewal & Gupta, 1991). Most of these studies are large scale studies, taking an etic perspective and primarily a macro-sociological approach to the problem (Dass, 1975; Seetharamu & Usha Devi, 1981; Naik, 1982; Hussain, 1982; Sharma, 1982).

All these studies use questionnaires and surveys, seeking causal explanations in statistical correlations. Producing numerical summaries of the situation, they posit dearth of and poor quality of physical infrastructure in terms of buildings, play grounds, ancillary facilities and equipment; heavy costs of education and the inability of parents to meet these; irrelevant curriculum, defective methods of teaching and poverty and low literacy among parents; opportunity costs of keeping children in school instead of putting them to work and child labour, as some of the reasons for the heavy dropout rates.

These studies provide useful background information, locating the problem in the larger social and economic structure of the society, showing also the magnitude of the problem, pointing out the neglectful state of education in rural areas, the lack of adequate resources and are valuable in as much. They have, however proved inadequate, because they do not give close detailed descriptions of the complex, multiple ways in which the teaching and learning of literacy is played out in the ground reality of classrooms, which are extremely complex social, cultural and political sites. These studies take only a

societal view of literacy, which is a partial view, giving no account of the individual, interpersonal level at which literacy is practised. Further, they take a static, external view of society and education both. They do not tell us the "how" of the problem as it occurs as part of an extremely complex social and cultural process.

There is very little research aimed at close ethnographic description and analysis of literacy as it is practised in the ground reality of classroom life, revealing its in-process, inter-personal, inter-contextual, inner-structural complexity, in order to understand school failure as it happens, in terms of who is failing whom and how. What are the specific ways in which the failure manifests itself? What is the role of the various individuals in this setting? What is the role of the structure — the societal structure, the political structure, the institutional structure of the school system in the specific ways in which it manifests itself in the classroom? Especially, there is no research that considers the perspective of the main social actors, the chief beneficiaries or victims of education - the children who have been reduced to a statistical invisibility by extant research.

The need for close descriptive studies of classroom settings is being recognised by scholars and educational planners the world over. In the American context, Mehan (1982) argues that ethnographic studies provide a much neglected perspective:

Instead of seeking causal explanations in statistical correlations, ethnographers seek the rules or principles that organize behaviour in practical circumstances. . . . If we are interested in understanding and possibly changing the structure of education in society, then knowledge about organizing principles is crucial. Such knowledge informs us of the processes that organise education and can relate what goes on inside schools to what happens in other aspects of society. (p. 59)

He adds that ethnographic description and analysis yields such knowledge in providing "descriptions of the way people live their lives in social situations" (pp. 59-60).

In the Indian context, Buch & Govinda (1987) comment on the lack of studies that use participant observation and case study methods in addressing a qualitative evaluation of the educational process and curricula in “real classroom conditions” which they assert, would go a long way in developing curricular material adapted to local conditions. Roy (1987) also bemoans the lack of studies in classroom settings, commenting that “since none of the studies relate to classroom settings, practicing teachers will derive little benefit from such studies” (p. 1022).

I agree with the view of the scholars mentioned above. Education is an extremely complex process, requiring a multi-perspectival approach to understand it. Macrosociological studies reveal the sociological factors at play and these are important to show, but they do not deal with the structure from the inside and do not provide the perspective of the people affected most by the problems. Large social problems are played out in the mundaneness of daily life. Political and social structures impact people as they live their lives. In trying to understand large concepts like power, hegemony, cultural relevance and its implications for difference and equality, we must get closer to real lives and inside real situations. Structural understandings must emerge from within structures — in understanding people as they grapple with structures, learning how they make sense of them and how they act inside them. The problems are enormous and their enormity tends to overwhelm, leaving many of us feeling helpless. It is in creating bounded contexts, living and learning within them that much can be learnt and perhaps solutions found.

THE PROBLEM STATED

This study attempts to provide this much needed perspective. It attempts to understand literacy as it is practised in a 2nd grade classroom of a government rural

primary school, in the state of Uttar Pradesh, India, with the intent of understanding the social cultural and political dynamics of the practice. It takes an emic view, considering chiefly the perspective of the child-participants. In this study, I attempt to understand the children in this setting, to get to know them and learn how they define literacy, how they use it and for what. What do they do with it? What purposes and needs do they reveal? What kind of a literacy curriculum do these children transact when they are invited to negotiate the curriculum and how do they develop as writers and persons in the process of this transaction.

The chief purpose of this research is to attempt a careful study of the culturally indigenous purposes and conception of literacy of the child members of this community. This research has a dual purpose — firstly, to enter the setting and understand it in all its social, cultural and political complexity asking the following specific questions:

- What is the nature and variety of literacy events in this classroom?
- How is literacy practiced?
- What are the participant structures?
- How do children and adults participate in the literacy events?
- What kind of social lives do the children experience in this classroom?
- What are the ideological, social and cultural factors shaping this literacy practise?

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, it attempts to explore the possibilities and potentialities presented by the children, and constructed collaboratively by the researcher and the children both, asking the specific questions:

- What is a child-responsive literacy for the child-members of this classroom?

- How is a child-responsive literacy constructed mutually by the students and the teacher?
- How does children's literacy develop in a classroom when children are responded to and take a more active participatory role in the construction of the literacy events?
- What purposes for literacy do they reveal? What functions does it serve?
- How do children develop as persons in such classrooms?

The hope with which this study was undertaken was to gain a deeper understanding of the children of this community and to give voice to their needs and purposes which I believe are vital for any planning of relevant curriculum and pedagogical strategies. Children's voices, particularly conspicuous by their absence, might provide directions for improved pedagogical practice, furnishing much needed information for the formation of "child-centered" curricula. I hope, too, that this study will provide information about culturally indigenous purposes of the children of this community, who are viewed as cultural representatives, members of their community and as inhabiting a special sub-culture, i.e., child-culture. They are viewed as individual persons and also as cultural representatives.

This study aims at adding to the growing cross-cultural perspective on children's participation in literacy practice, and their literacy development, by providing information about children in another cultural context. The hope is that it will be a part of the growing body of research trying to understand and to describe child-culture and children's construction of literacy, both in its universality and particularity.

Further, this study hopes to contribute to the theoretical discussion featuring multicultural education, aimed at defining culturally-responsive education. The world

over, societies are struggling to reconcile the notions of difference and equality, trying to reach a justifiable equilibrium between diversity and integration. Scholars are engaged in finding answers to the complex educational problems this poses, particularly that of designing curricula that will respond to diverse cultures, maintain a rich diversity and at the same time empower minority groups to participate equally in the social and political process. This study hopes to participate in this endeavour. In the next chapter, I outline the theoretical and definitional constructs which frame the study as also the theoretical debates in which this study attempts to participate.

CHAPTER 2

THE THEORETICAL GROUND

In this chapter, I map out the theoretical and definitional ground on which this research stands. I take the view that definitions have prescriptive force, or pragmatic force, which determines practice. This makes it imperative to define terms carefully and to examine them along with their underpinnings and presuppositions. I discuss the definitions of literacy used by different scholars and describe the conception of “literacy,” along with the theoretical perspective on language, and its epistemological and ontological relationship to reality and self that guides and informs this research. This is followed by a discussion of the politics of “relevance,” with its implications for difference and equality, in both Indian and international contexts. I then define the concept of the “developing self” that undergirds the analysis presented in the chapters to come. Finally, I make explicit the ethical, normative framework of this research.

CONCEPTION OF LITERACY

The paradox of literacy is that, even though it has been seen as an important causal determinant of social, political, economic and personal development, its widespread diffusion a prized national achievement or aspiration (NPE, 1986), and its lack or decline a national embarrassment (*A Nation at Risk*, 1984) or developmental failure, a very simplistic, mechanistic view of it has been taken by educational planners the world over. Literacy has traditionally been defined by scholars, teachers and planners as a set of decontextualised, functional skills tied to immediate vocational and personal needs — the skills of reading (i.e., decoding and comprehension) and writing (i.e., encoding). It is viewed as a personal attribute, a technology that individuals and societies do or do not possess. Brian Street (1984) refers to this view of literacy as an

“autonomous model” of literacy — one that defines literacy in terms of “a neutral technology that can be detached from specific social contexts” and one in which literacy is viewed as independently and by itself having consequences for economic, political, and social development.

This view of literacy is often accompanied by a causal perspective, succinctly summarized by Gee (1988):

Literacy leads to logical and analytical modes of thought, general and abstract uses of language; critical and rational thought; skeptical and questioning attitude; a distinction between myth and history; the recognition of the importance of time and space; complex and modern governments; political democracy and greater social equity; economic development wealth and productivity; political stability; urbanization; lower birth rate. It leads to people who are innovative, achievement oriented, productive, cosmopolitan, politically aware, more globally and less locally oriented, who have more humane social attitudes, are less likely to commit a crime and more likely to take education and the rights and duties of citizenship seriously. (p. 146)

This is the view taken by scholars like Goody and Watt (1988), Raza and Agarwal (1986), Havelock (1988), Olson (1991), Ong (1988), and Anderson and Bowman (1965). These scholars make a clear distinction between written language and oral language, and the kinds of thinking associated with each, ascribing a different set of cognitive abilities to each. All these scholars identify literacy with the print on the page which is causally linked with internal cognitive processes. They believe that the mastery of the skills of reading and writing lead to “higher,” more logical and abstract modes of thinking, while oral language is concrete, context bound or situational (Ong, 1988; Olson, 1991). Ong (1988) states:

writing establishes a different kind of relationship between a word and its referent, a relationship that is more general and abstract and less connected with the particularities of person, place and time, than obtains in oral communication. (p. 13)

These scholars take the written product as the unit of analysis, while others like Clay (1975) and Ferreiro (1986), inspired by Piaget, study the individual as he/she reasons out the internal logic of language as a rule-bound, internally consistent, coherently structured, context-independent symbol system. This is a view of language taken by structural linguists like Saussure, Bloomfield, and Chomsky. Saussure (1959), the founder of structural linguistics, viewed language as a system of signs, which was to be studied synchronically, that is, as a complete system at any given point in time, rather than diachronically in its historical development. He distinguished between *langue* (the objective structure of signs) and *parole* (actual speech), maintaining that linguistics would fall into a hopeless mess if it concerned itself with actual speech, thus valuing structure over context.

Undergirding this view seems to be an objectivist-realist view of reality and the positivist-rationalist, scientific verificationist criterion of knowledge (Descartes, Russell, Strawson, Ayer). The expository essay is viewed as the highest paradigm of written language, in which language is used in a highly decontextualised, objective manner, encoding meaning more “explicitly and literally” (Olson, 1991), where meaning is understood as “reference” to objective fact. They view written language as having a referential and representative function alone — referring to objects out there in the world with symbols or signifiers that map directly onto the objects. Knowing involves true, justified belief of fact (Ayer, 1966), in which knower and known are ideally abstracted from cluttersome social and cultural contexts and from unreliable subjectivities. Ideal knowledge followed the scientific objectivist paradigm, the ideal knower the lone-scientist (Piaget) transacting with the physical environment alone and figuring out its logical structure, albeit with innate *a priori* categories of the mind (Kant), developing higher more logical and abstract modes of thinking. This is the view of literacy,

language, and knowledge that has guided the work of teachers and curriculum planners, which I consider to be a limited one, as do several scholars who have argued against it.

The “autonomous” view of literacy described above, has been challenged by scholars like Street (1984), Gee (1988), Graff (1988), Scribner and Cole (1988), Lankshear and Lawler (1987), Pattison (1982), Freire (1970), Dyson (1989), Heath (1983), and Hull and Salvatori (1991), who argue variously that the view described above takes a simplistic, mechanistic and reductive a view of literacy. Drawing upon the work of scholars from various fields, such as Sociolinguistics, Anthropology, Philosophy, Psychology, they present a more complex understanding of literacy. Redefining literacy in terms of a social practice, they move it from the page to the world, study it in the multiple overlapping contexts in which it is practised, thus revealing the social, cultural and political dimensions ignored by the autonomous model.

Scribner (1988) rightly calls attention to the *social* dimension of literacy, referring to it not as an individual attribute, but as a “social achievement.” Dyson (1989), Rogoff (1990) and Heath (1988) define literacy as it functions in the entire social situation, shifting attention from literacy as a technical skill to literacy as an “event,” occurring in the world, in time, in a specific interactional context of speakers, readers and writers, guided by historically and socially defined purposes and intentions. A literacy event is defined by Heath (1988) as “any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants interactions and their interpretive processes . . . an action sequence involving one or more persons, in which the production or comprehension of print plays a role” (p. 350) or, as Dyson (1993) defines it, “the use of graphic media (print, drawing) for some purpose and viewed by the child as a “reading” or “writing” activity” (p. 27). Bakhtin (1986), Stern (1985), Vygotsky (1978), and Dyson (1993) have described

literacy as an important mediational tool used to enact and transact relationships with others.

Ferdman (1991), Dyson (1992), Scribner and Cole (1988), Ochs (1988), Schiefflin (1990), and Heath (1983) call further attention to the *cultural* dimension of literacy, stating that literacy is an outcome of “cultural transmission” (Scribner, 1988). Dyson calls it a “cultural tool,” having a symbolic function, used for enacting social and cultural purposes (1992). Dyson (1993), Scribner (1988), Ferdman (1991), and Pattison (1982) rightly call attention to the fact that literacy functions in a context of culturally and historically defined values, definitions, world views, intentions and purposes, so that people inhabiting different socio-cultural worlds will assign different normative and social meanings to literacy.

Other scholars like Graff (1988), Freire (1970), Lankshear and Lawler (1987), Street (1984), Giroux (1989), and Gumperz (1986) emphasise the *political and ideological* dimensions of literacy, showing that literacy always has definite connections with existing power structures, and functions as a political tool used either to maintain existing social and power hierarchies or to question and transform them. They have provided evidence to refute the popular belief that increased literacy leads to social equality and democracy, supporting instead Gee’s observation that literacy is “a loaded weapon,” and like any other technology, it can be used for a variety of ends, to oppress or to emancipate. They make the further point that historically, literacy has been used in all societies by groups in power to maintain existing power structures, such that literacy serves the interests of dominant power groups while adding to the oppression of subordinate groups, thus increasing and perpetuating social inequality while claiming to mitigate it. With special reference to school literacy, Graff (1988) and Gumperz (1986) both make the significant point that the major goal of mass schooling, when it is

promoted by governments, should more appropriately be seen as a way of controlling populations, observing that school literacy normally reflects social relations of authority and control, its practice being structured around hierarchical social relations, it promotes these by teaching how life should be lived. It should be lived obediently, in harmony with established social goals and power hierarchies, and within the existing class, gender and race/caste relations of society. These scholars try to dispel the literacy myth as Graff refers to the naive, simplistic, “autonomous” view of literacy as a socially and politically neutral technology, necessarily and intrinsically leading to all varieties of social and personal goods.

These scholars thus redefine literacy in terms of a plurality of socio-cultural and political practices — defining it as a social activity, carried out with the use of cultural symbols (written language and oral language) used to conduct “social dialogues” (Dyson, 1993), to perform social actions or to enact personal and social purposes in society.

According to this socio-cultural and political conception of literacy, the contexts in which literacy emerges and is practiced, the variety of literacy practiced, the people participating in the practice, the ways in which they participate, the social relationships enacted, the power dynamics surrounding and undergirding the literacy practice; the social groups whose purposes it serves; the ideology shaping the literacy environment, content and practice, the cultural and social worlds in which it emerges, the ones it gives rise to - all these factors determine what literacy is and the consequences on all its participants. This is the conception of literacy that informs the research questions and provides the analytic frame for this study.

The Foundations of the Definition

The vision of literacy, defined above, rests on theoretical foundations provided by the work of scholars from various fields, which I outline briefly, in order to define the linguistic and philosophical underpinnings of the perspective adopted in this study.

There has been an anti-structuralist move across disciplines, shifting inquiry away from impersonal, abstract, universal structures towards peopled contexts, which has helped to move literacy from the page to the world.

The sociolinguists: Sociolinguists like Labov, Gumperz, and Hymes rejected the structural view of language and argued against structural linguists, making salient the contextual nature and the necessary sociality of language. Labov (1972), considered the father of sociolinguistics, finds the term “sociolinguistics” redundant because he views the social aspect of language as necessary and fundamental to it. Other scholars, like Firth (1964) and Halliday (1973), in linguistics, have supported this view, pointing out that language is a social phenomenon — it always functions in society. As such, its structure cannot be abstracted from the contexts in which it is used. All explanations of the structure of language must refer to the people who use it, the purposes for which they use it, the ways in which they use it and the contexts in which they use it. Language, as Hymes (1980) writes in a Wittgensteinian vein, is “in large part what users have made of it” (p. 20).

The discussion of language shifted from deep structure, or semantic and syntactic code, to the more messy, human realm of “discourse,” which according to Paul Ricoeur (1976) is language in action as it refers backwards and forwards to speakers and a world — who says what to whom, for what purpose, in what context and with what attitude. The structural linguists, and those who followed their lead, failed to consider the essential

feature of discourse which Plato saw centuries ago, and which the philosophers Ricoeur (1976) and Bakhtin (1986), and sociolinguist Hymes, emphasises — its *dialogic* nature. As Bakhtin (1986) says, “An essential marker of any utterance is the quality of being directed to someone, its addressivity” (p. 95). According to him, whenever we speak or write we address someone, either a real addressee or an imaginary one a “superaddressee.”

Labov (1972), along with others from the pluralist socio-linguistic tradition, counters the contention that rational, logical thinking and explicitness of meaning are outcomes of literacy or special features of written language. He argues that language use itself entails abstract thinking, given that it often involves reference to something not immediately present. From a linguistic point of view, speech and writing are merely different forms of language, writing superior only in the social prestige it enjoys. Further, they point towards a pluralistic view of writing, or as Bakhtin (1986) calls it, a “heterogeneity of genres” — that fiction, poetry, speculative philosophy, letters, personal diaries, autobiography are all respectable and valid forms of written language. Written language is as much an interpretation and open to further interpretations as oral language, as subjective as oral language, depending on the form and purpose of the writing in question.

The philosophers: The philosopher Wittgenstein (1958) was the forerunner of the view of language taken by sociolinguists in that he perceived language as a social construction, as several “language games” with sets of rules, constructed by people for various purposes, in varied contexts. Participation in these games requires a knowledge of the rules of the game. Children are brought up, for example,

to perform *these* actions, to use *these* words as they do so, and to react in *this* way to the words of others. . . . The whole process of using words is one of those games by means of which children learn their native language. I will call these

games “language games. . . .” I shall also call the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the “language-game.” (pp. 4e-5e)

These “language games” constituted “forms of life,” lived by the participants as they played varied roles in it. He was later joined by Sellars (1967), Kuhn (1961), and Feyerabend (1972) who envisioned language not as a “mirror” of an external, independently existing reality, as a mere naming of reality, but as a pragmatic tool, created by people for the execution of purposes they had. In the same vein, Austin (1962) presented a performative view of language, saying that we act in the world not only with things but with words.

These philosophers argued along with Dewey and Heidegger, that words derive their meanings from the “conceptual schemes” or language games in which people use them rather than from the their “transparency to the real”(Rorty, 1979, p. 368). They argued against the objectivist view of language and meaning held by the analytical philosophers who had dismissed as nonsensical all non-factual (i.e., non-verifiable) propositions, arguing that language has many functions not one, that there are no privileged propositions (not even scientific ones) that describe the “truth” about reality; rather there is only “reality-under-a-certain-description.” Existentialist philosophers like Sartre and hermeneutic philosophers like Gadamer move us away from essentialistic notions and argue for a plurality of descriptions, or as Rorty describes it, towards

a relativist sense that the latest vocabulary borrowed from the latest scientific achievement, may not express privileged representations of essences, but be just another of the potential infinity of vocabularies in which the world can be described. (p. 367)

and that

Newton was better than Aristotle not because his words better corresponded to reality but simply because Newton’s description made us better able to cope. (p. 269)

They give thus a view of language, truth and reality as intentional, contingent and multiple.

Rorty would argue, helped by pragmatic philosophers like Dewey, James and Wittgenstein, existential philosophers like Sartre, and hermeneutic philosophers like Gadamer, against the positivistic paradigm taken by Goody and Watt, Olson, and Ong, that writing has no privileged position over speaking, nor do objective, logical, abstract descriptions have any special claim to truth. People use language and other symbol systems to describe reality as they need to, in order to deal with it, cope with it, driven not by necessary essences but by existential urgencies. They don't, in fact, describe reality as much as they interpret it, reconstruct it in order to deal with it and they use whatever symbol system, or a combination of them, they find most useful to do the things they want to do.

Vico (1744), Sartre (1956), Gadamer (1975), Ricoeur (1982) counter the claims to superior knowledge made by an objectivist, a scientism which claims that "there will be objectively true or false answers to every question we ask, so that human worth will consist in knowing truths and human virtue will be merely justified true belief" (p. 362). Vico (1744) made the important point that history is the story of man's effort to understand himself and his world and realise his capacities in it. Gadamer (1975) makes the same point saying that describing ourselves and "redescribing ourselves" is the most important thing we can do. Ricoeur (1981) points out that all understanding is at bottom the effort to understand ourselves in our relationship with the world and with others in it. These philosophers remind us of the injunctions of the ancient Vedantic philosophers and of the Socrates dictum, "Know thyself," saying in various ways that all knowledge is effectively self-knowledge, thus placing human subjectivity and people at the centre of

the endeavour to know. All descriptions, whether they come from poets, anthropologists, psychologists, novelists, sculptors, scientists, or philosophers are on par one with the other; they are, as Rorty (1979) says, “simply among the repertoire of self-descriptions at our disposal” (p. 362) or, as Ricoeur (1982) calls them, hermeneutical tools we appropriate in order to make sense of ourselves as we act purposively in the multiple worlds we find ourselves in. Sartre (1956) offers a creative view of knowledge, saying that our freedom lies in that we are beings who generate new descriptions, alternative theories and vocabularies to understand ourselves and our worlds, echoing Vico’s view that to know is to create and to create is to know.

In this way, these philosophers offer a pluralist, constructivist, interpretivist view of knowledge and reality, reminding us that reality is an extremely complex, dynamic, continuously in-process; in large part, a *human* construction, calling forth multiple symbol systems and multiple descriptions, all of them valid. These philosophers do not deny the existence of a physical world, but they provide the important insight that the important thing about reality is not that it exists but what it means to us and what we can do with it. To know is to interpret this meaning, not alone, but in consort with other people similarly engaged, using the meanings they have created, the symbols they have generated. Together we proliferate symbols, meanings and worlds. As Nelson Goodman (1978) says, we make worlds “not only with hands but with minds, or rather with languages or other symbol systems” (p. 42), pointing out, as does Bruner (1986), the “constitutiveness” of language, “its capacities to create and stipulate realities of its own” (p. 64).

This view of language, knowledge and reality constitutes the interpretive frame, with which I observe and interpret the children’s use of language and literacy in the classroom.

THE POLITICS OF RELEVANCE

The Jain philosophers in India intuited, in the sixth-century BC, a perspectival view that our descriptions of reality are dependent on our positions relative to the world. This is a view taken also by present day scholars like Pattison (1982), Rosaldo (1989), Geertz (1973), and Ferdman (1991), who argue for multiple cultural perspectives, saying that people from different cultures define reality from their own cultural perspective. Taking a semiotic view of culture, Geertz (1973) defines culture as a symbolically encoded system of meanings saying that “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be these webs” (p. 5). Along with Ferdman (1991), Heath (1983), and Schiefflin (1990), he states that people codify and represent their values, beliefs and norms in the cultural symbols that they generate together, language being the primary one, reflecting the world view of a culture or its “consciousness” (Pattison, 1982), thus building a shared world of meanings. Agreeing with the scholars referred to above, I take the processual view of culture provided by Rosaldo (1989), viewing it as a multi-layered, multi-faceted, overlapping, dynamic, changing process, an intersubjective social construction.

Ferdman (1991) perceives close connections between literacy, culture and cultural identity. According to him,

the impact of literacy education as a socialization agent on individual's cultural identity can be either destructive or constructive. When the person loses the capability to derive and create meaning in a culturally significant way, he or she becomes less, not more literate. (p 364)

He defines cultural identity as

the individual's internalized view of the cultural features characterizing his or her group, together with the value and affect the person attaches to these features. (p. 358)

Scholars in the Western context have identified cultural mismatch between the home and school experience of children, referring mainly to non-congruent language use and communication styles as one important cause of the poor performance of kids in school. Their general argument, with some variations, is that since different cultures symbolize meanings in diverse ways, and since they use language for different things, they have different purposes for literacy. Children are also socialized into language in culturally varied ways. Since the norms, interactional styles and language used in school follows the mainstream cultural norms, studies have shown that minority groups fail at school literacy because the literacy practised in school seems to be culturally inappropriate for minority children. Researchers use varied terms to describe the same phenomenon — cultural congruence (Mohatt & Erickson, 1981), cultural appropriateness (Au & Jordan, 1981), cultural compatibility (Jordan, 1985), and cultural relevance (Ladson-Billings, 1992).

The argument of cultural appropriateness is relevant to the Indian context, in which this study is situated, since a mismatch is detected between the life-worlds, which by the definition of culture given above, are also different cultural worlds, of the urban middle class planners and the rural student population. In India, too, a culturally relevant education is proposed as a solution. In both contexts, the problem of relevance arises because of the unequal structure in which the decision making control rests with a dominant group, whose decisions usually reflect the interests of their own group, resulting in hegemonic, exclusionary practices. Interestingly, this fact is not problematised in either context, though it has significant bearings on the issue. The power differences between the different “cultural groups” are glossed over by studies like

Heath's (1983), a seminal work in the discussion of culturally appropriate education in the USA. Harris (1991), studying bilingual education for Aboriginal populations in Australia, makes the point that the question "Who decides what is culturally appropriate or relevant?" has critical bearings on the issue. He makes the significant point that what is culturally relevant is best decided by the cultural members themselves. He uses the term culturally "authentic," saying that

the way things are done, the social context, the reasons for doing them, who decides what is done, the discourse structure . . . are just as central to cultural authenticity as the content of what is done and the language in which it is done. (p. 136)

He brings to the fore the important dimension of "ownership" and intentionality, missed by the scholars referred to above. According to him a culturally authentic literacy is one which is defined by the cultural group themselves for culturally indigenous purposes.

In terms of the role of the dominant cultural outsider, he recommends as did Adams in the Indian context, that

efforts should be focused on finding out what the people want and then helping them to achieve it. In relation to how their own language is used let them set the agenda. (p. 146)

I agree with Harris that *who* decides what is culturally relevant is key. When outsiders, especially when they belong to a dominant group, decide what is culturally appropriate for subordinate group, they run the risk of essentialising and objectifying the culture along with the possibility of misrepresenting and minimising the hopes and aspirations that the cultural members might have for themselves. Cressy (1980) makes the significant point that different literacies are promoted in different classes. Making a distinction between "passive" and "active" literacy, Cressy points out that a passive form of literacy characterised by a strictly sequential skills-approach is often promoted

amongst working class children, conceived as being more appropriate to the realities of their life conditions and possibilities. In the Indian context, too, when locally relevant education is proposed by urban middle class planners, it is conceived minimally in terms of functional relevance to the opportunities and possibilities available to the children in the local environment. The Gokhale-Parulekar model, the Rajagopalachari model, the Acharya Vinobha model and the Naik Non-Formal Education model are models of education that purport to be more appropriate to the conditions of poor, rural children, designed specially to work around the work hours of the children, to provide them good craft skills and basic literacy.

Rightly, subordinate groups are suspicious of “culturally appropriate” programs designed by urban planners when they propose different curricula for their children. They view them as exclusionary practices, limiting access to power spaces occupied by the dominant groups (Gore, 1982; Delpit, 1988). Delpit points out, and I agree, that subordinate groups are sensitive to the issues of power glossed over by well-meaning members of dominant groups. Subordinate groups differentiate between the differences distinguishing their respective groups, and they see power differences as salient, unlike members of dominant groups, who have a more politically neutral perception of the same differences. Subordinate members are suspicious of the motive guiding the argument of cultural difference, asking the question whether the push towards culturally appropriate education is meant to address and eliminate power differences or whether it is one more hegemonic practice, a move towards strengthening existing power differences between groups?

Further, culturally appropriate education if it only mirrors the conditions of a culture might lead to a cultural “freeze” as noticed by Newman (1989) in his study of a rural school in India:

The village has absorbed the school. The school has not been able to change the village. The child who attended his or first day of school found nothing new. She or he did not enter a new world. . . . The school reflected the traditional discipline and authoritarian methods of village families. Children were seen but not heard. . . School was a part of the village socialization process reflecting the type of discipline and attitudes the villagers thought to be important. (p. 50)

The education in this school was “culturally appropriate” in the sense used by the researchers mentioned above, but it seemed to limit the life possibilities for the children rather than extending them, as such it was non-responsive to them. Significantly, it seemed to follow the norms and values of the *adults* in the culture, while ignoring those of the children.

In my view, the problem seems to be one of the location of culture. The scholars referred to above mistakenly assume a cultural homogeneity. They fail to take cognizance of the formation of “cultural borderlands” (Rosaldo, 1989), along social barriers and boundaries such as class, caste, gender and age. As Rosaldo comments, “such borderlands should be regarded not as analytically empty transitional zones but as sites of creative cultural production that require investigation” (p. 208).

When cultures and culturally indigenous purposes are referred to, a further question becomes salient — Whose purposes within the group are being referred to? As the Jain philosophers pointed out, since people occupy different social spaces, they define reality and their place in it, differently. Men’s purposes are different from women’s purposes and adult purposes are different from children’s. The world makes different sense to children than it does to adults. I adopt the stand that since children are the key social actors in schools, and since schools are purportedly for children, the literacy practised should be responsive to children’s purposes, which are embedded in the larger adult culture of the local village, in turn embedded in the macro-culture of the state and

country. It is necessary to look for distinctions and connections both, between the various levels or various cultural circles, in order to understand the cultural worlds inhabited by the children we seek to educate.

I problematize the use of the term culturally appropriate, making salient the issues of power involved and argue that only cultural insiders may most appropriately decide what is *culturally appropriate* or *culturally relevant* for them, with the qualification that this is not best decided by the dominant group within a cultural community, normally the upper class adult males. The only justified stand for a cultural outsider to take is one of *cultural responsiveness*, in the sense that it must respond to the needs and purposes of people as they define them. I define culturally responsive literacy as *one based on a respect for the culture of students and a concern to foster a positive identity. It must emerge from the real lived lives, needs, intentions and purposes of students. It must take into consideration and honour culturally indigenous ways of using language and most importantly, it must be one in the constructing of which the cultural members have a decisive role, so that they have ownership over it. I further add that a culturally responsive literacy practice must be one that is constructed mutually, emerging from a dialectic between the teacher and students.*

It is in the context of the above discussion and with the given definition of culture and culturally responsive literacy, that the main question of this study — “What is a child-responsive literacy for the child-members of this community from children’s perspective, and how is it enacted?” — is framed and investigated.

THE DEVELOPING SELF

The seventeenth-century Italian philosopher and historiographer, Vico Giambattista, provided the valuable insight that people “are born into traditions of speech and writing which form minds as much as minds form them” (Berlin, 1962, p. 42). Much later, Volosinov (1973) said much the same thing, defining language as “a continuous generative process implemented in the social-verbal interaction of speakers” (p. 98). According to him, language is a social construction, a symbol system representing and generating meanings which are inter-subjectively constructed in shared socio-cultural spaces. Language is constructed socially by minds as they interact and as minds are constituted by language, which is a socio-cultural and historical construct, the repository of and bearer of the social and cultural experience of historically situated beings. Language creates the shared reality in which we locate ourselves. As Bruner (1986) says, language “creates or transmits culture and locates our place in it” (p. 65).

This social constructivist view of mind and language is an important idea attributed largely to the Russian psychologist and philosopher of language, Vygotsky, according to whom language is the “social means of thought. . . . Thought development is determined by language, i.e., by the linguistic tool of thought” (1986, p. 94). The view of mind as socio-historically constituted with language playing an important role has been an influential one, adopted by psychologists like Bruner and contemporary educational theorists like Dyson, Britton, Genishi, Cazden, Rogoff, Paley, and others, as they study the development of children. They view development as a socio-cultural historical process, viewing children as social, cultural and historical beings, growing, learning and developing in a variety of social contexts, as part of a social and cultural process, using cultural tools, their competencies developing assisted by the competencies of others. The child developing not as a lone scientist, but as an intelligent social operator and

interpreter, using the cultural tool kit of metaphors, concepts, categories, and theories implicit in the language s/he inherits, which provide the cultural frames, with which s/he makes sense of reality, re-interprets and invents it along with his/her place in it.

This view counters the acontextual, Piagetian view of the lone individual interacting with the physical environment, figuring out its structure and developing higher, more abstract logical modes of thinking, thus moving to higher levels or stages of development. This view has predominantly guided teaching, learning and assessment in schools everywhere. According to this view of development, learning is an individual activity and the self an individual construction.

I take the socio-cultural view of the developing self, to frame my interpretation of the children as they develop. According to this view, the self is an inter-personal construction, constructed with language — both a verbal self, according to Stern, a “named” self, named by ourselves and others, and dialogic self or a relational self, constituted dialogically by our interactions with others, their perception and treatment of us, the roles that are assigned to us and those that we play in the many discourses in which we participate. According to Lankshear (1993), “discourses are norm-governed practices and involvements around and within which forms of human living are constructed and identities and subjectivities shaped” (p. 407). This view of the socially constituted self takes the Marxist stand that the socio-cultural and political world in which an individual lives defines the possibilities or limits of development. The self is also politically constituted, positioned in social structures, participating in institutions, constructed by the roles played within these.

Volosinov points out the ideological dimension of language saying that “language is essentially semiotic and ideological in nature.” According to him, not only is language

a social construction, it is an intersubjective construction by individual consciousnesses which, in turn, are socio-historical ideological constructions, so that the words they speak to each other and the meanings they construct together, are ideological phenomena. He views language and meaning as the site of ideological struggle, as does Freire. People are historically situated and constructed beings. Whenever they enter into a conversation or a dialogue, they speak with the force of their socio-cultural and political histories. They speak from different socio-cultural and political spaces, with their own special “accents” and as they converse they defend or protect these, so that their conversation is, in fact, “an arena of class struggle” (p. 21) — an idea developed also by Bakhtin, who maintained that whenever we speak or write we position ourselves in a network of social and political relations. According to him, an utterance is a link in the (historical) chain of communication, its chief feature being its “addressivity” — that we enter a conversation when we speak, in response to someone and in addressal to someone else. With language we transact our relationships, negotiate meanings and our own position within social and political structures.

Where once the linguists studied language in abstraction from society, later philosophers and socio-linguists (Labov, 1972, Brown & Gilman, 1960; West & Zimmerman, 1982; Lakoff, personal communication) perceived its deep roots in social structures and its relationship with social structures. They maintain that power places in the public sphere are played out in interpersonal conversational interactions. Foucault (1980) develops the notion of discourse describing it as a historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs. He includes in the domain of discourse not only the words spoken or written, but also social organizations and institutions to which the speakers belong. According to him, discourse not only reflects social and political structures it also constructs structures. For him, there

is no truth, only discourse which acquires the status of truth because of the power privileges of the people who define the conditions of the discourse.

The self is a socio-political construction, constructed by the discursive practices we engage in, the dialogues we enter into, are included in or are excluded from. Phillips (1972) originated the term “participant structure” to refer to “structural arrangements of interactions” which determine who has the right to say what to whom, who has the power to say what to whom. Who defines reality in this universe of discourse? Whose definitions determine truth? Whose are the voices that are heard and whose voices silenced? Who is being addressed and how? Whose purposes reign and whose purposes are ignored? Discourses thus constitute a grid of power, rights and duties, in which the participants construct identities, their own and that of others in relation to themselves. Socio-linguists have analysed discourse structures to understand the implicit power dynamics or the politics of a social situation. I use this analytical tool to explore the politics of the literacy practice in the classroom studied.

THE ETHICAL FRAME

This research is grounded ethically in the idea of Participatory Democracy. I use Dewey's (1985) conception of democracy, according to which

a democracy is more than a form of Government — it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his/her own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his/her own. (p. 93)

The key idea in Dewey's notion of democracy is “sharing” or participation, i.e., a good society is one in which maximum sharing is made possible among its members. Further, a society or a polity is truly democratic when all the institutions within it are organised

around giving all the participating persons a “voice” in setting and implementing their goals. It is in this sense that the term participatory democracy is used.

Key to the conception of democracy defined above is a concept of “person.” I use Kant’s notion of persons as autonomous, rational, free, equal, intrinsically worthy ends-in-themselves. Building on this notion, I use the term to mean one who is aware of his/her self as thinking, feeling, desiring, striving, evaluating, questioning, judging being. One further, as having interests, purposes and claims of one’s own and the right to pursue these (Reid, 1986; Lomasky, 1987; Peters, 1970).

Intrinsic to being a person is the awareness of one’s personhood as an autonomous, self-determining purposive agent, and as possessor of inviolable rights to pursue one’s purposes or ends. Further, I endorse the view held by Peters (1970) that people develop an awareness of themselves as persons as a result of being treated with respect. Based on the view of the self as a related being — a social construction, constructed in and by her/his relations to others — is the view that persons become aware of their personhood as it is reflected in and by these relations, so that it is in being treated with respect that persons learn to respect themselves. As Peters says,

People only begin to think of themselves as persons, as the fact of that consciousness is individuated into distinct centres, linked with distinct physical bodies and with distinctive points of view, is taken to be a matter of importance in society. And they will only really develop as persons in so far as they learn to think of themselves as such. (p. 211)

Respect for persons involves perceiving persons as ends-in-themselves, honouring their intrinsic worth and dignity and most importantly being prepared to see the world from their “point of view” (Williams, 1981). Intrinsic to the notion of respect is responsive addressal — a responding to another attentively, caringly and fully, as one equal person to another.

The contention of this paper is that children are persons in the sense described above, with a legitimate child-perspective of their own, and a right to have it respectfully considered. They stand in a different place from adults and so view the world differently and, as I suggest, they have the right to interpret it in their own terms. This counters the view of children as potential persons deriving from a comparative approach which holds the adult person as paradigmatic. I agree with Dewey (1985) that children's immaturity should be interpreted not as a lack or deficiency, but as a force, positively present, i.e., their ability to develop. He emphasises that the prefix, "im," of the word immaturity should be understood as something positive like "capacity" and "possibility" rather than as a mere void or lack and, further, that children have a right to their childhood, that their present is valuable in itself and not merely as the forerunner of their future as adults. As Dewey (1985) puts it, "Since life means growth, a living creature lives as truly and positively at one stage as at another, with the same intrinsic fullness and the same absolute claims" (p. 56).

Furthermore, I press the claim that, as members of a democracy, children have the right to have a decisive "voice" in the construction of institutions and practices that affect them, schools being one such institution. As such, these institutions should be organised in a way that gives children an important negotiatory role.

Finally, I construe the purpose of education to be one of empowering children. The concept of empowerment pedagogy has been contributed by Paulo Freire, who refers to literacy as "critical literacy." Critical literacy is aimed at making people critically aware of their social and political reality. The underlying belief is that being able to name their reality will enable people or empower them to transform it. According to Freire (1973), becoming literate is a necessary part of pursuing our common historical

and ontological vocation of becoming human, and to become human is to become more critically aware of our world and gain more control over it. To be dehumanized is to have no control over the form one's humanity takes, to live in a world named and made by others. This resonates with the Kantian idea that autonomy is intrinsic to personhood. Freire's ideas have inspired an impressive trend in favour of critical pedagogy, promoted vigorously by a breed of critical educators and Freire followers, like Giroux (1983), McLaren (1989), Apple (1982), and Lankshear and Lawler (1987). According to them, the goals of critical pedagogy are social justice, individual freedom and transformative social change. These educators view schools as potential sites of resistance and social transformation, the students engaging in critical dialogues unveiling the historical, socially, politically constructed identities and being empowered in this process to take transformative social action.

While I find the concept of critical pedagogy inspiring, I agree with Dyson (1994, personal communication) and Ellsworth (1992) that the theories provided by critical theorists function at a high level of abstraction offering very little direction in terms of classroom practice, especially proving inadequate with reference to young children. The critical educators take a predominantly and for the most part an exclusively adult sociological, macro-structural perspective. Educational theorists like Dyson (1993) have been engaged in exploring the meaning of "critical literacy," when applied to children, defining it in more personal and interpersonal terms. This study undertakes a similar exploration, seeking to understand the term "empowerment" when used for children in classrooms engaged in literacy. I hope to provide a better understanding of the following questions: "What does it mean, in concrete terms, to empower children with literacy or how do children practice critical literacy?" "What do grand terms and phrases like 'empowerment,' 'cultural politics,' 'critical dialogues,' 'cultural capital,' 'reading the

word and the world,' 'naming one's world,' and 'social action' mean when contextualised in the ground reality of children's classroom lives?"

Having prepared the ground in terms of the theoretical underpinnings, the definitional constructs and the normative frames that guide and inform this research, I turn now to the study itself. In the next chapter, I describe the site of the study, introduce the participants and describe the data collection and analysis procedures used.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

SETTING AND PARTICIPANTS

The study takes place in the second grade classroom of a government-run primary school in Jannakibagh, a small village in Lucknow district, Malihabad block (each state is divided into administrative units of districts, which are further subdivided into tehsils and blocks. The blocks are further divided into villages). Lucknow district has 3 tehsils and 8 blocks, Malihabad being one of the blocks. Jannakibagh is 25 kms from the city of Lucknow in the state of Uttar Pradesh, located in North India. Jannakibagh Primary School was established in 1956, it provides classes from 1 to 5 and currently has an enrollment of 236 boys and girls, 102 out of whom are girls and 134 are boys. The children come not only from Jannakibagh, but also from five neighbouring villages, all located within a radius of 5 kms. The population of the area served by the school is predominantly lower-caste, approximately 80% of the families living in that area belonging to the scheduled castes and other backward castes.¹ The caste distribution of the school population, as provided by the principal is as follows:

30% Scheduled Castes

65% Other Backward Castes

5% Upper Castes

The children all come from a very low socio-economic background, the average income of a family of 10 being approximately Rs.1500 per month (50 US \$). The majority of the population work as labourers (Mazdoor) on farm land, some of them renting land to

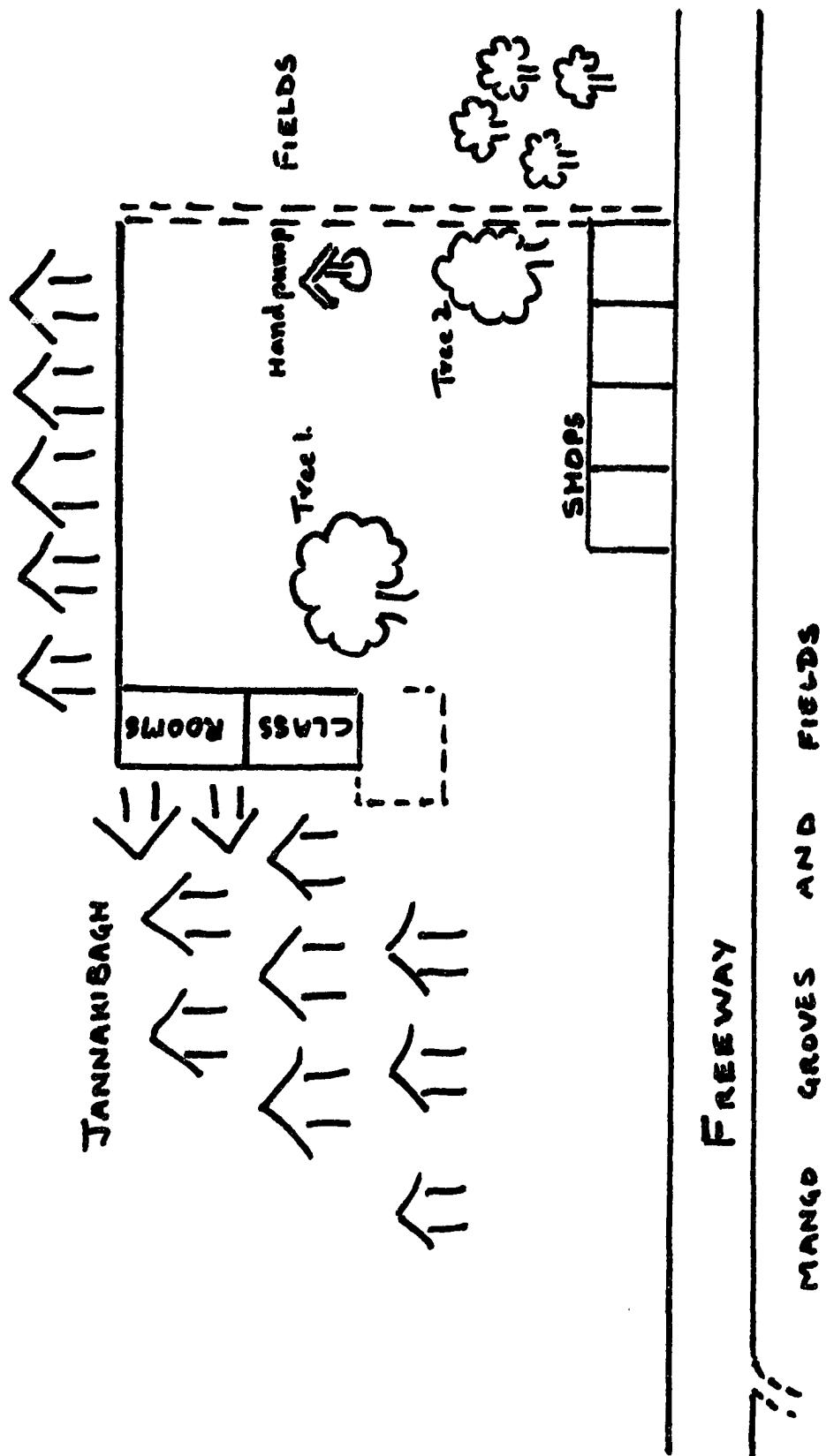
¹See Appendix A for explanation about caste in India.

and other varieties of crops. According to information provided by the village head-man and corroborated by the principal who is an old resident of the area, 80-85% of the population is below the poverty line. Literacy figures are low, only 22% of the entire population having had any education.

Jannakibagh Primary School is a typical government rural primary school, one of the better attended ones out of 74,705 in the state and 1,133 in the district (Basic Education Department, Lucknow — State and District Profiles, 1991). The school is situated on the road side, just off the highway. There are 2 rooms which were built in 1978, in which Classes 4 and 5 are housed, while the other 3 classes are conducted in the open unpaved ground in front of these rooms, under 2 large trees. The seating arrangement is flexible, depending on the season, the position of the sun and the shady spots available during the day. The classes which are conducted outdoors, simply shift to a more comfortable spot, when it gets either too hot or sunny. All the classes move into the 2 rooms or are dismissed when it rains heavily. Light drizzles are simply ignored if the trees fail to provide adequate shelter.

The school is bounded on two sides by the village homes and by a string of shops on the road side. It opens out to the fields on another side. A hand pump, (one of the 3 belonging to this village) forms the centre point of the school. It is a site of constant activity. Men, women and children from the village come there all the time to fetch water, to bathe and clean themselves (see Fig 3.1 and Photograph 1 in Appendix B).

Fig. 3.1 SCHOOL LAY OUT



The school has a total of 5 teachers, all female, middle-class, urban residents of Lucknow. Four of them belong to the upper-castes — 3 are Brahmins and 1 is a Kaisth while one of them is Muslim. The principal is male, also upper-caste Brahmin, an influential land-owner, upper-class resident of a neighbouring village. Literacy figures are not available for the parents of the children but from my interviews with the village residents, teachers and principal, I gathered that a majority of the students' parents were illiterate, particularly the mothers. As such, there was very little print in the homes of the children studied. The men often gathered at the local shops to discuss the news, while one of them read the newspaper. Older children who could read and write were used as scribes by illiterate adults for purposes of writing letters.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Table 3.1 provides a time schedule and an overview of the various inquiry procedures adopted during the course of this study.

Insert Table 3.1 here

I spent a total of 30 weeks with a group of 51 children who were in the 2nd grade for the first 20 weeks of the study and with whom I graduated to the 3rd grade for the latter 10 weeks of the study. The field work and data collection ranged over 3 academic semesters of the school. For the first 2 semesters, the children were in the 2nd grade, and for the last semester, they were in the 3rd grade. The study had two phases — an observation phase and a participation phase.

TABLE 3.1 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

| Academic Year | Month | Major Procedures |
|---------------|--|---|
| 1992-1993 | <u>Observation phase:</u> 26th June till 10th August | US familiarising self with school, teacher, students and school routines Observing/audiotaping in second grade two time weekly; focus on language arts teaching Interviewing 8 mothers, teachers and principal Home visit with class teacher |
| 1992-1993 | <u>Participation phase:</u> Begins 9th Jan 1993 | US Resumes visits in 2nd grade classroom 2 times weekly — 4 hours each visit Initiating literacy events, teaching and observing Taking field notes, audiotaping whole class |
| | February through 17th May 1993 | Selecting focal children Audiotaping small groups with focal children Collecting written samples Interviewing focal children |
| | May till July 1993 | Home visits to all focal children Literacy survey in three villages Second home visit to Mrs. S |
| 1993-1994 | Same class now in 3rd grade. July through August 1993 | Visits reduced to once a week Teaching, observing and audiotaping Collecting written samples |
| | September 1993 | US withdraws for a month for preliminary data analysis |
| | October through December 1993 | Visits once in 2 weeks Teaching, observing, audiotaping, Collecting written samples |

The observation phase. This phase began on 26th June 1992 and ended on 10th August 1992. During this phase, I assumed the primary role of observer, keeping participation to a minimum. I observed for 2-3 hour visits twice a week, for 12 weeks, staying for the whole day on some days. I made close observations and took detailed field notes of the classroom life and the teaching-learning processes in this classroom, focusing on the literacy events.

In my observations, I focused on

the teacher's

- verbal and non-verbal behaviour
- her use of the text and interaction with the children
- her stance towards the children

the children's

- participation in official, (i.e., assigned by the teacher) and unofficial (i.e., self-assigned by the children) literacy tasks
- their social behaviour as they engaged in these tasks
 - their verbal and non-verbal interaction with their peers
 - their verbal and non-verbal interaction with the teacher
- their use of the printed text and their own written texts

I had been associated with 12 women, from two of the five villages served by this school, for two years before I undertook this study. I had visited the school site briefly, a few months prior to the study, chatting informally with some of the teachers on this visit. I had no trouble gaining entry into the site and was fortunate to find quick acceptance from the teachers and the students, who seemed to find the attention welcome.

I began with a preliminary informal survey in Sannasibagh. I visited 11 homes, spending approximately 45 minutes at each house, chatting with the women mainly. My

purpose in undertaking the survey was to get a sense of the children's home worlds and to acquaint myself with the level and variety of literacy in their homes. Poonam, my key informant from the community, served as my guide and introduced me to the people whose homes I visited. Some members of each family accompanied me on my subsequent visits, so that there was a small crowd at each of these visits. Several people spoke at once, volunteering information for each other. It was a small community, (the village consisted of 36 families), where every one knew every one else intimately.

On 2nd July, I made my first visit to the school. I introduced myself to the principal and expressed an academic interest in rural schools. The principal and staff welcomed me in and were very co-operative throughout the study. I interviewed the teachers soon after, using this as an opportunity to form a relationship with them. I hoped, too, that this would help the children get accustomed to my presence a little. I interviewed the teachers singly, but soon all the teachers gathered and we ended up having a group discussion. The principal, whom I shall refer to as Mr. G, stayed away from our table, watching us from a distance, sitting at his table in class 1. I interviewed him informally on my third visit.

I began class observations on my fourth visit on (7th July), choosing class two as my observation site, because it seemed as though that was the earliest grade level where the children were writing more than the letters of the alphabet. I also made 2 visits to the class teacher's home. On my 7th visit, she invited me to have lunch, and I jumped at the opportunity, since I hoped it would help me get a sense of the personal world she brought with her to school, its restraints, oppressions, joys and relationships, much of which she shared with me in class as well. She often chatted with me as I observed, telling me about her life and her family and inquiring about mine. The chief participants during this phase were all the children in this class, the class teacher, the principal and some of the mothers

of the children. The other teachers and other members of the community were the peripheral participants.

The chief purpose of this phase of the study was to gain an understanding of the classroom life of the children in this community, a “situated” sense of the “ground reality” of this classroom, as it were. I attempted to examine literacy as it was practised in this classroom, with the intent of understanding the social, cultural and political dynamics of the practice, especially in terms of the distribution and use of power; the structure of the social life (i.e., the kinds of social relationships transacted and enacted), the cultural variations, their interpretations, and the bearing these had on the social and political relationships. I took an emic view, considering chiefly the perspective of the child participants, but including the adult participants (i.e., the parents and the school staff). The specific questions guiding this phase were:

-What is the nature and variety of literacy events in this classroom?

How is literacy practised?

What are the participant structures?

How do children and adults participate in the literacy events?

-What kind of social lives do the children experience in this classroom?

-What are the ideological, social and cultural factors shaping this literacy practise?

During this phase, I did not choose focal children for closer observations, observing instead, the entire class, which consisted of 51 children, 29 of whom are boys and 22 are girls. Twenty of these children belong to the scheduled caste, while 27 belong to the other backward castes, and 4 of them come from a higher caste. The age range is a wide one, ranging from 6-12 years. A more detailed description of the setting and participants is provided in a later chapter, where the findings of this phase are presented.

The participation phase. The second phase of the study began on 9th January 1993 and ended on 4th December 1993. During this phase, I participated more actively in the construction of the literacy events in the classroom, in terms of initiating literacy activities and engaging actively with the children. Some of these activities were based upon — and derived from — the observations of the first phase. The thesis guiding the methodology adopted in this phase is that observations and interviews are not sufficient to elicit the answers sought by this research. Given the constructivist view of knowledge, culture, and reality informing this study, it follows that the investigation must take a greater participatory mode, such that the answers are constructed collaboratively by the researcher and the informants both.

The major research questions guiding this phase were:

- What is a child responsive literacy for the child members of this classroom?
- How is a child responsive literacy constructed mutually by the students and teacher?
- How does children's literacy develop in a classroom when children are responded to and take a more active participatory role in the construction of the literacy events?
- What purposes for literacy do they reveal? What functions do they use it to perform?
- How do children develop as persons in such classrooms?

In this phase, I adopted the role of teacher/researcher, paid careful attention to the tacit and explicit cues given by the children, and attempted to negotiate the literacy curriculum with them by adopting an interactive and responsive stance towards them. This

seemed to be the best way to learn more about them. The thesis guiding me was the understanding that classrooms are social places and children's cultural and social worlds are embedded in their social interactions in the classroom. They enact and express their cultural selves, lives, purposes as they interact with each other, with print and the teacher. They give cues for and point directions towards their culturally indigenous purposes, needs and interests. As such, a child responsive curriculum must necessarily be constructed in collaboration with children, by watching them carefully, by listening to what they say and in a dialogic, responsive engagement with them. For example, I responded to their need as I perceived it, to engage with the pictures and stories in their text book — constructed a literacy activity based on this perception and taught a lesson. (A more detailed description of the kinds of activities collaboratively constructed by the children and myself is provided in a later chapter.)

While I was teaching, I observed and made mental notes of the children's ways of responding to the activity, their engagement with print and with each other, in order to confirm my own intuitions and in order to derive further directions. I would find time to scribble notes in between, during lunch recess and later when the class teacher took her lessons. The teacher was very co-operative and welcomed my participation. I audio-taped the entire lesson on some days and small group interaction of the focal children, on other days. At the end of the day, I engaged in a disciplined reflection of the day's events, developing field notes from my head notes and observation scratch notes, listened to the audio-taped conversations and interactions, along with a careful look at the written products of the children. This enabled me to make a comprehensive analysis of the literacy events, attending to the social process, the interactions, the reading and writing behaviours and the products produced.

For the first term from January through May, I visited the classroom twice a week and spent 4 to 5 hours in the class. I alternated between teaching and observing, engaging actively with the children for 2-3 hours and observing them for at least one hour on each visit. I made it a point to eat lunch with the teachers, in order to avail of the opportunity to engage in informal conversations with them. The lunch recess also provided me the opportunity to watch the children at play.

In February, I chose my focal children for more focused study, choosing 6 children initially and narrowing it down to 4 eventually. I focused on 2 boys, Rajesh and Ravi, and on 2 girls, Shakun and Sheela (see Table 3.2 for more details about the children). My choice was guided by considerations of gender and age and also by the fact that these children seemed to be relatively uninhibited in the presence of a strange adult. I chose them, too, because more than the other children in the class, they displayed an active tendency to engage interactively with their peers and with print.

Insert Table 3.2 here

TABLE 3.2: AGE, GENDER AND CASTE OF FOCAL CHILDREN

| Name | Age | Gender | Caste |
|-----------|-----|--------|----------------------------|
| 1. Shakun | 8 | Female | Kshatriya: Upper caste |
| 2. Ravi | 8 | Male | Pasi: Scheduled caste |
| 3. Sheela | 8 | Female | Raidas: Scheduled caste |
| 4. Rajesh | 10 | Male | Pasi: Scheduled caste |

The school closed for the summer vacation in May and convened once again in July. During the summer vacation, I visited and informally interviewed 22 families in Habirpur and 24 families in Dugauli. The “interview” took the same informal form used during the observation phase. The purpose of these interviews was to get a sense of the level of literacy in the community and, more importantly, to understand the attitudes of the community adults (particularly the women) towards literacy, its value and place in their lives. I also questioned them about the village school, asking them to evaluate it in terms of the teaching, the curricular content, the attitudes of the teachers, the value and place of the education provided in the school in the lives of their children and their perception of a “good” school.

I made 2 visits to each of the homes of my focal children, and chatted informally with their parents, in order to get their specific perspective in the terms described above and to get a sense of the children's home lives, the availability of print, use of it and literacy levels of parents. I asked them specific questions about what constituted a culturally appropriate curriculum from their perspective.

In July, I resumed my visits to the classroom, reducing the frequency to once a week, following the same pattern of active participation and observation described above. I withdrew from the setting in September for a month, in order to give myself the time and distance to analyse my data. In October, I returned to the setting and reduced the frequency still further, visiting once in 2 weeks and staying for only 2 hours per visit.

My data set consists of the following:

- Observation notes from 46 visits
- Formal and informal interviews of all teachers and the principal
- Home visits to all focal children
- Audio-tapes of 16 hours of classroom interactions
- Audio-tapes of interviews with parents during home visits
- Several conversations with the women of Sannasibagh
- Informal literacy survey of 57 families in 3 villages
- Written and drawn entries from all the children of the class and, more particularly, 278 entries from the 4 focal children.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data for both phases was analysed separately and then collated at the end of the study for a more comprehensive view. During both phases, I analysed the data simultaneously with data collection, conducting a rough running analysis as I observed. I wrote brief summaries and a reflective conceptual memo at the end of each observation note and interview. In this I articulated insights gained and emergent patterns. These reflective memos helped me discover further lines of inquiry. The conceptual memos grew into a cumulative conceptual analysis of the data, giving rise to tentative categories as they emerged. They served the purpose of a running journal. I filed my observation data according to the chronological sequence of visits, along with the conceptual memos. Interview data was filed according to the groups interviewed (i.e., teachers, principal, parents, children.)

After the field work of the first phase was over, I re-read my interview data and the conceptual memos, in order to thematize, categorize and code my data for each group of informants, according to categories implicit in my questions to the informants, which are as follows:

Parent's perspective:

- evaluation of school in terms of its efficacy in promoting literacy growth for their children; its relevance for the community and its growth
- evaluation of school staff
- participation in decision making and sense of ownership over the school
- their vision of a “good” school
- their vision of literacy and its purpose for their children

Teacher's perspective:

- perception and evaluation of school and its efficacy
- perception of their own work and worth in their present jobs
- perception of rural culture and the community of parents from their urban perspective
- perceived differences between rural and urban children
- sense of ownership and control over school program
- participation in decision making

I then analyzed my field notes to find supports or contradictions to the information gleaned from the interview data according to the above mentioned categories, highlighting these, and cross-referencing my notes in order to have easy access to relevant material when studying a particular category. I finally selected for more careful study, key events, which seemed to capture and exemplify the following:

- the political dynamic of the setting
- the social and cultural dynamic

as it emerged from an analysis of

- the official literacy events, their participant structures and children's and teacher's characteristic ways of participating in them.
- the unofficial literacy events, and children's ways of constructing them and participating in them
- the official definition of literacy guiding the literacy practise

I looked particularly for literacy events and episodes which revealed children's own needs and purposes for literacy, which I categorised thus:

engagement, defined as the need to *actively interact*

- with print (i.e., the printed text and their own written texts)

- with each other

- with the teacher

-performance, defined as informal artistic performance for an audience

- of language

- of text

- of self

-play, which included symbolic play, dramatic play, verbal play like chanting and interactive games

- with language

- with print

- with each other

-voice, addressal and response, which I interpret as the need *to be heard, to be addressed, attended to and responded to individually and collectively as persons or active subjects in contrast to being overlooked, grouped into invisibility and acted upon as objects.*

The final analysis emerged as I carefully examined the selected events, episodes and segments of classroom life captured in my field notes, using conceptual and theoretical tools from a variety of sources.

I followed a similar procedure in the 2nd phase of the study, focusing more now on the focal children, and their special ways of using literacy. I first grouped together all the

material from my fieldnotes, interviews and selectively transcribed audio-taped conversations, along with the written entries, that referred to each child, which I classified according to the kinds of literacy activities that each child had engaged in during the course of this phase and the kinds of topics that had been chosen by me and the children. I then developed a chronological developmental history — using as my guide the following questions:

- How are these children appropriating literacy as a social and personal tool?
- What are the different functions they are using literacy to perform?
- What purposes do they reveal for literacy?
- How do they participate in these literacy events?
- How do they collaborate with their peers?
- How do they collaborate with the teacher (in this case the teacher/researcher)
- How do they develop as writers?
- How do they develop as persons — i.e.,
 - as autonomous decision makers
 - as risk takers
 - as interpreters of their own reality
 - as imaginatively and creatively positioning the self in relation to others
 - as enactors and transactors of relationships
- How do they negotiate the curriculum?
 - what are the negotiation points?
- How do they co-create the curriculum?

I chose “key” events for each child which helped me answer these questions and scrutinised them closely, examining the literacy events as a whole, in terms of what the children did, what they said to whom and what they wrote, in order to understand what

they mean by all this, in terms of their purposes, their socio-cultural worlds and their self-identity. I examined the data once again and selected key events, for analysis of the restructured social and political dynamic at work in this differently constructed classroom life. After this close analysis, these key events were linked with other events, other data and theoretical constructs, the descriptions grounded in some theory of the event described. I analysed interview data to understand the adult perspective, particularly in its difference from the children's perspective and as it impacts the children's use and perception of literacy and their construction and perception of themselves.

Finally, I tried to develop a set of terms to categorize the social, verbal and literate behaviour of these children, their purposes, conceptions and needs for literacy as it emerged from my interpretations of their observed behaviour. I developed similar descriptive terms for the variety of negotiations and collaborations entered into by the children and myself while transacting the curriculum. My purpose is to provide a coherent picture of these as they are played out in the classroom lives of the four focal children. While this study takes a micro-view of children learning and living in a classroom setting, it is embedded in and reaches out for connections with the larger social and political context.

Having described *how* I constructed the process of inquiry, I turn now to *what* was learnt. In the next chapter is presented a descriptive analysis of the findings of the observation phase of the study.

CHAPTER 4

FAILING THE CHILDREN

In this chapter, I describe the classroom world as situated in the larger social and political world in which the children lived their lives. In the sections that follow, I first describe the setting in its physical details. I then use episodes from my observation notes, in order to situate the reader and to ground the descriptive analysis of the site. I attempt to contextualise the literacy practiced in this classroom in the social, cultural and political universe as structured by the discourse governing it. The descriptive analysis that follows reflects the organization structure of the school, revealing the implicit power dynamic; the participant structures of the classroom interaction; the official definition of literacy; the community adults', teachers' and principal's perspectives of literacy; their perception of the children and the social place assigned to them in and outside the classroom. I then describe and analyse the nature of the literacy environment, the official and unofficial literacy events in this classroom and in trying to understand the children's perspective of literacy. Having done this, I attempt to present a "polyphonic landscape of discourse" (Bakhtin, 1986), seeking to make audible the many voices I heard and to lend them a coherent interpretation, in the attempt to understand the complexities of this literacy context from the varying perspectives of all the participants.

THEIR PHYSICAL WORLD

The second grade had no room to be housed in. It was conducted outdoors, under a large Banyan tree. This was not their permanent place, however. For the first week after the term began, the class was arranged under tree 1 (see Fig. 3.1). After the first week the principal decided he needed the larger shaded area under tree 1 for class 1, which was a larger class with 71 children. As a result, class 2 was moved across the yard,

under a smaller Gulmohur tree in the school. Every morning, as the school day began, two children from the class swept the dirt floor with straw brooms, under the supervision of a teacher or the principal, if he was present at the time. They then brought out 6 jute mats, each about 8 feet in length and 2 feet in width. The mats were laid out in rows with 6 inches between each row under the shaded area covered by the tree. A portable wooden blackboard, about 3 feet by 4 feet in size was brought out next, carried by two boys, while another boy brought out the stand. The board was set up in front of the class. A large wooden chair was carried out and placed next to the blackboard. This was the sum total of the class equipment. The class with all its equipment had to be shifted frequently, depending on the position of the sun or contingencies of heavy rain.

The teacher seated the children in 6 single files with 9 children in each row, one behind the other. The girls and boys sat in different halves of the class. The other classes were arranged in much the same way. The principal had no office, so he sat in class 1, sharing the desk with the teacher.

Class 2, in its later more permanent position, was very close to the shops and to the highway, where buses, trucks, tractors, bullock carts, bicycles and all manner of vehicles plied all day, resulting in a continuous stream of noise. There was always a group of men hanging out at the shop, talking and laughing loudly, discussing work, sharing news and local gossip. There was a mud path bounding the class on one side, where it opened out to the fields and a mango grove. This path was used by the people of the community regularly, by pedestrians and motor cyclists both, as also by cows, buffaloes, dogs and goats. The hand pump, behind the class was also a site of constant activity. Men, women and children from the village came there all the time to fetch water, wash clothes and utensils and to bathe and clean themselves. This openness and un-private behaviour was a common characteristic of village life and did not seem to

disturb the children or the teacher very much, though the teachers did complain occasionally about the impropriety of men bathing at the hand pump. It took me some time to get used to it however and to the continuous stream of noise surrounding us. Owing to the close proximity of the classes, the sounds of teaching and learning, performing and punishing in all the classes mingled one into the other.

The children found the activities at the hand pump interesting. They often ran off to it themselves (always in pairs since it takes two to work the hand pump) to fill water in their chalk bottles, to drink water or to fetch a glass of water for one of the teacher. Members of the community, mostly women, often stopped by, sometimes squatting on the ground by the side, watching silently or chatting with the teacher. Often mothers came and took their daughters away, needing them to "watch the baby," while they went to work in the fields. They would simply stop by and call out to the teacher, "I'm taking Geeta home. I have to go to the fields and she has to watch the baby."

Parents (mostly these were fathers) came to enroll their children, pay their fees or give books to the teacher. The principal administered the entrance test, sitting at his desk, often asking the child to draw the letters in the dirt with a twig, or to orally solve a math problem. The children in all the classes held outdoors were witness to these activities which they watched with deep interest.

It was July, the beginning of the monsoon. The daily temperature fluctuated between 100 and 105 degrees Fahrenheit. It was humid and very hot. The tree did not succeed in keeping the sun out entirely and the children and teacher shifted places to find shady spots. The children moved with their slates and books to the rear wall of the shops, sitting, with their backs to the wall on the narrow concrete pavement bordering the walls of the shops. The jute mats remained in place till the end of the day, when the bell

signaled "hometime." The children then rolled up the mats, carried them along with the backboard and the teacher's chair to the two school rooms, which were locked by the principal or a teacher, to be opened the next day.

The children were a cheerful lot. They did not wear uniforms, the boys dressing in pyjamas and kurtas (loose knee-length shirts), or shorts and shirt. Almost all of them had very short cropped hair. The girls wore dresses or salwar-kameez (traditional North-Indian dress, now worn by women of all ages in cities and villages all over India). They carried their slates and text books in a cloth bag which they used also to serve as a small table. They often placed it across their knees and rested their slates on it as they wrote. They removed their shoes and slippers before seating themselves.

The Teacher:

The teacher who I shall henceforth refer to as Mrs. S, is a 38 year old woman, mother of three children. She has a gentle, careworn face that matched a quiet low-key manner. She lives with her husband, her mother-in-law and her 3 children in Lucknow. She has two daughters — a 12-year-old and a 9-month infant (Raakhee) that she often brought to school. Raakhee was a universal favourite in school, much petted and cared for by all the children and the teachers. The children in the 2nd grade looked after her while they performed their school tasks. Mrs. S' only son, Raju, suffers from Down's syndrome. On one of my visits to the classroom, Mrs. S expressed to me the difficulty of raising a child handicapped thus. She described, too, the social pressure applied by her family to produce another child after the birth of her son:

You know how it is. You, too, have two daughters. It's so important to have a son and mine was not normal, so no one would give me any peace, till I had

another child. That's how Raakhee was born. It's so hard, there's no one to take care of her at home, so I have to bring her here with me.¹

Mrs. S lives with her family in a very sparsely furnished, small one bedroom apartment. She told me that she and her husband struggle to raise their family and are barely able to scrape through with both their salaries. I met her 6 year old son on my lunch visit to their house. He is a sweet little boy, gentle mannered and very eager to please. He goes to a private primary school in the neighbourhood and studies in the kindergarten. Ekta, the 12-year-old helps Mrs. S cook and clean and often takes care of the younger children. She studies in the 6th grade in a local government school.

The School Day:

The school timings for summer stipulated by the state department were from 6.30 am to 11.30 am, Monday through Saturday. The sequence of events in a typical day followed this pattern:

7.15 -7.30 am: The teacher arrives. Children have already laid out mats and are seated in clusters, chatting or trying to read their text books. She goes across to the principal's desk to get her register. She returns after a 5-10 minute chat with the class 1 teacher and takes attendance. She calls out the names of the children, who respond with a "Jai Hind" or "Hail India" when present and "not here" for the ones who are absent.

7.45 am: The teacher begins "black board work" (her term). She writes numbers on the board and calls on individual children to either identify the whole number or the number in terms of tens and units.

8.00 am: Written work: the teacher asks the children to copy numbers or tables from their text or to write them out from memory on their wooden slates. She goes over frequently to other class teachers, while the children are at work.

¹All conversations reported in this dissertation were originally in Hindi. Reported here are the English translated versions.

9.30 -10.15 am: Teacher's snack recess: children remain in class. Teacher appoints a monitor to supervise the assigned instructional task, while she goes to class 3, where all teachers collect for a snack.

10.15 - 10.30 am: Blackboard work — Hindi: Teacher writes letters, words and short sentences asking children to identify them. Once a week there is reading instruction. The teacher reads the text and the children recite in repetition.

10.30 - 11.00/11.15 — Written work — Hindi: the teacher assigns copy writing. The children copy the first few lines of the current lesson from the text books, or she dictates from the text book.

11.15/11.30 — School day ends. The children pack away the class materials and leave in groups to walk home to their respective villages, some of them having to walk 2 miles and more.

This schedule remained fairly consistent throughout the summer months, though sometimes, the Math and Hindi lessons were interchanged. The teacher switched periods on her own initiative, there being no bells to signal period changes. In winter, about mid-October, the official school timings changed, the school day beginning at 10.00 am and ending at 4.00 pm. There was an official lunch recess of 1 hour at 12.30 pm, during which some of the children went home for lunch while some had packed lunches. The children played in the ground and in the mango grove. The girls and smaller children played ball, bounced it against the wall, taking turns or simply played "catch." Some of the girls played hop-scotch and hide-n-seek. The boys played cricket in the mango grove, using their wooden slates to serve as the bat. The principal went home for lunch, while the teachers brought packed lunches which four of them shared in class 1. Mrs. K from class 4 did not eat with them. I learnt from Mrs. Z who is Muslim, that this was because she had reservation about eating with a Muslim. The teachers lingered on at the table almost always returning 10-15 minutes after the bell rang. The children too came late from home and some did not return at all. The pace at the school was a leisurely one, well in tune with the general pace of life at the village.

SETTING THE STAGE

An episode is described in detail, in order to provide an example of the “discursive practices” that characterised the literacy in this classroom. Lankshear (1993) defines “discursive practices” as the “many discourses which in inscribing meaning are crucially involved in the formation of human subjects . . . unveiling the interplay between subjectivities, objects and social practices within specific relations of power” (p. 10). With the following episode I attempt to draw a pen-picture of the social and political context of the literacy practice.

It is 8.25 am. The day is a hot one, (about 105 F). A math lesson is in progress. Mrs. S is sitting on her chair near the blackboard. There are 4 sticks of assorted sizes at her feet. The children have been asked to write out the tables 2- 12 on their wooden slates. Mrs. S calls out to the children — “Call out the tables aloud as you write.”

She brings down her reed cane lightly on the shoulders of a boy sitting close to her feet — “Write the tables, not the numerals.” Raju rubs his shoulder and looks around on the floor for some leaves to rub his slate with.

Mrs. S turns to me:

Beating seems to have no effect on these village children. It has no effect on them. They’re not like urban children. I feel bad about hitting them, but it has no effect on them. Do you know, the Education officer has changed these days. He’s very strict. He wants us to reach here at 6.30 sharp, and sit here till 11.30.

She goes on to tell me that in order to reach the school at 6.30, she has to wake up at 4.00 am, cook for her family, pack lunch boxes for her husband and daughter and them leave at 5, so she can get the bus which is an hour’s commute to the school. I make sympathetic noises.

As the sun gets hotter, some of the children move to a shadier spot, with their slates and chalk bottles. Mrs. S moves her chair to a cooler spot, too. She goes on to complain that the state department doesn’t care about giving them any resources, “No buildings, no shade, no fan, no place to go when it rains. All they’re concerned about is attendance.”

The children have formed small clusters. Some of them are helping each other find places in the text from which they are copying the tables on to their slates. They are sharing their chalk and string, while some are simply chatting. A little girl, Salma, finishes the task and moves over to another girl to help her with her tables.

9.30 am: The children have finished writing and have formed clusters. Some of them are trying to read their basal readers together, some of them are chatting. Geeta goes up to the teacher, book in hand and say, "Now make us read the book."

Mrs. S does not look at her. She moves towards the board. She asks one of the children for a lump of chalk. Standing at the board, she calls out: "Now look at what I write and tell me what is written. Identify the vowel symbols."

She calls on individual children to identify the vowel symbols in the words of a sentence she puts on the board. The children stand in their places and answer. They get scolded and swiped for wrong answers. I saw many children in the class try to read the whole word and sentence for themselves.

One boy, Manu, is staring at the principal in class 1, who is seated in his chair, berating a parent loudly, because his child is failing. The parent stands looking at his son, who stands with his head hung low, by the teacher's side, who is also standing.

Mr. G: You should teach your child for one hour everyday.

Parent: Sir, I am illiterate, how can I do that? Perhaps you could teach him.

Mr. G: Oh! So you'll tell me what to do will you?

Mrs. S goes up to Manu and hits him on the back with her stick, "What are you staring at them for?"

She goes through the vowel drill for 15 minutes and then begins the reading lesson. It is 9.45 am. She takes a book from Geeta and sits in her chair, saying to the children:

Mrs. S: Now I will read, you listen. Then I'll explain. Then I will ask you questions. I will see which one of you has been listening to what I say.

She reads out, stopping to ask the children content questions, addressing the boys mainly. A child from class 3 comes with a message from the other teachers asking her to join them for their daily snack. She usually walks out of the class at this time, today she tells the child, "No, not now, tell them I'll be there in 10 minutes."

She goes back to reading the lesson. The children are listening attentively. Mr. G comes up to the class, standing at the back. Mrs. S rises as she sees him, continuing to read. Mr. G interrupts her — "Stop!"

He turns to one of the quietest girls in the class:
"Ruby, look up and tell me what is written on the board."

He is standing very close behind her. She stands and stares at the board silently. Mr. G slaps her head and shakes his own at Mrs. S:

Mr. G: This won't do you know. Most of the class knows nothing. They are unable to identify the vowels. so what's the point of your teaching?

Mrs. S tries to explain that she has just been through the vowel drill. Mr. G ignores her response and continues to pick on the quiet girls, sending them to the black board to identify the vowels. As they fail to answer, he says, "You should ask the one's who don't know."

Mrs. S: I keep hitting them, but they refuse to say anything. What am I to do?

Mr. G: What can I tell you? Break their bones.

Mrs. S: Just look at the number of sticks I've broken since morning. I call their guardians, but they don't come.

Mr. G walks off, shaking his head. Mrs. S turns to me, "Didn't you see me do the drill? Ruby, you come right here."

Ruby comes up quietly and stands in front of Mrs. S. Mrs. S smacks her across the face, saying, "Why didn't you answer? You know this one."

Mrs. S does not go back to reading the lesson. She calls Geeta and asks her to lead the class reading, telling her, "make sure each child reads, or I'll hit you."

She walks out of the class for her snack. Geeta stands in front of the class and reads the text one word at a time, the children repeat after each word. Mr. G comes up to the class, once again and stops her:

Mr. G: No not like this. You read and these boys will tell you when you go wrong. And don't lean against the board. Stand straight.

He shouts the last two commands and walks around the class cuffing two boys for not following in their readers as Geeta reads. Mr. G interrupts Geeta again, calling out to the class, "Which boy will tell me where 'gudahal' (name of a flower) is written, in this book?"

One boy answers after a few seconds. Sheela goes up and sits close to Mr. G's feet, book in hand. Mr. G ignores her. He asks a small boy (Gopal): "Where is 'vatavarana' (environment) written?"

Gopal is unable to answer. Mr. G slaps him so hard that he falls to the ground. Gopal picks himself up, rubbing his face, nearly in tears.

Mr. G: You, there, girl — where is 'darwaze' (door) written? Sit straight.

He yanks her pony tail and shakes her head. Sheela slinks back to her seat. Mr. G moves on, hits another girl on the head and then slaps her back hard.

Mr. G: You know nothing! nothing! Listen you - girl - tomorrow if you don't know the letters and the vowels, I'll beat you to pulp. Did you hear that?

Mr. G leaves the class. Sheela gets up and leads the class reading. Geeta and Salma stand by her side and help her read. After a couple of minutes, the class stops following. Sheela reads out loud to herself. Geeta helps and corrects her when she goes wrong. Four girls come up and stand around Sheela and they help her read, filling in with the right word when she falters. Pradeep (he is the youngest in the class) keeps asking Geeta if he may read. She refuses: "No it's not your turn. This has to be done turn by turn."

It is now 10.15 am, Mrs. S is still at her snack. Mr. G comes back to the class. All the children scatter to their seats. Sheela is left alone. She keeps reading, her voice softer now. Mr. G sends her to her place. He sends one of the children to fetch chalk and duster. He rubs the board clean, as the children watch. He writes the letter names p,m,r,l,k (in Hindi) on the board. He calls on Ruby once again:

Mr. G: You come here and read. No one will raise their hands. Who ever I ask will answer.

He picks only on the girls and the quietest ones, hitting them with his stick when they err.

Mr. G: I'll break your bones if you don't know all your letters and vowels by tomorrow. You, there, Sano or Rano, whatever your name is, you answer.

All the children who answer incorrectly remain standing.

Mr. G: From tomorrow — all these children will sit separately.

The teachers are watching from a distance. After he leaves, three of them come up to me:

Teacher: He does this everyday. Insults us in front of the children and the parents. Why doesn't he remain in his own orbit? He should do his job without trying to interfere with ours.

THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

Adult-constructed participant structures

An analysis of the discourse structure in the literacy context described above, reveal the power dynamic, played out by the various participants. Implicit in the participant structures inherent in this universe of discourse, is the politics of the practise. Lankshear and Lawler (1987), define politics as "the operation, exercise and distribution of power . . . which shapes an institution, having consequences for the interests and life

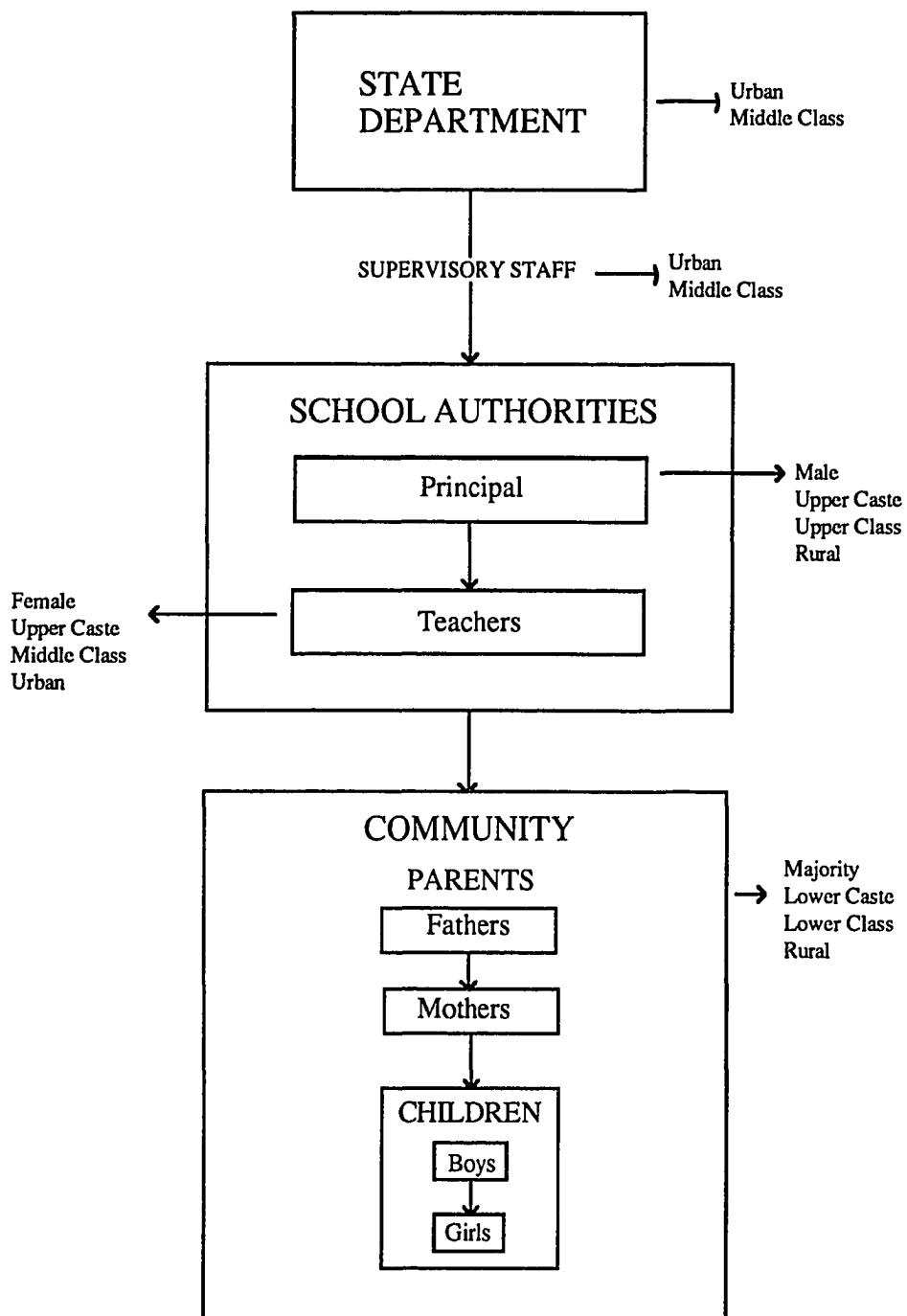
possibilities of its members" (p. 16). The social interaction described above reveals the politics of this literacy practise.

The official power structure is unidirectional and hierarchical as charted out in Fig. 4.1. The state department wields complete authority and supreme decision making and regulatory powers regarding curricular content, staff appointment, school timings. The principal comes next in the hierarchy, holding all the same powers relative to the context of the school, reigning supreme in his kingdom. The teachers come next, going down the hierarchical ladder, having "relative autonomy" (Bourdieu, 1977) in their classrooms, followed by the parents. The children are the bottom rung of the social ladder, the girls lower than the boys. The social setting and the social interaction described above, reveals several social power hierarchies at work. The official power hierarchy is patterned along the asymmetrical relations of power existing in the larger social and political world.

Insert Fig. 4.1 here

The principal who is male, rural, upper class, upper caste, exercises the power to override, negate, disrupt and interrupt the class room events structured by the teachers, who are female, urban, middle class and upper caste. He uses his official power as principal and his social power as male and interrupts Mrs. S' instruction with the direct command: "Stop." Sociolinguists maintain that power and directness of conversational style are positively co-related (Brown & Gilman, 1960). Interruptions, especially direct and intrusive ones like Mr. G's, are ways of exerting power — of asserting that "You are interruptible, you do not have the right to speak, your topics are less important, so they

**Figure 4.1 The Institutional Participant Structure:
Power Hierarchies**



deserve to be silenced" (West & Zimmerman, 1978). In the episode described above, Mr. G exerts and asserts his power over the teachers, the parents and the children. In challenging the parent: "So you'll tell me what to do will you?" he asserts his power place and establishes his right to it, which the parent accepts. The parent, the child and the teacher stand while the principal sits. This is also indicative of the relative social positions of each.

Apple and Weiss, cited in Lankshear (1993), claim that "dynamic relations of race (caste), class and gender interact with each other in complex ways, but that each is necessary for the mutual reproduction of the others" (p. 335). This is evident in this episode. The fact that Mr. G is male and upper caste and upper class helps him maintain the dominant institutional power position he occupies. Each power place supports the other and maintains the power structure in place.

Mr. G's is the power place in the social and political structure of the school, so his voice gives definitions and sets standards. He refers to all the children as "boys," denying girls official recognition — almost defining them out of existence. In the course of my interviews I saw the parents do the same — When asked how many children they had, they would reply — 4 children and one girl. On several occasions, I heard the principal ask the teacher, "How many boys present today?" The teacher responded with 45 or 46, which referred to the full strength of the class.

The principal defines literacy for the teacher and the class in terms of a technical skill, a personal attribute, reducing it to the bare elements of the alphabet. Interrupting the story reading, he relegates storying, wholeness of language, engaging dialogically with text, as extraneous to the literacy enterprise — "they are unable to identify the letters(of the alphabet), so they know nothing." According to him, being literate is a

linear process of mastery of discrete elements of language — first the letter, then the vowels and then words. He continues to reinforce this conception of literacy as is evident in the episode given above — interrupting Geeta's reading, pulling out isolated words from the text for recognition. He goes on to pare it down still further, to the letters of the alphabet, towards the end of the text.

The teacher takes much the same conception of literacy, as is evident from the episode described, concentrating on discrete language skills. On another occasion, she was dictating from a lesson in the text, in which the words — “undercaste” and “discrimination” appeared. She asked them to spell the word, pointing out the vowels in each and left it at that. The children too worked hard at spelling these words accurately without stopping to consider their meaning. The words represented simply that - a string of letters and sounds. She does not perceive the socio-cultural import of meanings, nor the power of language as a bearer of culture. Literacy for Mrs. S is a neutral, technical skill — writing as symbolically encoding not meanings but sounds and reading as decoding phonics. Words like “undercaste” and “discrimination” when used by children from the undercaste describe their reality and could end up defining it if they are not helped to de-essentialise or deconstruct them. She does not see that words or “signs” as Volosinov calls them are ideologically rooted — representative of ideologies, that sign systems or language is a social and historical “practice” in which we all engage in order to perpetuate an ideology or contest it. In this case she was perpetuating a certain ideology in ignoring the ideological meaning of the words the children were writing and the children were “learning” this ideology. As Gee (1993) says, “Education is always and everywhere the initiation of students as apprentices into various historically situated social practices” (p. 291).

On another occasion, I asked the teacher if the children were aware of their caste membership. She replied "Of course!" She then called out to several of them asking them "Who are you?" The children responded with the names of their caste: "Raidas" or "Pasi." What are the "social practices" into which the children are being apprenticed? The rules of this discourse are structuring the identity of the child, by providing a framework for the child to position herself - as the response shows: "I am Pasi," not "I am Sheela." The discourse defines the children in terms of caste and constructs their identities in terms of their caste, coming as it does from someone in a position of institutional and social power, it has more definitive power. There is no problematising of caste, in order to deconstruct it, but a reinforcing of it, by institutionalising it. When I asked Mrs. S, if she practiced caste rules of exclusion, she denied it — though accepting that she did practice them in the city, where she was better known: "There of course we have to, don't you?" She was in fact practicing it in the classroom too, with her language and with the way in which she structured her discourse. Differences and practices of inclusion and exclusion seemed taken for granted, essentialised and naturalised as it were, in her interactions within her world generally and in the practices of her classroom more specifically.

Within this larger participant structure, the teacher frames another one, equally authoritarian. Even though her control in the classroom is tenuous as evidenced in the example given above, subject to being overthrown by the principal at any time, she controls all the activity in the classroom and the children accept obediently. She determines the socio-spatial arrangements of all interactions, the structuring of classroom events, the sequence of instructional phases (Mehan, 1982), unilaterally, without participation of the children. Her interaction with the children takes the I-R-E (Initiation-Response-Evaluation) form described by Mehan (1982). As seen in the episode

presented above, both Mrs. S and Mr. G use violent physical and verbal forms of evaluation.

Child Constructed Participant Structures

Mrs. S often initiated peer-led instruction, as she did in the example given above. She did it to fill class time, while she was out of the class and sometimes while she was in class. In the peer-led structure, the teacher determined the nature of the activity, and the power positions of the peer-participants, but the control was vested in one of the children for the duration of that instructional phase. The structure was overtly as authoritarian as that of the teacher led event — with one child acting as leader and the others following in an imitative, recitation mode. To an extent the children emulated and reproduced the official adult designed interactional pattern, calling for a repetitive, word by word recitation of the text, in many cases they even wielded the stick playfully against their peers, reveling in the vicarious power given to them. They altered the nature of the participation however, bringing to it perhaps a child-ethic.

Whereas the teacher's leading has an authoritarian, judgmental intent and overtone, the students' leading has a performative character. In this episode, and in others observed, children vied with each other to play leader. Leading in front of the class gave children a chance to perform for their peers, thereby giving them a sense of prestige and control in the class (Bauman, 1977). The children also displayed a collaborative, mutually supportive stance towards their peers. Often as in this episode, the leader was joined by other children and they read together, helping each other rather than rebuking and judging each other. In this episode, Mr. G breaks the social cohesion built by the children, by putting them in an adversarial relation, telling Geeta, "No not like this. You read and the boys will tell you when you go wrong." He also takes away

from Geeta her joy, felicity, and control as performer putting her in the position of examinee, now accountable to her audience.

The children were careful to respect and uphold their peer's right to turns, as Geeta does in this episode, staving off Pradeep, eager to perform — "No it's not your turn." The adult model of intrusive interruptions was not emulated. In this structure no one held absolute power, the right to speak was adjudicated in terms of turns. They all had the right to speak, but in turn.

As evidenced in another peer-led instructional episode, the child-leader orchestrated whole class monitoring and individual child helping, in a way that allowed the whole class to use the lesson for their individual purposes.

Mrs. S has been calling out only to boys to lead the class reading, ignoring girl volunteers. She sits on her chair while children follow in the books. She does not check whether everyone is following accurately in their readers. She does not call upon girl volunteers for the role of peer-leader. She leaves the class for her snack, before all the children get a turn at leading. She appoints Rupa as class monitor. Rupa is a 9 year old child. She has failed in class 2, and is more advanced than the other children. She calls on Sushila (another class 2 repeater and competent reader), to lead. While Sushila leads, Rupa goes round the class tapping children on the head, making sure they have their finger in the proper place in the text and are matching sound and print. She calls on other girls refusing boys who volunteer to lead — "No, boys have had their turn, now the girls." She allows Pradeep a small boy, to lead though, standing behind him with her arms around him as he reads. At this point she does not monitor the class, she provides Pradeep support as he stutter through the reading, lending her voice to his.

She monitors the class and the leading reader both. As she sees the reader falter, she goes up and prompts her, returning after this to her rounds of the class. The class recites actively and concentration on the words in the reader. Several children help their neighbours with unfamiliar words.

Rupa then, yanks a shy girl from the class — "You are too silent, come on you're going to lead." She stands next to her and helps once again, neglecting to monitor the class. The children are reading now in smaller groups and pairs. Some of them are reciting after the leader. Mrs. S calls from her table outside the class - "write your tables." Rupa has not finished calling on all the children. She instructs the class to go ahead and start with the tables, while she continues to get girls out to the head of the class to read. She stands by their side and prompts as they perform.

It seemed to me that Rupa was a very responsive and responsible leader. She accorded her peers the respect of active and appropriate addressal, response, engagement and support, characteristics that were missing in the participant structures designed by the adults in this context.

Contrast this episode with episode 1 described on page 67. Episode 1 reveals a chain of violence, oppression, disrespect and non-responsiveness. Mrs. S hits Raju and complains to me about the unfair uncaring treatment meted out to her by a state department insensitive to her circumstances. Mr. G violates her social and personal space intrusively, and she retaliates by striking Ruby. Mrs. S articulates here and in several other episodes, that rural children are less sensitive to violence than urban children. Though corporal punishment in classrooms is illegal, both Mr. G and Mrs. S, as did many of the parents interviewed, consider physical and emotional violence against children perfectly justifiable, perhaps a necessary adjunct of teaching. One of the parents commented, "How will they learn if they're not hit?" Violent threats and blows accompany the literacy teaching, the children objectified, silenced by the violence against their persons and their minds, constantly subjected to blows and insults, deprived of all control, they were given no opportunities to exercise any choice. In this classroom as in many all over the world, children were not seen as persons having purposes of their own along with the right to pursue these.

The children sought the attention of the teacher often making verbal and non-verbal attempts for addressal. In episode 1, Sheela seeks addressal by Mr. G — going up to him, book in hand hoping to be asked. She soon slinks back to her seat, preferring the security of anonymity rather than the dubious felicity of a violent addressal. Geeta's

request to Mrs. S also goes unresponded to. Such incidents of non-response were observed frequently.

The social and political dimensions of the literacy context as embedded in the discourse structuring it, described above, reveal the “shared life” of the participants of this literacy setting. What does this place say to the children (and to the adult participants) — “who look for the answer in every intonation of the institution. In finding the answer they also discover what it is possible for *them* to say” (Rosen & Rosen, 1973, p. 2). Though the scenario described varies in its specifics, it is fairly common in its general structural features. Scholars studying public schools in several other contexts have revealed similar hierarchical, non-participatory, non-responsive, alienating structures, in which children are relegated to the very bottom, constrained to engage in activities unrelated to their purposes (Holt, 1964; Goodlad, 1984; Lindley, 1986). Teachers the world over can identify with Mrs. S as she complains about being disrespected, undervalued and depowered by a hierarchical, impersonal administrative structure. Having provided the social and political backdrop, I now turn to a detailed descriptions of the literacy environment and the literacy events in this classroom.

THE MATERIAL CONDITIONS OF LITERACY

The material conditions of literacy determine its possibilities and constraints affecting the qualitative nature and the quantity of writing produced, which is why I describe the literacy materials used in this context, in some detail below.

The literacy environment in this class is sparse. The school does not provide books or writing material. The children bring a wooden slate, a lump of chalk, a small glass bottle and a piece of string, rolled up into a tiny ball, a wooden reed pen and a blade

to sharpen it. These are the tools of literacy. Some of the older children — Rupa, Rajesh and Vijay, carry a notebook and a ball point pen in their bags. A basal reader produced by the state department of education, is the only reading material in the school (and for most of the children in the home, too). This reader is a hundred page anthology of poems and stories, divided into 25 lessons. The stories are a combination of fables, moral stories, tales about religious leaders, myths and information-stories about places. At the end of each lesson are grammar and comprehension exercises.

These materials are carried by the children to and from school. When a writing task is assigned the children begin an elaborate almost ritualistic preparation. They grind the chalk with the back of their bottles on the mat. Then they collect the ground powder with their fingers and stuff it into the mouth of the bottle. They either bring water in the bottles from home or they run to the hand pump to fill the bottle with water. The bottle is then capped and shaken hard to make a white fluid, called “ink” by them. The “ink” prepared, they unroll their string and lower the entire length of the string into the bottle. The string is then held with both hands and stretched taut across the slate in order to line it. The children rest the slate onto their laps as they line them, horizontally for Hindi and vertically for Math. This done, they tip some of the ink in to the bottle cap, or tip a blob on to their left palm, dip the sharpened reed pen in this “ink” and write on their slates. The pen requires dipping into the ink after every stroke. In order to erase their writing, some children use a wet rag, some use the bottom of their bottles to scrape the chalk off, others use Gulmohur leaves from the ground. Children spend anywhere from 5 to 15 minutes preparing to write. There is much talking sharing of all materials, from chalk to, string, pens and the text book.

LITERACY EVENTS

Official Literacy Events

Copying events. There were no composing events in this classroom. Once a day everyday, the children were assigned a writing task, which consisted of copying the first few lines, or as many as would fit on the slates from the lesson they were currently reading. She would leave the class after assigning the task, with instructions to the whole class to repeat loudly as they wrote “bol bol ke likho — say as you write.” The other instruction she always gave was to write beautifully — “sundar akshar likhna — write beautiful letters.” The underlying assumption seemed to be that speaking the words as they wrote would result in a stronger association between sound and print, thus integrating them better in their memory. She believed the copying assignments were helping children build up a stock of words along with helping them acquire orthographic control.

The children rarely called out the words as they wrote. They copied very carefully, indeed forming beautiful letters. Often two children shared a text book, such that one of them could only look at it the wrong side up. This did not seem to bother them. They wrote quickly and mechanically. They did not talk about their writing, nor did they read it to themselves or to their friends. They stopped while they were writing to chat with their friends about other things. Incidents about home, their siblings, festivals, each other. I never saw them discuss what they wrote, discuss the letters or try to figure out the size, shape or meaning of the letters and words. They wrote quickly and mechanically, keeping one finger on the words in the book and looking at each word in the text as they copied.

In this classroom, the official assigned writing had a purely imitative function, it was a means of representing the words from the text, not a means of conveying meaning or a message. Writing was a school task, sufficient in its own right. Children had not yet discovered that you can “draw not only things but also speech” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 115). The children were drawing the letters — (it was the only drawing they did) and the teacher’s constant reminders to write beautifully emphasised the “drawing” aspect of the writing. The emphasis was on the graphic and orthographic control of the language and none on the meaning.

The children did not discuss their own texts at all, putting them aside as soon as they’d finished filling up the available space on their slates. Several times I saw Salma, Ruby and Geeta end their writing with incomplete sentences, for example, “Madan and Sudha are brother and sister. They both go to school together. Their school is one kilo — Ruby, class 2” (metre away from their village).

In this context, given the kind of writing they did, the children were not reaching a second-order symbolism, which according to Vygotsky (1978) — “involves the creation of written signs for the spoken symbols of words” (p. 115). They never wrote down self initiated speech. Their drawing of the letters was still a direct representational use of the symbol system. They knew what the written words said, because they were in a language they understood, but since they had not learnt to use the written symbols to express any message of their own, they had not yet discovered the symbolic power of print (Dyson, 1993). They seemed to have the “sign concept” without having acquired the “message concept” (Clay, 1975). I asked Vijay, who I had observed copying very efficiently, to write the following 2 sentences on his own — “My name is Vijay. The name of my village is Kanar.” He went back to his place and opened his text to copy out sentences from it. I tried this with Rajesh too, who also displayed good orthographic control.

Rajesh brought his text to me and asked me where he should copy these sentences from. This reinforces my point that the children had not acquired the message concept. They had not yet learnt that “lines, dots and signs” could help them transmit “ideas and concepts” (Luria, 1976). They knew the orthographic signs represented words which meant something, and even though they had good control over orthography, they could not use this for their own purposes. They had not yet discovered the symbolic function of print.

The teacher did not write any messages, either. I did not see her put a whole piece of text on the board at any time. She wrote isolated words, short sentences like “Raju go home. Mira go fetch water.” These were always meant for spelling drill. The only other writing she did was in her attendance register.

The children’s participation in the official writing events seemed to be as passive copiers of written language produced by others. They did not actively participate in the construction of the language except to physically reproduce it on their slates. Given that the only written texts these children produce are ones written by others (bigger and better than them) and passively copied by them; that they never use written language to express themselves, their purposes or their worlds, and if participation is taken to mean taking an active part in the construction of an event, choosing its purpose and the activities initiated to achieve that purpose, in what way are they *“participating”* in the literacy events in this classroom? It seems more appropriate to describe them as being subjected to literacy.

Following Bakhtin, Dyson (1993) takes the view that our texts, spoken and written are our ways of presenting ourselves socially. Given the minimal, passive participation of these children, it seems to me that they are presenting themselves socially and forming a self-identity simultaneously, as docile subjects, passive imitators of reality,

not constructors or authors of reality. Further, they are not appropriating literacy as a tool with which they might *do* something — effect some purpose of their *own*.

Reading events. The official reading events take the form already described earlier in the paper. The teacher reads the text once or twice a week. She reads a word at a time, the children reciting after her, pointing out the words in their readers. Often I observed them simply reciting along, without even looking at the text. At times, they had their fingers on the wrong word and wrong page. The teacher conducts a brief spelling and word recognition drill everyday.

I never saw Mrs. S bring in any extra-textual reading material into the class, nor did she bring out the books from the school library. She said she was afraid the children would tear the books, since they were not used to handling them. The principal expressed similar reservations. The literacy curriculum consisted of reading the lessons from the basal reader and copying parts of them out. There was no official story-reading (other than that from the basal reader) or story-telling either by the teacher or by the children. There was no singing, craft work or drawing either. I saw very little variation on the official curricular stage. The children read and wrote the same opening 4-5 lines of one lesson for 2 weeks. They were taught the vowels everyday and wrote the tables and numerals everyday too. Mrs. S said to me in one of our interviews:

It's so boring — the numbers, the tables, the vowels and the text book! Day in and day out, all year long, year after year! I've become dull doing this for so many years now — as rustic as the people here. There's absolutely no growth teaching in rural schools. Nil!

I can understand why Mrs. S was bored. It surprised me that the children had not lost all interest.

Unofficial Literacy Events

Apart from the official literacy events that occurred during the school day, there were several unofficial events constructed by the children themselves. As Dyson drawing upon Corsaro (1985) and Goffman (1961) says, "Children like any people brought together under the authority of others react to the official classroom structure by forming their own social structure." This is precisely what the children in this classroom had done. I focused my attention on the unofficial events expecting to learn a great deal about the children's conception of literacy and their own purposes and uses for it.

I did not observe many unofficial *writing* events, which is not surprising considering the extremely constraining writing materials used by the children, the nature of the writing instruction and the fact that there is very little presence, consumption or production of written language at home. I saw a child write his name on a scrap of paper and give it to his friend once. On another occasion, Saroj experimented with a sentence I'd written for her, using a twig to write on the dirt floor. She wrote it from memory, writing it several times. After a while, I saw her sitting with a group of girls around her. They were all copying out the same sentence on the floor using twigs. Other than this I never saw the children write spontaneously for themselves or for each other, though twice I saw girls copying poems from scraps of newspapers.

Unofficial reading events. Even though the teacher only read from the first paragraph of each lesson with the children, some of the children worked together to decode the entire lesson. They read whenever they had the chance. As soon as they had finished their writing assignment, they pulled out their readers and started reading. They did this individually, but more often in pairs or threes, sometimes using the same text and sharing, sometimes using individual texts. My observations show that their concentration

centered strongly on the code. That seemed to be the challenge. They helped each other decode. One person would read while the other followed silently, forming the words without saying them aloud, pitching in to help the other when stuck. They did not discuss the text while they read, concentrating only on breaking the code. They sounded out letters in unfamiliar words, helping each other with letter identification — ‘No that’s /m/ not /bh/ and with word recognition.

The text book was a respected much used object. It was, I learnt, the only book many of the children handled in school or at home. The children exploited it more extensively than the teacher did. Even though the teacher never called attention to the pictures, the children spent much time looking at them, discussing them and making up stories about them. They used the pictures for dramatic play. On one occasion, Ruby and Salma were looking at picture depicting a cobra snake:

Ruby: Are you frightened of snakes?

Salma: Of course, aren’t you? And this one is a cobra. A big one, no? Here it comes to bite you, watch out!

Salma pushed the book into Ruby’s face, who shrank back in feigned fear. They repeated this several times, laughing a great deal. Geeta who was sitting close by came over and joined in the fun.

The text book provided a site for social interaction amongst the children. The pictures provided a context and spring board for talk that generated “imaginary worlds” (Dyson, 1989). Though the children did not draw any pictures themselves, they used the drawings in the text book, to symbolize their own imagined meanings. They touched the

objects in the pictures, making believe they were real. Manipulating the book physically in their make-believe play.

Pradeep and Rajesh were discussing pictures of money in the text, and Pradeep picked at the coins on the page, in a mock attempt to collect all that money. He asks Rajesh, "Do you have so much money?"

Rajesh: No but you have now. So what are you going to do with it?

Pradeep: mmm let's see — why should I tell you?

Rajesh: So then give it to me.

Pradeep keeps his hand behind him, his fist closed. He shakes his head, "Oh no! It's mine, I took it."

I saw the children use the pictures in this manner to *play* with each other and with the book on several occasions. Researchers have pointed out the importance of play in the development of children's written language (Daiute, 1990; Dyson, 1988; Gudlach, McLane, Stott, & McNamee, 1985), and in the development of oral language (Cazden, 1976; Heath, 1983). Others have written about the effect of play on problem-solving and learning (Bruner, 1976). They all point out that play is an important catalyst of development for children. Apart from being an important developmental tool for children, it reveals and releases what Bakhtin calls "the free laughing aspect of the world" and of the self. Though the official curriculum did not recognise the importance of play in its developmental for the children, making no curricular provision for it, the children found ways of including it in their school worlds using whatever means available to them to create contexts for play.

I saw children use the pictures as contexts for story telling. They made up stories from the picture and pretend-read to their friends, using a reader-like tone and stance. The pictures seemed to provide the jumping off point for the children's conversational meanderings and constructions.

Reading events provided a richer context for social interaction than writing. The print in the text book, had greater permanence and prestige than the texts they produced, which were impermanent replicas of the same text. Dyson's (1989, 1993) work with American children in classrooms ,where the curricular context provided many opportunities for writing and drawing, reveals that writing and drawing produced by children is the site of social dialogues and interaction and the creating of imaginary worlds.

There were other ways in which children enriched the official curriculum adding missing dimensions to their school lives. The curriculum gave the children no opportunities for *artistic performance* of any kind. On one occasion, one of the boys asked Mrs. S if he could sing a song he had learnt at a cousin's wedding¹ Mrs. S refused permission, saying — "This is not a wedding." I saw the children sing to each other in the unofficial worlds they constructed in this classroom. Often singing the poems in the book. They would open the book to the right page, but sing without reading the poem. When left to themselves with no official task to perform for Mrs. S (which happened quite frequently), they often recited the tables in small groups. The recitation was led by a peer, chosen by the group. The recitation had all the elements of a chant and the children performed the tables artistically, paying attention to the rhythm, intonation and tune. They enjoyed the recitation which extended over considerable lengths of time. On

¹Community singing and dancing at weddings and festivals forms an integral part of almost all Indian sub-cultures, rural and urban, across class and caste boundaries. I heard some of the mother's sing and they had a rich repertoire of folk songs

one of my visits the children in one group chanted their tables to each other for 30 minutes. The group grew in size beginning with four and ending with 7 children.

On another occasion I saw girls draw on each other's hands with pens they had brought from their homes. Drawing floral henna patterns on the palm is a cultural practise in many communities in India. This was another attempt to add an aesthetic dimension to the curriculum by the children *and* to express their own purposes and needs. I saw the children give many such cues and clues to the teacher which went unheeded.

Creating literate worlds for themselves

7th July — It is the 7th day of the term, the teacher is out of her class for 2 hours, sitting at the Principal's desk working at her registers with her back towards the class. The children have their readers which they are examining with great interest, turning the pages, matching pictures and talking about them. The children have formed small groups as they did several times a day even though the official seating arrangement was straight rows. The teacher has not yet assigned places, so the children have not been segregated according to gender as yet. I observed one group of two boys, Rajinder and Babulal and two girls — Salma and Ruby. They have just finished reciting the tables from 2 to 12 twice over in chorus. Babulal opens a page in the text and tries to decipher the letters. The rest of the group open their books to the same page, matching their pictures to make sure they have the same page. Salma and Ruby ask Rajinder who seems to be an — reader (I learnt later that he was repeating class 2) to read to them — “Padhao — make us read.” Rajinder recites a poem instead, turning the pages to the poetry lesson in the book. Salma and Ruby listen to him. After she finishes, Salma opens her book to another lesson again and asks Rajinder — “Come on teach us, please.” She shakes his arm as she tries to cajole him. Rajinder seems reluctant, he breaks out into a song instead. Salma and Ruby watch him perform, smiling. Finally Ruby collects all the books present and puts them together, all in one — “Look what a fat book that makes.” Salma takes her book back, opening it, turning the pages. She scratches her head, looking at the pages then around — “I wish someone would make me read it.” Turning to Rajinder again she says insistently “You. You make me read it. Come on, make me read, make me read.” Rajinder starts decoding for her. She recites after him word by word. Ruby moves closer and so does Jayadevi. Rajinder warms up to his task, reading louder. They read for 5 minutes, when Mrs. S calls out from the principal's desk — “Sit straight and don't make so much noise.” The children straighten up and stop for a while, but go back to their reading in a few minutes.

I saw learning events like these occur several times during my observations, where children tried to construct literate worlds for themselves. They felt they were in

school to “do school.” To be taught to read and write, to handle books and to acquire the dignity and prestige that literacy conferred. Ruby’s sense of pride as she looked at the “fat book” she made, seemed to say “I want to learn to read such a ‘fat book.’” “No one teaches me anything,” Salma said at one point, quite despairingly, before she turned to Rajinder. She seemed to know who she could address, who could be expected to respond. The teacher was not someone who heard her voice or responded to her. She addressed her peers and together they tried to create a learning environment for themselves. Mrs. S failed to recognise or appreciate their efforts in this direction, putting these down to so much “noise.”

Mrs. S’ regular and frequent absence from the class, her failure to treat the children with the respect due to students, sitting with her back towards them as she did, her failure or refusal to listen to them, were all signs of how minimally she conceived them and her own work. Her message to them seemed to be “You are not worth addressing or responding to.” Refusing to enter into a dialogic relationship with them, she missed all the cues they provided, the rich lessons they taught, the many learning/teaching opportunities they provided, the possibilities they held out. During the interviews, she and the other teachers explicitly “blamed” the children for their “low intelligence,” “lack of effort,” and “illiterate parents,” holding these up as reasons for their poor performance at the literacy tasks she assigned them.

Though the focus of this study is on children, it becomes important to consider the adult participants of this setting, in order to understand the “shared life” of this classroom. So it is to the adult voices in the setting — the teacher, the principal, the parents, that I now turn. What were they saying? What was their perspective on this practise?

VOICES — UNHEARD, UNRESPONDED TO

The Teacher

Mrs. S firmly believed in the cultural deficiency (Bereiter & Engelman, 1966) of rural children. She believed that rural children were cognitively deficient because of their social and economic disadvantage. She also believed as did the rest of the school staff that rural children were insensitive to beating. She said as much in the interview and her attitude was reflected in my observations of her verbal and non-verbal behaviour of the children in her classroom.

City children and rural children are very different. Rural children are unmoved by beating. They won't heed anything but beating. Even beating doesn't affect them. They get hit at home too. They're hardened. . . . There is a definite difference in the intelligence levels of urban and rural children. They are so poor, their parents illiterate, what can you expect out of them?

Further, she and the other teachers ascribed a very minimal function to literacy for these children. Stating her perception of the state's purpose, she said:

The only purpose of this curriculum is to make sure the kids can at least sign their names. That's all. They shouldn't remain "angutha-chaap".(An "angutha-chaap" is an illiterate person who uses his/her thumb-print as a signature).

From my formal and informal interviews with her it was evident that she valued her work in the rural school very little. Teaching in a rural school was not something she did out of choice, she said:

I've been appointed here and have now been teaching here for the last 7 years. There's absolutely no growth in a rural school.

Mrs. S had her own tale of woe and though her complaints were directed elsewhere. She used much the same language as did the parents in describing her own condition:

No one cares. We have no facilities, no resources. No one listens to our complaints, they put our petitions in their dust bins. . . . So we too don't care. We teach what we can, do our job and go back. Parents also don't care. They're illiterate and too poor to do much.

About the principal she said, he didn't understand their special problems because he was a man. She also thought that he had a very gendered perception of them, though she did not seem to resent it very much. She once said with good natured resignation:

Women are treated very poorly by the village folk and we're women too aren't we? The principal belongs here, so he has the same perception of women. He's a man, older than us and he's the principal, so he insults us in front of the children.

She made allowances for his age and for his institutional position as principal. Along with the other teachers, she was grateful for his male presence in the rural setting, despite his bullying ways, which they put down to his being a man, their principal and older than them. It was evident from my observed interactions of the teachers with the parents and the children and from their comments in the interviews that the teachers do not consider themselves as part of the community, seeing themselves distinctly as cultural outsiders, referring to the parents and children as "these village folk," saying of them that, "they're not like us in the city." They were glad that Mr. G was a cultural insider and more so because he was an influential powerful member of a dominant group within the culture. This helped them deal with the rural folk, especially the fathers, since he knew their ways better, "He keeps them in line." They valued too his protection from administrators, saying, "He takes care of us. It's really nice to have him there when any senior administrator comes. They respect him, because he's so influential here. So we have no trouble."

The Parents

The parents sensed and resented the culturally patronizing and disrespectful stance of the teacher. They told me that the teachers talked down at them, disrespected them because of their poverty and illiteracy, their lower caste rural status. As one mother said:

The teachers consider themselves above the villagers because they're city folk. . . They don't consider villagers worthy of anything at all. All they do is mark attendance and then they're off. . . They hit our children even more than we hit them. If they taught with love they would learn.

The parents complained that the school staff neither cared nor listened to them. One of them said:

She (teacher) calls us for a meeting. But she doesn't listen to us. Just has her say. If we dare to complain, she blames us instead. She doesn't listen to us at all . . . never listens to us. She speaks to us in such a haughty manner that we don't have the nerve to talk to them. . . We're illiterate, how can we question anything they say? No one cares. This is the failing, no one cares. When the teachers don't care about the school then how will it be good? If we ever have the nerve to talk to one of the infrequent inspectors, he says he'll look into it, but doesn't do anything at all.

Almost all the parents interviewed wanted an education for their sons, in the hope that literacy would open windows in to the larger social world for them and that entry into the literate world would enable them to have a better life than theirs. Some, though not many, were openly sceptical of the benefits of literacy, of the view that, "Literacy is good only for the rich. Only those who have money can afford literacy." One father expressed his lack of faith in the power of literacy to change anything in their lives, "Is literacy going to banish our poverty?" Most of them spoke about literacy only with reference to their sons. When asked specifically about its value for their daughters, they responded without much enthusiasm, "Yes we'll send them to school till the fifth grade. They should teach them how to sew and embroider . . . you know something useful for them." Some parents expressed their helplessness, "There are so many babies to take care of at home. I have to go to work, so how can I send my daughter to school?" There

were only four or five mothers who said very strongly that they would educate their daughters through high school. Some of the parents interviewed in a neighbouring village rated the Jannakibagh school as a good one. They sent their sons to Jannakibagh school who seemed to be doing well. They said:

At least the teachers come, they're from the city and there is some teaching. The one here is no good. There is one village teacher and she is more interested in working her fields than teaching.

The parents from Jannakibagh had a different view of the school. They sent their children to school at some cost to themselves and resented the neglectful, uncaring attitude of the teachers. They felt powerless and too intimidated to complain to them or to demand anything better for their children, even though they could envision an "ideal" school — "one like the schools in the city," "with English, chairs and tables, good teaching." Poonam who had two daughters in the school said:

The village has not gained anything from this school. . . . A school should be good. The children should study properly. They should read and write a lot, make a lot of progress. Get ahead in life with a good education - get better jobs and improve their lives. It should function according to the suggestions of the villagers. It should be like the schools in Kakori and Malihabad (two townships close to the village). It should be clean, have buildings, books and some games for the children. Here the teachers write on the board and the children copy. They don't understand anything. The teachers should love the children. If they cared for the children the children would definitely go to school and study well. They hit the children, scold them, insult them, then why will the children go to school?

When I remarked that she hit her children often herself, she laughed and said:

Yes, but I don't hit them that hard and they're my children. I'm not saying they shouldn't hit them at all, after all they are children, they'll have to hit them a little, to make them study, but there's some limit. Mrs. S doesn't hit them that hard, but Masterji (the principal) . . . gosh! You've seen him!

Interestingly, there were some parents, all fathers, who took a benign view of the Principal's violent treatment of the children. They perceived it as "caring," as one of them said:

Oh Masterji! He's a great guy! He really cares that the children should learn. I've been taught by him. He's always been like this. He used to hit me too. He has *really* heavy hands.

The Principal

Mr. G is a gruff man in his late fifties. He has been teaching for over 25 years. Interestingly, he is less qualified than any of the teachers, because he got his job at a time when the degree-requirements were lower. He owns land in a village near the school and is comfortably off. He has 3 children all of whom he sends to private schools in the city. He said to me:

They're failing. I can't believe that *my* children are failing. Here I am, a teacher and principal and I can't do anything for my own children's education. But that's the city — and going from a village — it's hard! Maybe you have some suggestions?

About the teachers, he said, "They don't understand me because they're women. They're city bred and don't really understand rural ways. But they're much better than some of the rural teachers I've seen." Mr. G blamed the parents for neglecting their children and the state authorities for neglecting the school:

Guardians don't care. They have no control over their kids and no interest. They don't care at all. The state authorities don't care, they don't listen to us. . . . We have no facilities. The officials should come and visit us more. Someone should come and help us, help our teachers.

He too was convinced that the children were deficient, saying, "The problem with these children is that they all have very dull minds." He said this in the presence of the teachers, the children and some of the parents, none of who objected. I disagreed, "I haven't found that to be true of the children in my class."

Mr. G: Yes, but even in your class I'll show you some who are absolute dullards.

US: Why did you promote Jayadevi, Pushpa and those other three girls. They shouldn't be in the second grade, you know.

Mr. G: I'll tell you why I promoted them. No one here is interested in pursuing education for their daughters. All they want is for them to scrape through class 5, cheating all the way through, then they want to get them married. And I think they're very right. The atmosphere in the village is very bad, all sorts of things happen. As soon as they reach puberty, they should be married off.

Mrs. M: (another teacher):

That's what I tell them. Don't think about education for your girls. About class 5 is good enough for them or at the most class 8. What they really need is good husbands. This is a village, nothing is going to change here. So what's the use?

This conversation occurred in the presence of several mothers, who nodded their heads in agreement, saying "Yeah! That's right!" Two of the girls from the second grade, Sheela and Geeta were also present. They listened without saying anything, drawing geometrical patterns in the dirt with a twig, throughout the conversation.

Interpreting Words and Worlds

Despite their harsh, often uncaring and seemingly callous behaviour with the children, I did not perceive Mrs. S or Mr. G as malevolent, harsh persons. In my view, they suffered from "cultural myopia." Mrs. S' vision of herself and the villagers grew out of her historical consciousness, that stipulated social and cultural boundaries and constructed impermeable barriers. She found herself situated in a social and political world in the making of which she did not feel a sense of participation. It was from this social place and its consequent conceptual bounds that she viewed herself in relation to the rural community. Erickson (1987) offers the concept of "hegemonic practices" that seems to fit in this case. According to him,

hegemonic practices are routine actions and unexamined beliefs that are consonant with the cultural system of meaning and ontology within which it makes sense to take certain actions, entirely *without malevolent intent*, that nonetheless systematically limit the life chances of members of stigmatized groups. (p. 352)

Mrs. S was not malevolently inclined, I thought. On one visit, she related to me a tale of a child who she found crying without any visible reason. It turned out that he was crying from hunger.

Mrs. S: I feel so sorry for these children, sometimes. They walk 2-3 miles from home, some of them and most often on an empty stomach. Poor things, no food. They get beaten at home and then we hit them here! But what else to do?

She shrugged her shoulders helplessly. She was a victim of the pervasive cultural hegemony as were the members of the rural community. The village folk did not perceive themselves as having the right to demand more than they were getting. They, too, felt excluded from the construction of a social and political world, which circumscribed their life circumstances, assigned a social space to them, which in turn gave them a socially situated, politically bounded, historically coloured conceptual framework through which they perceived themselves in relation to the rest of the world.

Williams (1977), elucidating Gramsci's notion of hegemony, defines it as a

whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world. It is a lived system of meanings and values - constitutive and constituting — which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. Thus constituting a sense of reality for most people in the society, a sense of absolute because experienced, reality beyond which it is very difficult for most members of the society to move, in most areas of their lives. (p. 110)

I saw all the participants of the setting studied caught in the web of a historically created political and social reality in the construction of which they felt no sense of agency,

struggling to cope with it and to fit into the structure as it existed and, as Williams points out, thus being constituted and further constituting reality. Literacy was just another fact of the power reality. None of my informants perceived literacy as having the power or potential to change their reality or to alter the power structure in more equitable ways, though some of them viewed it as a way of helping their sons move up the social and economic ladder.

They all complained of the oppression of dominant groups, without recognising their own oppressive practices towards people lower than them in the social hierarchy. The men in the community felt justified in their gendered perspective towards their wives and daughters. The women complained about the culturally patronising stance of the urban teachers but found nothing wrong with their own treatment of their daughters. Mr. G worried about his children's chances in the city aware of his rural disadvantage, despite his upper caste and class status in the village. *Most significantly, none of the adults, urban or rural, upper caste or lower caste, were aware of their oppressive treatment of the children.*

What about the children?

Radical educators like Giroux (1983), Apple (1979), and Lankshear and Lawler (1987) have stripped schools of their political innocence. Based on studies of schools in the USA, they argue that schools are complex political, cultural and ideological sites. They are concerned with the power schools have to influence the ideological personalities of students. Student subjectivities, which Giroux (1983) defines as "conscious and unconscious dimensions of experience that inform behavior," are constructed in schools as a result of the social and political structure and the ideology undergirding it, where ideology is defined as "those systems of meanings, representations and values embedded in concrete practices that structure the unconsciousness" (Althusser, 1969, p. 233).

My concern is for the children in this classroom. Given the social, cultural and ideological dimensions of the context described, it is not hard to see what kind of “student subjectivities” are being constructed, what kinds of social subjects the children are being constituted into or what sense they are making of themselves in relation to society. Bourdieu (1977) offers a theory of “cultural reproduction,” which is based on the assumption that class-divided societies, and the material and ideological conditions according to which they function, are mediated and reproduced through what he calls “symbolic violence.” Symbolic violence is the imposition of a picture of social reality constructed by the dominant classes and consistent with its interests. In the classroom described, where the inequities and injustices of a class and caste divided society are clearly reproduced, the social space assigned to the children at the very bottom, tells them where their place is in the world. It reconfirms what they already know — poor, lower caste, rural and children, they know they occupy a very insignificant space in the larger social world, in the school world too the social spaces are similarly structured. The social world they experience in this class room is one where they are most often unheard, uncared for and disrespected by those in power over them. The most frequent forms of address are violent ones. Their parents are equally victims of this “symbolic violence.” The children confront once again and are confirmed in a sense of their own powerlessness and that of their parents.

Even though the children seemed to offer a variety of unconscious “resistance” to the symbolic violence against them, the intrinsic powerlessness of childhood, when it is combined with their social powerlessness, is incapable of withstanding the cultural reproduction that is evident in school settings like the one described.

Voice and Addressivity

The recurrent and all-pervasive theme that characterised this setting was an uncaring non-responsiveness. Parents, teachers, principal, children — their voices resonated with it — “No one cares,” “No one listens” they all said.

Erickson (1987) offers a legitimacy and trust explanation for school failure, which seems to apply here. According to this view, the crucial factors for school success are legitimacy of the school’s authority and the trust generated by a perception that the teachers have a sincere commitment and faith in the worth of their work. If parents and children believe that the teachers care about their work and the children they teach, the children will succeed. This argument can be extended to include the school staff as well, they too must accept the legitimacy of the authority of those above them and repose faith and trust in them, in order to be able to generate a corresponding sense of trust in the children and their parents. As demonstrated by the interview and observational data, though the parents believe in the legitimacy of the schools authority, the trust factor is lacking. Similarly, though the principal and the teachers recognise the authority of the state department, they have no faith in its commitment to the school’s growth or their own in the context of the school.

Literacy was practised in a culturally non-responsive way in the context studied. The salient feature of a culturally responsive practise is respect for the culture. It should be founded on the fundamental premise of equality of all persons, based on a recognition of their intrinsic worth and dignity. I define a culturally responsive literacy as *one which is based on a respect for the culture of students, emerging from their real lived lives, their needs and purposes and their consciousness of these, (Harris, 1991); their ways of using language (Heath, 1983) and most importantly one in the constructing of which the cultural members have a decisive role, so that they feel a sense of ownership over it*

(Harris, 1991). Taking the view that culture is a dynamic process (Rosaldo, 1989; Schiefflin, 1990) and an intersubjectively constructed practice (Schiefflin, 1990) *a culturally responsive literacy practise must be one that is constructed mutually, emerging from a dialectic between the teacher and students.*

Ladson-Billings (1992) describes culturally relevant (or responsive) teachers as ones who see themselves as a part of the community, who believe that success is possible for each student and part of that success is helping students make connections between themselves and their community, national, ethnic and global identities, and I agree.

The literacy practise described seems to fail on all counts. No one expressed a sense of ownership over it or felt they were participating in its construction. The community felt disrespected and the teachers, cultural outsiders by their own self-definition and that of the villagers, did not identify themselves with the community and its culture at all. The literacy program was planned and constructed by urban planners without the participation of the community members, who did not find the literacy practise relevant to their lives in the sense in which Billings describes it. The purposes of all the participants in the setting were unaddressed. *Most importantly, the purposes of the child members, the key cultural members in this study, were ignored and left unaddressed.*

The adults, the teachers and the parents both seemed to have purposes for literacy that were not the same as the ones that children have for themselves. The teachers failed to attend to the many cues and clues children gave regarding their own purposes for literacy, for play, performance, engagement and addressal. This stems from the fact that children are not perceived as persons, as beings who have interests and purposes of their own, as "project-pursuers" (Lomasky, 1987). They are viewed as potential persons, still-

to-be-persons, their own interests, desires, motives and goals of no value. Whereas the lack of respect with which the teachers regarded the community is evident and a matter of concern, of special significance is the fact that the children were treated with disrespect by the teachers and the adults in the community both.

Rosaldo (1989) points out that “cultures” are not monolithic structures, rather there are several sub-cultures within cultures, overlapping in multiple circles. His term “cultural borderlands” is useful in making the claim that children inhabit these cultural borderlands, have a distinct sub-culture of their own within the larger culture of their community. A culturally-responsive pedagogy should therefore recognise this fact and honour it - so that the child-community of a culture is respected and responded to. Children’s identities are constructed by their cultural membership — whether it be defined in terms of race, caste or class and suffer the social cost of it or enjoy the benefits of it, depending on their place in the social hierarchy. But children’s worlds have a special place all its own which is not recognised by educators, when they talk of “child-centered” education and “locally relevant curriculum” as they do in India or “culturally-appropriate” literacy as they do internationally. Whose culture is being referred to? Does the community in question honour the culture of its children? Do the educators honour child-culture? Are they heeding its voice and allowing it to grow in power and strength? This setting is non-responsive especially in not responding respectfully to children.

In my view, the scholars postulating the cultural mismatch argument for school failure do not emphasize sufficiently a crucial point. The main failure of culturally non-responsive practises is its exclusion of certain cultures from the important socio-cultural conversations of their times. According to Bakhtin (1986), “An essential marker of any utterance is the quality of being directed to someone, its addressivity” (p. 95). For him, an utterance is a link in the chain of communication, made with the anticipation of a

response, having not simply an author but an addressee as well. It is constructed mutually by the author and the addressee. I suggest that it would seek an active response in the form a counter addressal. An active, attentive listening and respectful response conveys a respectful stance towards the author-addressor and provides the essential link in the chain of communication. I further suggest that an utterance takes on the character of “voice,” when it receives the response it anticipates. McLaren (1989) defines “voice” as “the means people have to define themselves as active participants in the world.” When voices fail in their addressal, fail in engaging an audience and receiving a response, as they do in the non-responsive context described, they are liable to falter and die, silenced by a sense of ineffectiveness and powerlessness in the social world.

A culturally non-responsive context fails in this crucial way by engendering “structured silences” (Giroux, 1983), thereby excluding subordinate cultures from the conversations that constitute the public spheres in which we all live our lives. Hannah Arendt (1963) talks about the power of these conversations when people combine to construct “a worldly structure to house, as it were their combined power of action” (pp. 174-175). A culturally non-responsive literacy is a means of depowering cultures by excluding them from this “combined power of action.” This seems to apply to all the participants of the study including the apparently dominant members in the institutional structure of the school, who occupied dominant and subordinate power spaces simultaneously. The principal, though he belongs to the dominant group in the village and is a man, feels excluded from the urban power context. The teachers, though urban middle class, are female and have no participatory role in the construction of the curriculum. The community and more specifically the children, cultural actors in their own right are most obviously excluded, denied any participatory action in the construction of the curriculum.

Villains and Heroes?

Non-responsiveness was an all pervasive characteristic of the literacy context studied. All the participants the teachers, parents and children, felt unheard. Their voices falling on deaf ears, lost their power of addressal and were excluded from participation in the meaningful self-transformatory and socially transforming social dialogues (Freire, 1982). Each one of them felt powerless even while they were oppressing those in the chain of oppression beneath them. Scholars studying school settings in other countries (Fine, Giroux, McLaren) have observed a similar phenomenon where schools are hierarchical power structures in which every one feels alienated and disempowered regardless of their place in the structure.

It was not a dynamic, active, harmonious polyphony. It was a cacophonic arena of competing and conflicting words, intentions and interests. There was no meaningful interplay of multiple social dialogues (Dyson, 1993), only a babble of unresponded to sounds, confined within social boundaries, bouncing off the rigid, impermeable walls constructed by political and social structures, thereby further solidifying the barriers.

The only heroes in my story are the children — the only responsive actors in this setting, they listened to each other, addressed each other and tried to construct a meaningful social and literate world for themselves despite the severe constraints of their universe. They were constructing a dialogic community of respect, response and mutual support.

As for the villains, the chief villain is a class-divided, non-egalitarian, non-participatory, hierarchically structured, social and political structure which necessitates and perpetuates the violent, non-responsive, disrespectful, depowering, chain of power and oppression, I saw at work in the context studied. Social and political inequities filter into schools and

play themselves out in classrooms and the problems of education are often an extension of and reflection of larger social and political problems. Far from being a panacea for all societies ills, literacy requires a hospitable social and political climate in which to live up to its social and political potential. When this is not forthcoming, it furthers instead social inequity and injustice. Schools are but one part of a social structure and cannot provide a solution for all social problems. However what schools can do is to provide the fertile nurturing ground for the growth of children, because they are *for* children and their failure lies in their inability to do so.

Donaldson (1978) bids us ask the question seriously — “whether the school experience (and literacy acquired in its course) really is good for our children — as good as we could make it?” (pp. 5-6). And I ask a similar question — “How shall we construct a literacy practise that is really good for our children?” I think the children show us the way. We should attend carefully to them. In this study they displayed the need for a *dialogic* practise of literacy, along with the willingness and ability to engage in it. A good school experience or a successful literacy curriculum will be one that is constructed by the active participation of *all* the participants adult and children, emerging in the course of a mutually respectful dialectic. It is with this belief and the hope generated by my observations of the children in this classroom that I was led to follow the them into their classroom, in order to understand them better, to engage with them responsively, and to help them construct a meaningful literacy for themselves. In the next chapter, I describe our mutual efforts in this direction.

CHAPTER 5

“TELL US A STORY”

One day five weeks into the observation phase, as I sat watching the children, trying to find a comfortable, non-intrusive, inoffensive space for myself, Rupa a 9 year old girl, came up to me, text book in hand and said: “Tell us a story,” inviting me to participate in their world. I entered very cautiously, thankful to have the safe context of story to pave my entry, feeling intimidated by a setting that was yet unfamiliar and of which I had still much to learn. I picked out a story of the five blind men and the elephant, thinking it would make the most “child sense” (Donaldson, 1979) to them. Some more children flocked around me and soon the story circle grew. Using the picture and referring back to them several times with questions I told them the story. They participated responsively and as we finished they seemed to look at me expectantly wanting more. I remembered a nursery rhyme about an elephant and having seen how they enjoyed chanting I recited it for them and they repeated after me. They enjoyed the punch line, in which the chair creaks and crashes under the elephant’s weight. By now the whole class was engaged in this activity. Their laughter and engagement reassured me that this was succeeding. They asked me then if we could write it and I wrote it out for some of them, tearing sheets from my notebook and giving out as many pencils as I had in my bag. The children ran off to their groups and copied it out on scraps of paper they could find. This became some what of a pattern. They would want a story, either from their text book or from my mind and then a poem. Rupa said to me as I was leaving:

Every time you come you should tell us one story and teach us one poem.

This is how we embarked upon what I was hoping was the beginning of a mutually responsive relationship, an authentic conversation between us. Conscious of the many barriers between us, I was wary of the effects these would have on our relationship. We inhabited different worlds and occupied different power spaces in the classroom as well as in the larger social world. I wondered how we would negotiate the cultural and power boundaries. I had seen how class, caste, rural and urban differences, because these are also differences of power, build walls between people, preventing the creation of mutuality.

Armed with Maxine Greene’s (1986) words, that though “we cannot negate the fact of power . . . we can undertake a resistance, a reaching out towards becoming ‘persons’ among other ‘persons’” (p. 247), understanding, too, that this entails a

recognition of the other as a “person,” and that power differences often preclude this¹, I entered their world, changing my role from researcher to teacher-researcher. I hoped to learn from the children how to teach them in ways that were culturally-responsive to them.

In this chapter, I describe the literacy events that were jointly constructed by the children and myself and show how we collaboratively constructed these, how we negotiated our differences while negotiating the literacy curriculum, the cross-cultural conversations that occurred, some successful and some not so successful, the interactional patterns and discourse structure of these conversations, the texts we used and created, the ideology we constructed and finally I sum up some of the curricular conclusions we arrived at, in trying to answer, “What is a culturally-responsive literacy for the children of this classroom?”

As my guiding principle, I used my own definition of culturally/child responsive literacy. It emphasises *respect* for the culture of the students and their indigenous ways of using language; it is embedded in and emerges from their real lived lives, needs, intentions and purposes. It requires further that the children have a sense of ownership over it and therefore a decisive role in its construction.

The weeks I had spent observing their classroom, and conversing with their parents and teacher, provided me with some important background information which guided my early initiatives. I was aware of the material constraints of their home and school environment in terms of availability of print and parental literate support. My observations had revealed to me the children’s own needs and purposes for literacy.

¹This has been the case with gender differences and differences between other dominant and subordinate groups. (e.g., slavery in the USA and the caste structure in India. Slaves were not accorded person hood by their white masters, nor were the shudras so recognised by the upper castes).

They seemed to have a need to *engage actively* with print, with each other and with their teacher, from whom they sought *addressal* and *response*. They also displayed a strong need to *perform* and *play* with language, oral and written and with each other.

I kept in mind the classroom culture in all its social and political complexities as described in preceding chapter; the definition and practise of literacy and the pedagogical stances and strategies, that I had observed. I knew, too, the low cultural value assigned to autonomy in the classroom and the community and the social place assigned to boys and girls respectively.

Though I tried to take a culturally neutral stance, trying to keep my urban, upper class experience at home as much as I could, I was aware that we are social and cultural constructions (Vygotsky, 1978) and our cultural inheritance has deep historical roots. I expected my own social and cultural position to intrude in several ways and I was counting on the children to show me when it did. As Rosaldo (1989) cautions us,

There is no Archimedean point from which to remove oneself from the mutual conditioning of social relations and human knowledge. Cultures and their “positioned subjects” are laced with power, and power in turn is shaped by cultural forms. Like form and feeling, culture and power are inextricably intertwined. In discussing forms of social knowledge, both of analysts and of human actors, one must consider their social positions. What are the complexities of the speaker’s social identity? What life experiences have shaped it? Does the person speak from a position of relative dominance or relative subordination? (p. 169)

I had seen the kind of classroom life experienced by the children and had gained a sense of the ideology practised by the teachers and students both by observing the ways in which the social relations were lived out in the classroom along with its effects on the children in terms of how it constituted their identities as social subjects.

Having been associated with the women of the community for 2-3 years, I had some insider information about the home lives of the children. I could understand the

dialect spoken by the children but could not speak it. The children were able to understand Mrs. S who used standard Hindi and could converse with her in a colloquial register.² My interviews had provided further information regarding the perspectives of the adults concerning the education of their children, what they expected and wanted. But most of all, I was concerned to find out what the children wanted, what their consideration of a culturally relevant literacy might be, and it was with this intention that I accepted Rupa's invitation and decided to adopt the role of teacher-researcher.

I had two purposes — a researcher purpose and a teacher purpose. As teacher, I saw my role as one of helping the children appropriate literacy as a social and personal tool with which they could realise their own culturally embedded purposes and needs. As a researcher, my role was to understand how the children did this. The two roles overlapped, because of my vision of literacy, culture and knowledge as a mutually constructed practise. I visualise the classroom as site of cultural and ideological production, an intersubjective space in which culture, literacy and ideology were created as they are practised. Understanding that definitions are prescriptive, guiding practice, I take a view of literacy as a complex, social, cultural and political practise (Scribner & Cole, 1988; Graff, 1988; Pattison, 1982; Freire, 1982; Lankshear & Lawler, 1987; Dyson, 1989; Szwed, 1989); a social activity, carried out with the use of cultural symbols, used to conduct "social dialogues" (Dyson, 1993), to perform social actions or to enact personal and social purposes.

² Hindi is spoken and written in a great variety of dialects. Avadhi is the dialect spoken in the rural community described. A dialect widely spoken in the rural areas in parts of Uttar Pradesh. Standard Hindi is the dialect in which all official work in the state is conducted. There is a large body of literature in standard Hindi. There are lexical and grammatical differences between standard Hindi and Avadhi. The grammatical differences pertain to pronunciation, to etymology and to syntax..

Further, I carried with me a developmental view of written language (held by scholars like Dyson, Britton, Moffitt and Wagner, Graves, Holdaway, to mention a few), believing that it develops when it is embedded in the lived experiences and worlds of the learners, when they find they can do something with it and when it is contextualised in their social lives, their intentions and experiences, as against a view of literacy as a set of discrete decontextualised skills — “an unimaginative copying of lifeless letter forms, connected to and signifying nothing” (Dyson, 1991, p. 112).

Though I interacted with all the children of the class in my role as teacher, I use data as provided by my close observations of the focal children. As I visited only for 2 days every week, and since I was not their official teacher, I was not impacted by the official institutional structure. Further, having no official authority, the staff and Principal accepted me in my role as a researcher - trying out “something” with the children. The teacher and I had formed a friendly relationship during the observation phase, and she welcomed my interested participation in her class, telling me that it made her life in school more interesting. She participated, too, working alongside with the children as she saw me do.

LITERACY IS A SOCIO-CULTURAL PROCESS: Negotiating the curriculum

In the sections that follow, I describe and analyze some literacy events constructed by the children and myself, in order to show the ways in which we participated in the construction of these events, the multiple interplay of purposes, needs and relationships, the kinds of collaborations and negotiations entered into in order to realize these purposes and the ways in which power was structured in the class room life. I attempt to understand and show the kinds of social places we assigned to each other as we interacted; the things we said to each other and how we said these, thereby learning who we were and how we were situated in this social setting; the roles we adopted in our

responses to each other, what we were for each other — our mutual expectations and requirements, rights and duties. In sum, what kind of social life was structured by us in the course of these events?

Becoming a Community of Learners

As I entered the class one day, the children greeted me by reciting the rhyme I had taught them on a previous visit. I perceived it as their way of requesting another one from me and initiated this activity in response:

I drew a picture on the board, talking to them as I drew:

US: (drawing vertical rows of dashes) : It was raining the other day wasn't it?

Several children in unison: Yes, yesterday.

US:(pointing to the drops) What is this?

Children: Rain

US: And where does rain come from?

Children: Up
: From clouds
: the sky

US: (Adding clouds to the drawing) So let's draw clouds, shall we?

No response from the children.

US: (Adding a stick figure) Here is a boy — let's call him. . . . 'Vijay' (This is one of the children in the class). He was walking in the rain with an umbrella and his foot slipped in the mud and down he fell. (I add an umbrella and then in another frame I draw the figure as it falls on to the umbrella). The children were tickled at the use of Vijay's name and Vijay didn't quite know how to respond.

I then recited the poem, using actions and referring to my drawing, varying my voice intonation, stressing rhyme and rhythm. The children repeated after me, trying to model my intonation, laughing at the point when Vijay slips and falls. They request that we recite it again and we do. I didn't write the poem on the board for them to read but kept referring to the drawing as if I was reading the poem off of it.

Building on my perception of their need for performance, I asked for volunteers to dramatise the poem in front of the class.

US: Shall we act this out?

Children (In loud chorus): Yes, yes.

Many hands shoot up, some children running to me unasked. Finally we choose 2 children — the children making suggestions and negotiating amongst themselves about who would be good. Of course Vijay has to play his own part and he has to have a friend with him, because it's no fun walking alone in the rain is it? So I added one more figure to the drawing. Vijay chose his own friend, Kamlesh. As a prop for the umbrella the children offered one of the sticks used normally for punishment.

We all recited the poem while the 2 boys acted it out, Vijay doing a good job of slipping and falling in the rain. This evoked much laughter from the audience and performers both. We performed it three times, choosing different children each time and changing the name in the rhyme accordingly. Rupa and Subhashini performed the second time and Ravi and Shivprasad the third time.

Geeta then asked me if they could write it out.

Subhashini: Put it on the board and we'll copy it.

US: This time I'll dictate it

Subhashini: No, on the board.

Ravi: Yes, yes dictate it

Geeta: Yes

US: (to Subhashini) You'll be able to write it. You know the letters. I'll show you.

On earlier visits I had written the poems on the board after we'd recited them and they had copied the poems on their slates. On this visit, I brought in sheets of paper and pencils, because I saw how restrictive the slate and wooden pen holder were — it was especially hard to draw with the pen holder. Some of the children who were used to writing on paper found it easy, while the others had to be helped, which I and the children did. I was hoping for a more active engagement with print, so instead of writing the poem on the board, I called out the lines of the poem very slowly, word by word, stressing the vowel sounds as we went along. The children wrote each word, holding out their sheets of paper to show me when they were done, so I could move on with the dictation. The dictation moved very slowly because the children wrote at different paces and keeping up with all of them took time. They sounded out the words orally as they wrote, consulting with and helping each other. I called attention to the spelling at times:

US: Which vowel in panee (water)? The long 'ee' or the short one?

Several of them responded with the correct answer in chorus. After each line, they read out their writing to me and when we were done with the whole poem, they read out the whole poem as a class. (It was a short verse having 4 lines with a total of 20 words.) Though several of them had memorised the poem and could recite it from memory, they all read it out, halting when they couldn't

figure out the words. I asked them to try their hands at the drawing if they wanted — which only some ventured to do, coming very close to the board to copy the drawing. They had greater difficulty drawing than they had copying the letters and words. Some of them came to me requesting that I draw for them, which I did.

The children, each brought their writing to me and read it out. I saw some of them read out their poems to their neighbours, performing them for each other. Some of the younger children had not succeeded in writing the poem, so the older girls helped on their own initiative. Rupa pointed out the letter /m/ as she wrote it 3 times in the first line, commenting to Amardeep: this is /m/ see — ChaM, ChaM, ChaM — stressing the letter each time she wrote it out for Amardeep.

Towards the end of the lesson:

US: Now Let's write the poem on the board for those who haven't written it?

I asked the children to volunteer to write at least one word from the poem on the board so that we all had a correct model. There were several volunteers, girls and boys both, and soon we had the entire poem on the board, the words and letters in an assorted display of sizes.

In this event there was an *interplay of our mutual purposes*. The children were writing for several purposes of their own:

- To encode and store a message for future retrieval
- To lend some permanence to it, so that they could own it
- As an act of play and performance
- As a way of displaying their knowledge over print
- To write for teacher and for themselves — “so we can learn it”

I initiated the activity following up on my perception of their need to perform language, their need for an active engagement with print and an interactive engagement with another. My purposes were

- to help them contextualise their writing in their affective responses
- to respond to their needs as I perceived them

- to help them use their accumulated repertoire of letters and words and their knowledge of the sound-symbol association to generate new words, hoping to help them acquire the generative concept (Clay, 1975)
- to introduce them to drawing as another symbolic medium and its relationship to meaning and writing — Standing Vygotsky (1978) on his head, as it were, “to show them that they could draw meanings and things, not just words”
- to begin with a culturally safe context for us to interact

I chose poetry guided by the belief that poetry satisfies children’s natural response to rhythm and rhyme, because of the musical qualities of verse, agreeing with Chukovsky (1963) that children are first of all “versifiers.” Further standard Hindi couched in poetic language would make it less culturally intrusive and more acceptable, since poetic language is meant to be different from ordinary language. It had an element of humour which I know children enjoy.

The interactional pattern that emerged revealed the distribution of the following roles, rights, duties and responsibilities. The children were asked to and had the right to

- make choices
- offer consent
- perform
- play with language
- make requests
- offer suggestions
- display their knowledge for their peers and me
- help their peers by sharing competencies.
- ask for help - “draw for me please”
- be helped by the teacher and their peers

- express their needs and wishes - “can we write it out”
- have these attended to
- respect the decisions of the teacher

As teacher I

- provided a model
- addressed questions
- solicited suggestions
- made suggestions
- provided the text
- performed for them
- played with them
- conducted the performance
- listened to them and responded to them
- was their addressee
- evaluator
- collaborator - shared my competencies
- expert, leading them on to higher competencies - in this case leading them towards the generative principle, giving them a more meaningful context to learn spelling in

The interactional pattern and the roles assigned, revealed a *mutually responsive stance* — rights and duties equally distributed. The children had the right to express their needs and purposes, make requests, suggestions, choices and be heard, and attended to. They had the duty to follow the instructional task, to participate in the activity and to help each other. As teacher, though I occupied the power space in the class room and

was in charge, had the duty to be attentive to the needs of the children, heed their requests, help them in the realisation of their purposes, provide models, texts, share competencies, address them and serve as their addressee.

While I was the chief initiator of the activity, the children initiated the latter half of it and were active participants. They collaborated with me and with each other - Rupa helping Amardeep, teaching spelling in context, which suggested to me that some of them need a model to copy, which is why I invited the children to collectively provide the model. The children were performing their knowledge for their peers and for me. They also felt it to be a privilege to use the teacher's literacy materials and write in the authoritative space, enjoying the felicity of performance and power.

The performance provided a non-threatening, non-evaluative context resulting in a social cohesion — the audience and performers both bound in an artistic ensemble, “an absorbed collaboration.” It was as Rosen (1980) comments, a “collaboration between performer and onlooker who may easily switch roles. However, they may also combine a sense that the onlooker takes on the game and the whole interchange is an enactment” (p. 163).

Performing texts, performing self. This kind of spontaneous drama became a part of our classroom activities thenceforth. We used it to demystify the textbook language, which was in a high Hindi register and too distant for the children who used a dialect of Hindi in their daily lives. I would read a story from their text book as expressively as I knew how and then we would enact it. The children chose the cast themselves, the girls volunteering much more readily than the boys. This might be a result of a cultural definition of song, drama and dance as forms of cultural expression more appropriately belonging to women’s universe. While choosing their cast, they paid attention to who was most suited for the role

- Changalal: Rammilan is big so he should play the King.
 Geeta: Amardeep is just right for the rabbit's part - he's little.
 Mira: Sheela can play the queen.

Sometimes a tongue-in-cheek, "Geeta can play the dacoit" (highway robber). This was received with howls of laughter from the class and comments of, "A girl as a dacoit!!"

At times, the chosen actors and actresses had to be persuaded to take the floor — which the children did, sometimes physically pulling them up and onto the floor. Geeta was very indignant at the suggestion that she play a dacoit and pouted for the rest of the lesson. It did not meet with her own image of what she was and could be. Ravi who had made the suggestion was perhaps "playing" with "gender identity" (Dunn & Kendrick, 1982, cited in Gumperz, 1991). The boy who was finally chosen came on willingly and performed with the appropriate degree of villainy required for the role. The children had social attitudes and conceptions of who could be what that they played out in these events and were "in the course of their own activities developing a growing sense of their own social self in relation to others" (Gumperz, 1991, p. 212).

They also urged their friends to "speak louder," and "with strength," as they performed, calling back children who did not talk loud enough. They seemed to perceive this as a way of performing the "self" and felt it had to be done with strength and power - whoever had the floor had to take it with confidence, take control of the event, become the role — become as Vygotsky (1966) says, "a head taller than himself" (p. 16).

Gavin Bolton (1986) describes dramatic activity as "a metaphor relating two contexts, the actual world of the child as controller of events and the fictitious world in which events have control. The relationship is a dialectical one of controlling and being controlled. The experience is the dialectic" (p. 24). Perhaps this is why the children

demanded drama as much as they did, it gave them an opportunity to exercise control over the classroom life. It also gave them the opportunity to engage in what Piaget calls “symbolic play” or pretend play, in which according to Vygotsky (1966) — “a child is always above his daily behaviour. . . . It is as though the child were trying to jump above the level of his normal behavior” (p. 16). It provided an opportunity to expand their world (Nicolopoulou, 1991).

Having got our characters together, we performed our “natak” (play) in the story theatre mode — I acted as the narrator and prompter for the kids. The children enjoyed the activity hugely. After the narration I paraphrased the story for them, constructing a smaller version in a more colloquial register of Hindi with their collaboration. I would ask questions and we co-composed the story as I wrote part of it on the board for them to copy. After they had copied some of it, I would encourage them to finish it by themselves, engaging in one-on one composing with several of them.

The purpose of the dramatising and then re-composing of the story was to demystify the text book and to make it more accessible to them, also to “deprivilege” and “dialogise” (Dyson, 1993) it, in turn privileging the children as they made the story and the language of the text book, which to them was a much prized object, their *own*. As Rosen (1980) describes it,

Dramatic activity thus becomes elevated by the creation of an intense focused moment of interpretation and understanding and presupposes an audience which has willingly, eagerly submitted itself to this experience. Perhaps the most significant shift is the creation of a text which is in our theatres the supreme form of control of the actor and the performance. (p. 162)

The activity was initiated by me for the first story after which the children demanded it of every kind of text we used. We dramatized songs, poems and stories, the children needing to re-create or re-interpret the texts in their own terms. Shakun suggested once after we had recited and written out a poem, “We can dramatise this too.”

During lunch I saw her organize her friends as she directed the performance as children from other classes grouped around to watch. Shakun recited the poem loudly as the actors acted. She was “not only playing out her ideas, but organizing them” (Heathcote, 1984). The children requested that we perform it in class after lunch, which we did. In this way the children negotiated the classroom events — making suggestions and picking up on their friends’ suggestions, as they met needs and purposes that they had in common. This spontaneous drama seemed to meet their need for play and for “living through” the texts (Heathcote, 1984).

We included a recitation hour during which the children recited poems and sang songs as a group, performing for themselves and, because of the open nature of the setting, for the other classes - as such binding the whole school into an “ensemble” of performance.

Collaborations

The children entered into various kinds of collaborations with their peers and with me as we negotiated the curriculum. The vignettes presented below illustrate these collaborations and reveal the underlying normative structure for the classroom that was being constructed in the process.

Sharing competencies.

The children were writing about their friends. Kamlesh is a determined copier with a “beautiful” (term used by the teacher often in reference to his writing) handwriting of which he is very proud. He is finding it difficult to generate any sentences on his own and seems to need help. He approaches Ravi who responds to his request for help by dictating the letters of the words Kamlesh wants to write. He gets bored after dictating 2-3 words and begins to move away. Kamlesh stops him, “No, no don’t go. Help me finish writing this.”

Ravi responds, “Oh OK! Hey come on here let’s do this.” He calls out to Changalal and Rajesh who move over and now there is a group around Kamlesh - Ravi dictates spelling, Rajesh brings his book to provide a model. Changalal

brings the ink, holding the bottle for Kamlesh (Kamlesh is using the pen holder and chalk). They all help with the spelling -

Changalal: Write a 'g'

Ravi: Write a 'ch'

They consult Rajesh's book in which Rajesh has a model of his own sentences. After they have finished the sentence — "My friend is Changalal — Kamlesh Kumar" — Kamlesh and Ravi both bring the book to me. I ask Kamlesh to read it out and they both read it out. They seem to feel a joint ownership over the text. I ask Kamlesh to extend it, asking him, "And don't you chat with your friends?"

Kamlesh: Yes — but I can't write that.

I ask Ravi to help and Ravi agrees. He writes, "I chat with Changalal" in his book and tells Kamlesh to copy. Another child comes to Kamlesh and Ravi and starts copying off their book. Kamlesh wants to write more. They come to me for help and I suggest some more sentences - "So you have fun with your friends, right? So write — "We have fun". He asks Ravi and Rajesh for help. Both start spelling out the words for him — "make a 'm'." Kamlesh tries to sound the whole word out asking for corroboration: is this right? Kamlesh likes this way of writing. He comes to me for another sentence and I suggest "I go to Changalal's house." Kamlesh goes back to Ravi and asks for help. Once again Ravi dictates. Kamlesh makes a mistake and Ravi scolds him: "Not /bh/ write /j/." Kamlesh writes /bh/, cancels it, then writes /j/ himself. Seeks help with another word 'te' and writes the last one himself.

After helping Kamlesh, Ravi comes to me and says he wants to write about another friend. I ask him who he will write about.

Ravi: Rajesh

US: OK, so write "my friend is Rajesh."

I help him with composing, asking questions and composing his answers in sentences which he writes. Once the sentence is composed Ravi is able to write out the sentence on his own.

In this episode, we all participated in constructing Kamlesh's text. I initiated the occasion for writing and the topic and I did the composing. Ravi provided the spelling and Kamlesh wrote with his beautiful handwriting. Kamlesh is only the scribe and that too in a limited manner - like a typewriter he provides the ink and the typeset. Ravi and I do the composing. Kamlesh's purpose is to gain a sense of accomplishment - that he can write. In a sense he feels a sense of ownership over this piece of text. He wrote it and it

wasn't a copy of another text. he wrote with help, but it was about him and his friend so it is his.

We shared competencies — I can compose, Ravi can spell and Kamlesh has the beautiful handwriting. We all collaborated to help Kamlesh effect his purposes and Kamlesh seemed to know from whom he could find which kind if help. The collaborative principle that emerged was that it was everyone's responsibility to help him learn, not just the teacher's. Kamlesh seemed to understand the principle well, as he came repeatedly for help and managed towards the end of this episode to self-correct and write one word independently. Ravi played the role of tutor and helper to Kamlesh and then came to me as student and help-seeker, wanting me to compose sentences for him. He had a purpose for writing and wanted help from me to execute it, needing me to organise the language into meaningful sentences which he would then transcribe. I called such activities *dictated-composing*.

Making sense together. One day, after we had finished some dictated-composing, Ravi came up to me to show me his writing. After I had looked at it, I asked him what he would like to write about next. Getting no response from him, I suggested he draw a mango. My suggestion was prompted by the knowledge that this is a mango-growing area. (This became a pattern — I would begin with a whole class activity, that was familiar to them - like dictation or dictated composing and then when they brought their books to me, I'd engage in individual transactions of this nature — suggesting topics to write, or drawings. Often I drew for them things they wanted to draw, in order to provide a supportive context for them to write.)

Ravi moved back to his group of friends and the group moved to the wall. They were sitting on their haunches, with their knees raised against their chests. They rested their school-bags on the wall and their note-books on their laps. Changalal and Kamlesh were squatting in front of them forming a circle. Rajesh and Ravi were the only ones drawing. Ravi drew a mango and some leaves and Rajesh

followed Ravi's lead, doing the same. The others commented upon Ravi's drawing, suggesting what he should draw next —

Kamlesh: Make a parrot next to the mango. Make a nice one. The eyes don't look good. Make good eyes and a big face.

Changalal: Let's see? Let's see? These are eyes? They're too small.

Ravi seemed quite open to suggestions and erased his drawing several times to accommodate the suggestions. Rajesh asked Ravi to make the parrot for him.

Ravi: See mine and make. Make it from here (Pointing out to his drawing) Look.

Rajesh: (Looking at it and laughing): It's bad.

Ravi (quite undaunted by this criticism): Look at this! I'm making a huge mango and here's a parrot.

Rajesh: Now make a parrot in mine.

Ravi ignored this as his concentration was centered on his own drawing. A suggestion came from Changalal, "Now write, The parrot eats a mango."

He started speaking very fast, his tone registering excitement

Changalal: Yeah — make a parrot and then write "the parrot eats a mango": (He imitates my intonation dragging out the last word) Yes-yes write, "the parrot eats a mango

Ravi stopped, arrested midway in his drawing, his interest caught by his friend's suggestion. He looked at him and at his drawing and said slowly

Ravi: OK! Let me make this parrot first. Aha!

He made the parrot for the third time, then held his copy out to his friends and said out loud

Ravi: I've made the parrot.

It was a very tiny parrot. Changalal peered into his copy and asked,

Changalal: "Where is the parrot?"

Ravi was probably taking no chances. He wanted no more disparaging comments about tiny eyes and the like, so he decided that a small parrot in which minor details like eyes are not noticeable was the safest thing to draw given his present critical audience. He pointed to the parrot

Ravi: Can't you see? (There's an edge to his voice)

Kamlesh (Who has been watching silently all this time):
OK! Write "parrot" now.

Ravi (writing and monitoring his writing loudly with self-directive talk):
 /t/ - /t/ par /o/ ki matra, phir /t/, /t/ par /aa/ ki matra — tota
 — tota aam, tota aam, kha — tota aam kha raha — tota aam
 kha raha hai. Tota aam kha raha hai.

He spelt out each letter and vowel and then called out each word and all the words cumulatively as he wrote the sentence — “The parrot eats the mango.”

He read out the sentence and all four boys brought Ravi’s book to me. Not knowing the labour that had gone into the production of this drawing and this sentence, and trying to move him to writing and drawing more, I commended the drawing and suggested that he make a tree now for his mango.

Ravi went back to the wall and said:

Ravi: Make a tree. Mamiji says make a tree.

With a big sigh, he erased his drawing. He tried to make something that looked like a tree and then rubbed the whole drawing off, along with his text.

In this event, the children acted as critics and supportive collaborators. Despite his criticism of Ravi’s drawing, Rajesh accepts Ravi as a leader, having no superior estimate of his ability to draw. Kamlesh offers silent support, as Ravi the scribe and graphic artist in this event holds out his text for judgment. The children all participated in the composition of this text, making the joint discovery that drawing is representative and can itself be represented by written language — itself symbolising, it can further be symbolised in speech, and speech can be symbolised in writing. They are making connections between the multiple symbol systems, together, “constructing written language knowledge,” using both “social and symbolic supports” (Dyson, 1991). Changalal, who has less control over the conventions of written language, made the discovery, and Ravi clued on to it. Kamlesh and Rajesh were silent supportive participants and though Ravi “wrote” the sentence and “drew” the parrot, the text was jointly produced by all of them. They established their joint ownership of the text and its meaning by bringing it to me together.

Unaware of the effort that had gone into the composition of this single sentence and the tiny parrot and guided by my adult-teacher like purpose of urging the child on to higher competencies, I failed to appreciate the import of it for all the children - that they had struggled with tensions amongst themselves and varied symbol systems to arrive at this understanding. I had also not appreciated enough, that "Worlds first discovered through talk and pictures do not fit so easily on a page" (Dyson, 1991). In my eagerness to move them along to their potential levels of development (Vygotsky, 1978), I was not valuing enough, their present level of development. In this instance as in others I seemed to miscue, thus resulting in an unsuccessful adult-child dialogue.

Friendship groups and instructional chains. Even though the official seating arrangement in the class was such that the children sat in single columns one behind the other, the children always formed themselves into small clusters or friendship groups, segregated along gender lines. Membership in these groups was flexible, though there were some core members in each, as were the unanimously selected leaders. Shakun, Sheela, Mira, Geeta and Saroj formed one such group of girls, with Shakun as natural leader. Ravi, Rammilan, Changalal, Rajesh, Arjun and Shivprasad formed another such boys group. Ravi was the undeclared leader of this group. Interestingly, both Ravi and Shakun have relatively more proficient literacy skills. There were several such groups in the class. All productions of text, whether dictated, copied or composed, were collaborative. Corsaro (1985), Bruner (1986) and Dyson (1989, 1991, 1993) find that "collective negotiation" (Corsaro, 1991) is central to the cultural processes of peer production and reproduction, and this was evident in this setting too as illustrated by some of the ways in which the children collaborated as described above.

Another way in which the children structured the literacy practise in the class was by way of “instructional chains,” a term I borrow from Cazden and Steinberg (1979), as illustrated by this episode:

Shakun came to me asking me what she should draw. I asked her what she would like to draw. She had her text book in hand out of which she picked out a picture of a balloon seller surrounded by children and said she wanted to draw this. I suggested she also write about it. Having got my assent to her suggestion, she scurried off back to her friendship group announcing her intention. Her friends decided they would follow her lead and soon they were all engaged in drawing the picture. Mira and Saroj asking Sheela for help with their drawings. They then wrote a brief narrative again following Shakun’s lead. Shakun did not initiate the task explicitly but unofficially she was the peer-tutor. Sheela copied the structure of Shakun’s narrative but altered it to suit her own purposes.

Shakun’s text: A balloon seller has come to sell balloons in one village. Salma has come and Sheela and Amardeep have come. All the children from the village have come. The village folk have also come to buy balloons for their children.

Sheela’s text: A balloon seller has come to sell balloons in one village. Geeta has come. Amardeep has come. All the children from there have come. The village folk have come to buy balloons for their children.

Sheela uses her own friend Geeta’s name and she positions herself in relation to Shakuntla by not including Shakun’s name.

While this friendship group was engaged in writing about the balloon man, Ravi and his group had decided they wanted to write about my car which was an object of great fascination for them. In this way writing was a social event, as the children chatted, criticised each other’s drawing and writing, dictated spellings to each other and mused about other things while they wrote.

Sheela, Mira and Shakun were engaged in narrativising a song about a bear and in the midst of the lending and borrowing of pencils and competencies, praise and criticism that always accompanied such events Sheela asked Mira -

Sheela: Now you tell me this. Does the wind have hands and feet or not

Mira: (without looking up) No

Sheela: If it doesn't then tell how does it carry away leaves?

Mira (pondering): OK it has.

On another occasion they were writing out and drawing pictures to illustrate a song about stars, birds, trees and butterflies, they sang the song as they wrote and drew

Sheela: Have you written "bird?"

Subhashini: I've written "fish."

Sheela: If you've written fish then draw about it.

Salma: Yes fish are red. Stars are red also. Have you - have you seen stars when they move?

Subhashini: Yes I've seen them.

Salma: They move in the clouds and if you look very carefully you can see them. (Looking up into the sky) Look - look the evening star can be seen right now. (It was 3.30 pm - bright sunshine!)

Subhashini: Where — where show me.

Salma: Can't you see? I can. (She goes back to her drawing and Subhashini peers some more into the sky) — here give me your book, I'll draw the fish for you.

Thus, the friendly give and take of criticism, banter, help and imaginative musings formed the social context of their texts as they worked together to write and draw. Like the children Dyson (1991) describes, these children, too, provided each other with important "symbolic and social supports" and "included in these supports was . . . a talk filled and playful social world in which literacy and children's capacity for naming, expressing and collaboratively imagining ways of living can grow" (p. 113). The friendship groups not only provided the social fuel for their writing to grow, they helped a teacher trying to address the purposes of a class of 50 children, as the children provided

ideas to their friends, adopted each others purposes and collectively helped to realize these.

Cross-cultural Dialogues

The negotiation of the curriculum involved several cross-cultural dialogues, some successful and some not so successful. One unsuccessful adult-child dialogue has been described in an earlier section. The episode described below illustrates another adult-child miscue and the lesson learnt from it.

Adult-child miscues: Clash of purposes. On one visit, after giving the children a dictation test from their text book in reaction to the principal's comment that the children in this class could not spell, I asked the children to choose independent topics to write, as they brought their books to me to check. I asked Ravi what he would write, suggesting rather forcefully that he write a story, since that is the competency I was hoping to move him on to.

Ravi refused: No. Not a story.

This response followed from an earlier visit. Ravi had come prepared with a task for himself. Having figured I like them to write out stories, he came prepared with one, memorised for the occasion. He brought it to me after he'd finished, expecting me to be impressed at the "correct" story language and was disappointed at my response. I did not commend it enough because in my perception it did not count as a composing event. Our definitions of "story" were different and "the establishment of a context of shared meanings is an important precondition for the successful further transmission of culturally elaborated symbolic systems, meanings and norms"(Nicolopoulou, 1991, p. 135). Ravi's conception of a story was the one he found in a book, a coherent piece with

a beginning, middle and end. All the stories he'd heard or read were in standard Hindi, which was not his first language. As such, he did not conceive of himself as an author of stories and so he wrote one that he thought was a legitimate story. Further it came from "his mind" which I emphasised constantly, in my attempt to move them to independent composing. Since it was not copied, but came from his memory, he believed it did come from his "mind" and couldn't understand why it didn't receive more commendation than it did. His task was independently chosen, which was also a move towards independence, which I did not appreciate, and it answered his purpose for displaying his knowledge and skill. He knew a story and was able to write it and that was what he wanted to effect with his task. I had other purposes for him and these clashed with his and resulted in his refusal: No, not a story.

US: OK then write a poem like the twinkle, twinkle little star — no — OK write about your house.

Ravi: I wrote about the house that day.

US: Write about your mother, your village?

Ravi did not look enthusiastic about either topic.(I'm not surprised!)

US: Alright, what will you write — you say.

Ravi is silent as he fidgets.

US: Alright, write about what you do at home (No response from him), or make up a story — any story . . . go on.

Ravi goes away not feeling really helped, to his group of friends: Mamiji says write a story.

Shivprasad: I know a poem.

Ravi:(brightening up): Oh good! You recite it and I'll write it.

Shivprasad recites it for him again and Ravi writes out the first 2 lines. He guides himself very carefully spelling out loud each word, as he writes it. He reads them out to himself after he's written them. Shiv and Ravi sing the poem as they recite it and write it, having a lot of fun. It is about a crow. After he has finished he says: This is a really good poem. Ravi brings the poem to show me. I read it out and appreciate it asking: "Did you write it from your mind?" Ravi does not respond, either because he knew I don't appreciate memorised poems or because

he did not understand my idea of “from your own mind.” I suggested he write another one.

Ravi went back to his friend. Shiv says, “I know another really nice one.”

Ravi takes dictation of this too, once again they sing as they write. Shiv is quite happy to help his friend, even though he knows that this text will be recognised as Ravi’s production not his. As they are ‘writing’ this poem, Changalal comes up - offering to recite another one, “Shall I tell you another poem? We can sing it.”

Ravi brings his second production to me and once again I ask, “Did you write it from your mind?” Again Ravi is silent.

In this case, our purposes seem to have clashed. Ravi wanted to play with print rather than be a composer. His becoming a composer was more important to me than it was to him. As Garvey (1990) reflects, “Unlike the adult who is sated with the sounds and metaphoric nature of everyday language, the child finds word shapes and the figurative properties of meaning a source of delight” (p. 59). He enjoyed writing the poem and performing it along with his friends. It was an occasion to play and socialise, and he decided it was more important to honour his own purpose than mine.

The children had a fund of such limericks³ and small poems, which they would write out in their notebooks after they had finished an official task. It was their way of sharing their cultural world with me and I continued to ignore these, instead of capitalising on their need to produce these and play with each other through them. They were sharing their folk lore with me which Bauman (1982) comments is “the free peer group activity of children and is by its very nature a privileged realm in which adults are

³An example of the kinds of limericks the children traded:

A fat man lay on his bed
He got run over by a car
The number of the car is twenty eight
The car reached India Gate
In India gate were three policemen
They beat up the fat man.

alien intruders" (p. 176), and I should have felt privileged at being allowed entry, instead of taking an "adultocentric" view. Child folklorists Opie and Opie (1959) make the same point:

... the school child's verses are not intended for adult ears. In fact part of their fun is the thought, usually correct, that adults know nothing about them. Grownups have outgrown the schoolchild's folk lore. If made aware of it they tend to deride it; and they actively seek to suppress its livelier manifestations. Certainly they do nothing to encourage it. (pp. 1-2)

According to Bauman (1982), "the forms of children's folklore . . . are display forms, public means for the presentation and representation of oneself, one's culture and one's social structure to others in ways that underscore both their meaningfulness to the group and one's own competence as a member of it" (p. 175). Shivprasad is from Ravi's neighbourhood and normally follows Ravi's lead. He uses "his" poem as his contribution to his friend's performance of a task. In helping his friend to fulfill his purpose, he exercises his sense of power. He "owned" the poem and "gave" it to Ravi for his use.

I agree with Bauman (1982) that "children's folklore, representing what might aptly be called the indigenous art forms of childhood, unquestionably valued and enjoyed by the children themselves, might constitute a significant resource in the development of culturally responsive (language) arts program" (p. 184). The child-responsive classroom should allow more hospitable spaces for it to flourish.

More cultural cues from the children. Vivian Paley (1986), mentions genuine "curiosity" as an important factor in facilitating successful communication in the classroom, and it seemed to function in the same catalytic way in our classroom as well. The children responded to my genuine curiosity in their worlds and volunteered much cultural information about themselves in the context of their writing assignments, as is illustrated by the following episodes:

In one assignment the children were writing about their friends, in the course of which they wrote about the games they play with each other. Since I was scaffolding the writing with questions like — “so what games do you play with your friends?” — we talked about the games they played. They mentioned some that I was familiar with like — hopscotch, I-spy, ball and Kho (an Indian team game) and then the boys mentioned one called “ticket” that I had never heard of and I said so. Rammilan tried to explain it to me. Ravi could see that the explanation wasn’t making much sense to me and that I was genuinely curious. So he got up and said, “Here let me show you.” He called Shivprasad out and they moved to the ground on the left of the seating area. He pulled out an empty match box from his pocket, and semi-dug it in the ground at a distance of 6 feet. Pulling out some pebbles from his pocket he tried to shoot the match box and missed. Shivprasad, his opponent had a shot at it and got it. The match box was his. Ravi explained to me that the game was won if you had more match-box covers than your opponent. This was not a game I had ever seen children play in the urban context in which I had grown up and it was interesting information gained. Ravi proceeded to write about the game as did his friends.

This event took place early in the study and provided a context for us to interact and gave the children a way of connecting literacy with their lives, with the special culture that children create in games and play (Kelly-Byrne, 1989). Important connections were made between literacy and their lived experiences, between adult and child worlds and between rural and urban cultures. This was a successful cross-cultural dialogue as there were others.

On another occasion after we had finished reading a story in which a girl described the various things she liked to do, I asked the children to write a similar one about the things they liked to do. Surajpal wrote that he liked swinging in the rain and then wrote out a poem which was also about swinging in the rain. When he brought his notebook to me, I asked him to tell me more about the poem. He told me it was a traditional song that was sung in the rainy season (referred to as the monsoon in India). There was a group of children around me, waiting for their turn to show me their notebook. They were listening to our conversation and one of them responded, “I know another one.” Then, on my suggestion, the children scurried off to their seats to write out

their songs. We sang a couple of these later in the day during recitation time, which was a regular feature of our meetings.

In this way, the children wrote, too, about their mango groves, their festivals and how they celebrated them. I suggested the topics and collectively we chatted about these after which they wrote about them. They knew that they were the experts on village life and customs and seeing that I was ill-informed but interested they willingly shared their cultural worlds with me, enjoying the new power place that this put them in, donning as it were the “mantle of the expert” (Heathcote, 1984). As they shared their world with me, they also found a way of embedding their writing in their local culture and making literacy more culturally relevant to their lives. Authentic cross-cultural dialogues are founded upon and fueled by a *mutual* interest in each other’s culture, and the children expressed an interest in my world too, examples of which I provide in the next chapter. It was in the course of such cross-cultural conversations that adult and child culture responded to each other, as did rural and urban cultures.

Insert Table 5.1 here

THE TEXTUAL FABRIC

Bakhtin (1986) defines text as any spoken or written utterance, any “coherent complex of signs”. He says of texts that “every text has a subject or author” and assigns “authorial responsibility” to the speakers or writers of texts. In this class, we built a matrix of varied texts, the “authorial responsibility” assumed by many of us. We drew upon our collective resources and further exploited these to craft more texts from the ones we had.

TABLE 5.1 VARIETIES OF LITERACY EVENTS

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| POETRY and SONG | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recitation of rhymes, poems and songs 2. Copying teacher models from the blackboard 3. Copying peer models 4. Teacher dictation of poems and songs 5. Peer dictation of poems and songs 6. Composing poems — extending and modeling official sample |
| STORY | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reading stories from the text book, library books, child-produced texts. 2. Re-composing stories collaboratively from text book and library books 3. Copying collaboratively composed stories from the black board 4. Teacher dictation of collaboratively re-composed stories 5. Semi-dictated composing, i.e., extending partially dictated stories 6. Re-telling stories heard or read 7. Re-writing stories heard or read 8. Composing own stories: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Narrativising events and experiences, real and imagined b. Extending story-starters and story ideas provided by teacher c. Picture compositions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> —Teacher draws figures requested by the children and they compose the text —Children draw and compose descriptive text —Teacher draws on the board and collaboratively teacher and children compose the descriptive text or story —Teacher brings printed pictures and children compose oral stories collaboratively and written stories individually and collaboratively |
| DRAMA | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enacting stories from the text for each other as a class and for the rest of the school: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> —Story theater : Teacher narrates; children act Children narrate and act —Readers theater: Teacher reads Children read 2. Enacting Poems 3. Enacting Songs |

This not only helped to multiply the meagre resources at our disposal, they helped the children to *make the texts their own..* When they transformed the story in the text book into a dramatic text which they authored and performed, it was a way of appropriating the text and assuming authorship, thus privileging themselves and deprivileging the text book simultaneously.

The textual fabric of this classroom illustrated well what Bakhtin (1986) meant when he said, “a text lives only by coming into contact with another text. Only at the point of this contact between texts does a light flash . . . joining a given text to a dialogue” (p. 162). When the children narrativised the poems authored by someone else, they crafted new meaning out of a given one, by rendering it in another genre. Just the fact of mechanically copying out texts in their notebooks in their own handwriting gave them a sense of ownership. Sheela once wrote in her book, “thank-you for the gifts of poems.” Having no books at home, it was very important for the children to own texts so they busied themselves in copying them, re creating them, enacting them, singing them - trying to make them their own in as many different ways as they could. They wove their imagined texts, their crafted texts — written, enacted, performed, their copied texts into the matrix of their social life in the classroom. These texts were “dialogised” by the children as they negotiated their meaning and appropriated them in various ways. In turn, the texts also dialogised the classroom culture, mediating relationships between the children and between the children and myself, providing thus a shared context for our life in the classroom.

The texts: Given below is a description of the variety of texts used by us, the various sources from which they came and the ways in which they were constructed.

Poems: The children recited poems, wrote them, narrativised and illustrated them. Some of these poems were brought by me, some we took from their official text book, some I chose from the school library, which consists of 50 books kept locked in a box in the principal's custody. He almost never gave out these books to the children afraid that they would tear them: "They'll only tear them, so what's the use. And then I'm accountable." He lent them to me for "my project" though. The children brought in their own folklore, trading poems and sharing them. Shakun has a younger brother who studies in the kindergarten in a local single-teacher private school. She often brought in his poetry book to share with her friends. The children copied poems out of these and learnt them, reciting them for me and suggesting that we dramatise them. Animals, birds and flowers generally formed the theme of the poems that attracted the children. The cat always ate up the mice or in some cases the mice managed to outwit her.

Songs: The children sang songs brought by me and them, dramatised them, wrote them and narrativised them. These were performative texts.

Stories: Aware of the lack of print in their homes, I tried to provide as many stories as I could, using their official text book, their library books and other children's books from other libraries. These were very popular with the children. They hovered around me everytime they saw that I had books to read, asking for them as soon as I was settled. They read these collaboratively as they did everything else in their friendship groups. Even though used them only to decode, they still enjoyed them a great deal. During the lunch hour there was a minor stampede for the books as children from other classes crowded around to get them. They formed groups in the yard as they read the books they took away.

The children brought in stories to tell, too. Shakun had an older sister in class 6. She often brought her text book to share with her friends and Sheela brought her sister's book too. Shakun had a fund of stories — fables and myths. I had her narrate these to the class after which we enacted them, I drew them on the board, directed by the children and then the children retold them in writing. In this way we co-composed, re-composed and re-created Shakun's story -sharing authorship. She lent us her story, the children lent themselves to its recreation as a dramatic text, I lent myself to it by drawing it, recomposing it as a drawn text and then the children appropriated it for themselves as they recomposed it individually.

Events: We used the events in our lives as texts to be told and retold. One day, Mrs. S was telling me about her experience in the bus that morning. There was a fire in the bus and a stampede as all the passengers rushed to get out. She was telling me this in the presence of the children, so I suggested that she tell her story to the children. She narrated the incident and the children had many questions to ask. I suggested they write about it, which they did. The teacher seemed to become more accessible and the "psychological and social distance" (Cazden, 1976) between her and the students seemed to reduce, as she featured more regularly in their writing after this, examples of which appear in the next chapter. The children made her a part of their symbolic worlds and in doing so seemed to "appropriate" her. The children also used events in their own lives, imagined and real to write about, learning that they were "narrated selves" (Dyson, 1993).

Pictures: I drew stories on the board for the whole class and individually in their copies, to provide a context for the children to write about. They also composed stories off of pictures from their text book, printed pictures that I brought in for the purpose. They drew their own pictures and told stories with them and about them.

Friends and the world around us: The classroom with its open setting provided rich texts as the children learnt to read it as text, and I used it to make some connections important for beginning writers, which the following example illustrates:

On one visit early on in the participation phase I was trying to make the oral-written and the object-symbol connection for the children. I looked around and drew the hand-pump on the board and the boy who was at the pump, to provide them with a context for their writing. As I did so, Ravi told me that the boy was Gita's brother, Santosh. The children were very tickled that they were actually writing about someone they knew. I saw them come alive as they wrote, "There is a hand pump in our school. Santosh is getting water from the hand pump."

They learnt from this to weave their physical environment into their texts. On another occasion when I was telling them a story which featured a lemon tree, Shakun said, "No we'll say Gulmohur tree, because that's what we have here," thus re-interpreting the text in terms of her own environment. In this way they learnt to exploit the textual potential of their physical environment.

We included English in the curriculum at their request and the children composed their own "oral primer" by asking for names of everything they could see around them — sky, tree, leaves, birds, moon, sun, stars, water, cow, boys, girls and so on. I had not considered including English, concerned that it would be irrelevant to a community where there was no context for English, no print, no texts in English. The children found relevant contexts and created their own texts from these, learning very quickly and enthusiastically. They perceived it both, as part of my culture and as a power language. In learning the language they were participating in my culture and negotiating the power differences between us. They were also demanding a share of the "code of power" (Delpit, 1988) and illustrating well her point that "those with power are frequently least aware of . . . its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its

existence" (p. 282). I had not considered including English on pedagogical grounds, failing to recognise the political implications of such an exclusion - it was an exclusion from the "culture of power" (Delpit, 1988), in which the children demanded inclusion.

Textual contributions from unexpected quarters: Because of the shortage of our time we only did English orally. I had not included much *written* instruction in English, restricting it to helping some of the children write their names. One day Ravi came and told me that he could write his numbers from 1-100. I expressed surprise and appreciation and asked him where he had learnt it.

Ravi: My father had his book from when he was a child, which he gave me a few days ago and I learnt up the numbers from that.

Later, he showed me a used English primer and was able to read some of the captions in the book, by referring to the pictures — DOG, DOLL, LAMB, ELEPHANT. He was able remember the words and could sight-read them even without the supportive context of the pictures. I learnt later that upon learning that we were learning English in the class, his father had bought a used English primer, to help himself and his son at home, as they built upon the instruction provided in school, illustrating well that learning develops best when it meets the needs and purposes of the learner. In this way, too, the children constructed two-way bridges between the local community, the classroom, and the urban community from which Mrs. S and I came — helping to make the teaching and learning culturally-responsive.

BOUNDED CONTEXTS

I have described the classroom life as though the on-going social life of the community did not impinge upon us, using this as a heuristic device, intended to make

the classroom a bounded context (Geertz, 1973) for purposes of sharper focus. Life went on as usual, the other classes chanting their tables, the principal yelling at the children, swishing his arm and stick liberally, the class five boys cramming for their lessons for the 5th grade state board exam, scattered in the yard by the teachers, so that they could concentrate individually on memorising their lessons. The activity at the hand pump continued as people came and went. The setting was such an open one that the happenings in the other classes and the community were not only very visible, I sometimes found them very intrusive. The women from the community often stopped by for a chat, thinking nothing of interrupting the lesson. On one occasion we were thus interrupted by Rukmini (mother of a child in first grade and a friend of mine) while I was engaged in giving the children dictation. I thought it was too impolite not to respond to Rukmini and broke off to talk to her. After barely a minute, Geeta called out, "Mamiji, what should we write after this," calling me back to my task. They were able to shut out the outside world and keep their classroom life separate within its bounded context and taught me to do the same. It seemed important to them to have their classroom life as a distinctive one — almost as if they were constructing an alternative reality for themselves in it.

The children were witness to domestic wrangles, abuses, loud quarrels and physical violence, some of this happening during the course of the classroom day, in the yard in front of them. On one occasion, Rukmini and her husband had just had a violent quarrel, and she was complaining to any one who would listen about the beating she'd suffered. Her husband was justifying his stand, and both were arguing loudly and abusively. The children watched this and one of them commented, "Both were hitting each other."

As soon as Rukmini and her husband left the scene, the children went back to work, asking for a poem. They did not want to discuss the quarrel, not in class. Unlike the children Warner (1963) writes about, the key themes that interested the children in my study were not centered around the violence, hunger and poverty of their lives. They centered around stories of animals and birds, fairy tales of kings and queens, foolish men and the consequences of their folly, friends and games, as is evident from the list of topics they wrote on (see Table 6.1). The children seemed to invent an alternative world for themselves in the classroom, a bounded context, asserting their right to their childhood and its special joys and travails and its dignity. Gumperz (1991) uses the term, "childness," to define "the understanding that children have of themselves as a social category." The children seemed to want to preserve their childness, or their child-world and bound it in the context of the classroom.

"I" IN MY RELATIONS TO OTHERS:

The ideology lived and practised in this classroom

Althusser (1969) defines ideology as having a material existence in the rituals of social practices that structure the day to day workings of life and as "those systems of meanings, representations and values embedded in concrete practices that structure the unconsciousness of people. The effects of such practices and their mediations is to induce in teachers and students alike an "imaginary relationship . . . to their real conditions of existence." Further, that we "live" our ideologies not as a form of consciousness but as an object of our world — "as our world itself" (p. 233).

What is revealed about the ideology "lived" in this classroom, embedded in the "systems of meanings," the "social practices" in it? The institutional power structure remained the same as the one described in Chapter 4, but there seemed to open another

space within the institutionally defined space as the children acted out their “imaginary relationship to their real conditions of existence” within the bounded context of the classroom.

There was a web-like power structure, in which I occupied the *institutional power* space as teacher, yet power was dispersed in several other ways, opening out other spaces which the children occupied. They exercised *social power* in their friendship groups, based on the competencies they had, the texts they owned and could trade, the help they gave and received. They exercised *personal power or performative power* during the performances they participated in. They exercised also *symbolic power* as they acquired a multi-modal symbol system to express and construct their meanings, as they became not simply passive reproducers of texts unconnected to themselves but authors and owners of their own texts - spoken and written. They exercised and acquired *dialogic power* as they became co-creators of the texts, negotiators of the curriculum, finding their voice and using it to negotiate the curriculum by offering suggestion, making demands and evaluations, expecting to be attended to and addressed. They grew in *narrative power* as they narrativised their experiences, becoming authors of their own stories. According to Bakhtin (1984), “the architectonic activity of authorship, which is the building of a text, parallels the activity of human existence, which is the building of a self” (p. 64). It was in this sense that the narrative power acquired by the children helped them to realise themselves as persons. Most importantly, they learnt *the power of imagination*, i.e., the ability to think in terms of possibility and to invent imagined realities.

The children began to have a more complex, non-essentialistic understanding of my power as teacher and in a way legitimised it, taking from it, its oppressive sting. They perceived my power as deriving from my position as teacher — in my role as expert

and resource, model, helper, owner and provider of texts, performer, evaluator and addressee *and* from my social position as urban, upper-class.

The ideology practised by the children and by me taking my cue from them, was a *connective* one. “I” as connected to others, as collaborator, helper, critic, evaluator, addresser, addressee. “I” as a conceiver of purposes and a legitimate possessor of purposes, as project pursuer. “We” as possessors and pursuers of purposes individual and collective, as having the right to pursue these, as having the right to receive help from each other in our pursuits and also as having the responsibility to help each in his or her pursuits. In effect, “I” as a person related to other persons.

Cultural Identity

The children definitely resisted having their identities defined in terms of their caste identity as I learnt from the following episode. On one of the last visits of my study, it occurred to me that I did not have information regarding the caste distribution of the class. I asked Mrs. S for the information. While Mrs. S was reading out the information from her register, I asked if the children were aware of their caste identities.

Mrs. S: Of course they know — why don’t you ask them? Here, Sheela, come here — who are you?

Sheela looked up from her seat and answered quietly: Roidas.

Mrs. S: Surajpal, you come here and tell Mamiji.

Surajpal came to me and answered: Pasi.

He gave me along look as he returned to his seat and the look in his eyes seemed to say: Why did you ask?

It had seemed to me an inappropriate question to ask and their response confirmed this. Belonging to two different groups related asymmetrically in terms of power as we were, the children resisted definitions of identities in terms of these groups, especially by

someone from the dominant group. Identities so constructed would reinforce the power distances between us and work towards maintaining them. When identified as lower caste, the social powerlessness of their caste becomes a part of their identity, rendering them powerless and diminishing them. Conversely when dominant groups are identified in terms of their group identity, their social power is augmented as it becomes a part of their personal identity. The children perceived themselves and me as persons and wanted us to interact as persons, not as members of groups. This seemed to be their form of resisting the power structure, by positioning themselves in relation to others in their context, “by reaching out to persons as persons” (Greene, 1986).

Having described the “shared life” of all the participants in the classroom, as we constructed a responsive literacy curriculum, I continue the description of the literacy practiced in this setting by turning now to the focal persons in my study to describe how they individually appropriated literacy and how they grew as writers and persons as they did so.

CHAPTER 6

CHILDREN APPROPRIATING LITERACY

This chapter moves closer to the four focal children of the study, Shakun, Ravi, Sheela, and Rajesh, in an attempt to understand *how they appropriated literacy, the various supports that aided appropriation in each case, the purposes that drove their development as writers and how as they enacted their purposes in this context, they grew as persons*. In order to maintain the integrity of each child, they are described separately, because each one of them had different ways of using literacy, some that they shared in common and some that are unique to each, deriving from their individual histories and unique personalities. These are particular persons, in a particular setting, with particular sets of circumstances, and it is in their particularity that they yield rich understanding (Dyson, personal communication). The attempt is to rescue children from the statistical invisibility that some research tends to reduce them to, and to render them visible as real persons, to give, as Genishi (1991) describes it, a “feeling of lived lives” in order to “illuminate the world it explains.”

The term “appropriation” is used in this context to mean “making one’s own.” I define “appropriation of literacy” as acquiring written language as a conceptual tool, a symbolic tool with which to enact one’s purposes, goals, wishes and desires, one with which to act in the social world. Appropriation is an internalising, a making it one’s own, in terms of making it a part of one’s life structures or “psychological structures,” as Piaget refers to them, or as a “category of the mind” as Kant would refer to it. To appropriate literacy is to acquire a vital tool with which to live one’s life — a performative tool (Austin) used to perform actions with; a constructive, constitutive and hermeneutical tool (Bruner, Vygotsky, Piaget, Ricoeur) with which to interpret reality and construct its meaning for oneself; a self-presentational or transactional tool (Bakhtin,

Dyson) with which to transact social relationships and negotiate one's own position in relation to others. To appropriate literacy is to add to one's symbolic repertoire, aiding one in interpretive, constructive, creative interaction with and action upon the world and others in it. Appropriation is also used in the Marxian sense of appropriating a power-commodity or a set of practices controlled by dominant classes or cultures.

I take a teleological view of literacy development in children advocated by Dyson (1989, 1993) according to which children's writing development is propelled by purposes that they have, which are embedded in their social and cultural life-worlds and their personal histories. It is as they discover writing as a functional tool, something they can use to achieve their purposes, that they develop greater control over it, discovering further purposes and functions for it in the process.

The view of "development" is the one taken by developmental psychologists (Vygotsky, 1978 and Bruner, 1986) and child-theorists (Dyson, 1989, 1993, 1994; Rogoff, 1990; Paley, 1980; Genishi, 1994). This is a view of children as *social, cultural and historical* beings growing, learning and developing in a social context, as part of a social and cultural process, using cultural tools, their competencies linked with the competencies of others — developing into a wider and wider realm of meanings.

Having provided the definitional backdrop, I turn now to the focal persons in this study, providing developmental histories of each, showing how they appropriated literacy and became persons in the social process of appropriation.

SHAKUN

Orchestrating symbol systems: Interpreting her worlds.

A Mobile Home World

Shakun is an 8-year-old little girl with a waif-like appearance, an intent look and a shy but ready smile (see photograph 2 in Appendix B). She is Hindu with Nepalese origins, her parents migrant construction labourers. They migrated from Nepal in search of work and now lead a nomadic existence moving wherever there is work. They have moved 6 times during Shakun's life time and are presently working at a government project in Rehman Kheda, a village 2 kms from the school. Shakun lives with her parents and her older brother and younger sister in a tent at the construction site. The tent serves as their bedroom, kitchen and living room. The tent is small but neatly arranged, their clothes and other belongings stored in boxes piled at the back of the tent. There is a low string cot on one side of the tent and kitchen utensils on the other. Since there is no electric supply to the tent, they function with lamp light. Sometimes the children use the bulb outside the building under construction for reading and writing.

Shakun's mother did not know Shakun's exact age, but placed her at about 8 years. Shakun's older sister Sumitra, 12, studies in the 5th grade and their younger brother, age 6, studies in the kindergarten in a local private school¹. Both Shakun's parents are illiterate, but her mother places a high value on literacy, believing in its potential to provide better prospects for her children, especially her son. She told me that she had fought with her husband to send her daughters to school. Since they had been moving so much, she said she had engaged private tutors to tutor her children, where schools were unavailable. The family seemed to be a cohesive one, though I noticed that

¹The private school is a single teacher school with 20 odd children. The charge is a fairly nominal one of Rs.20 per month. The chief attraction of the school is that English is included in the curriculum.

the son was clearly more important than the daughters. Even though their son was enrolled in private school at a monthly tuition fee of Rs. 20, Shakun's mother expressed her concern about the future of her daughters' education: "We haven't any money and probably won't be able to educate either one of them beyond 8th grade." Shakun and her sister help their mother with the cooking, cleaning and washing of dishes and clothes. They also take their 3 goats for grazing, quite their favourite chore. The only literacy materials available at home are the children's text books, which they all share.

Social Status in the Classroom World

Shakun was one of the most advanced readers and writers in the class, having also a fund of stories and poems to share with her peers. She has had more exposure, owing to her nomadic existence, in the course of which she lived in the city of Lucknow for a few months. She brought with her some city experience which added to her status amongst her peers, none of whom had lived in the city. I learnt towards the end of the study that she was also one of the 4 children in the class who belonged to the upper castes. It seemed, however, that Shakun enjoyed leadership status amongst the girls, more based on her literacy proficiency, and perhaps her city experience, rather than on her caste position. There were three other upper caste children in the class, none of whom enjoyed a similar leadership status.

Early Conception of Literacy and Competencies

During the observation phase Shakun displayed an intense interest in writing and reading, prizing her text book and her own notebook. She seemed to understand writing as *copying from printed texts*. She had orthographic control over the letters and had made the phonetic letter-sound connection. She had a personal notebook in which she had copied stories and several small poems from her sister's text book and from her brother's nursery rhyme book. At the bottom of each page she had signed her name —

Shakun Devi — Class 2. These were all unofficial writing assignments and she “wrote” in the only way she knew how. She exercised her autonomy and decision making in that she decided which texts she would copy. Her signature at the bottom of each page is significant — she seemed to see herself as the author of the copied texts, since she had chosen the piece and performed the mechanical act of writing it, in her handwriting and in her notebook.

“Composing,” in terms of encoding expressions of her own ideas, thoughts and messages in print, did not yet form a part of her conception of literacy. She could read and make sense of what she read and seemed to have acquired a second-order symbolism (Vygotsky), though she understood written language as symbolising meanings constructed by others, not as a symbol system that she could control to express or generate her own meanings. Literacy and the meanings it encodes were on the “page,” hence the transference of it from page to page. She traded her copied texts with her friends and they performed the poems together. This lent the texts social value for her as they mediated her social relationships, though in a peripheral sense. She derived her support as a “writer” from her sister, the printed page, her view of print as having intrinsic value and as something that earned her social prestige amongst her peers. Literacy had not as yet acquired the living, malleable, expressive, dynamic quality, that it came to have as it moved from the page into multiple social and symbolic contexts, as she found a variety of supports and thus appropriated it as an *active, constructive* symbolic medium with which to craft her own words, meanings and purposes.

Drawing did not form a part of her symbolic repertoire as yet, though she had copied a couple of pictures in her notebook. She seemed to focus much more on print than on drawing, and it seemed to have less value for her.

Moving Literacy from the Page into Social Worlds: Building social and symbolic supports

Establishing circles of mutuality. Early in the participation phase, Shakun and her friends were engaged in an official activity, intended to help them contextualise their writing in a meaningful social context. I asked them to write about their friends and the games they played with them. They were given explicit instructions:

First write your name and then ‘friend’ and then write your friend’s name. You can ask her how to spell it.

Shakun wrote “My friend is Saroj” and brought her book to me.

US: what do you play with your friend?

Shakun: Uh . . . I spy, hopscotch and ball.

Her eyes lighting up she took out a small pink rubber ball from her bag and said: “this one.”

US: So write that.

Shakun writes, “My ball is pink.” Sheela who is sitting next to her writes, “Your ball is pink.” She shows this to Shakun who smiles in assent and they bring their books to show me their sentences.

Having established a circle of mutuality with her friend, in which they each found an addressee, she established a similar one with me on a later visit. I define circle of mutuality as a circle of mutual response and address binding persons.

I had not yet begun a lesson, waiting for Mrs. S to finish her dictation. Shakun brought her copy to me in which she had written

Mamiji² teaches us poems. She greets us with namaskar (Indian greeting meaning “I bow to you”) and we greet her with namaskar.

This is a speech act (Austin, 1962), having locutionary force, and illocutionary force, in which she does what she writes in writing it. She acknowledges my greeting and performs the social act of greeting with her writing, and it is a perlocutionary act, binding us in a circle of mutuality. She is learning at the same time that she can “do things with words” (Austin, 1962) and beginning to appropriate writing as a *transactional medium*.

Cazden (1976) perceives “relationships of power and social and psychological distance” as having important influences on the verbal interaction between teacher and child, saying that the greater the psychological distance the greater the constraints on children’s talk. Unable yet to talk to someone who occupied the institutional power space, shy and wary of transcending the socially approved distance of age and position, Shakun uses writing to bridge it. She uses writing to reduce the social distance by bridging the pysical distance, continuing to maintain the formality with the third person addressal, rather than the less distant second person. Her friends copied out this sentence and appropriated her competency to effect their purposes, thus widening the circles of mutuality.

Shakun continued to explore the transactional function (Britton, 1982) of writing, driven by purposes she had. She learnt to use writing as a medium of addressal. After a dictation lesson, she brought her book to show me. After the official dictation assignment, she had written me a message

²The children referred to me as Mamiji and to their teacher as Bahenji.

Mamiji has not taught us a poem as yet. I am happy with poems.

She seemed to be looking for a more specific response from me. I read it and responded orally — “I’ll teach you one in a little while” — this was my attempt to reduce the distance and to acknowledge her request, and also her claim to mutuality. She learnt that she could make complaints, address requests, express her appreciation and bridge communicative distances with her writing. She was negotiating our power differences with her writing in which she seemed to find a safe medium.

Enlarging her Symbolic Repertoire

Shakun was an insatiable writer. She finished assignments quickly and was ready to negotiate another one with me. One day, we were still writing about games and I asked her if she would write about “Kho” (An Indian outdoor team game). “Explain to me how you play it.” She wrote this semi-coherent narrative:

Two friends come to play and two stand. Five friends are made to sit and five run. One person touches everyone and then the game is over.

When she brought it to me, I drew five stick figures for her and asked her to explain it to me. She took my pencil and drew five more and then explained the game to me very coherently, filling all the gaps in her narrative. Then turning to me she said, “Shall I write about “sikdi” (Hopscotch)? She went back to her seat and she wrote out a description of another game — “Hopscotch.” Her friends watched interestedly as she drew and wrote. This time she drew a figure in the centre of the page and wrote on either side of it. She described the movements of each girl on either side of the rectangle on which the game is played (see Fig. 6.1). She used the names of her friends into her narrative, who participated playfully in her composition, almost playing the game as they wrote it.

Shakun: So Salma, you take that side and Geeta you be on this side.

Geeta: OK and then who wins?

Shakun: Uh . . . You lose and Salma wins.

Geeta: Why am I losing? Why not Salma? I play much better than her.

Salma watches smiling, as Geeta argues good-naturedly, trying to grab Shakun's pencil.

Shakun carries on determinedly:

Shakun: No, no, no. You lose this time.

Insert Figure 6.1 here

She learnt to orchestrate drawing and writing to express her meaning, using her drawing to organise her meaning and as a supportive context for her writing. She learnt from this transaction that meaning is elusive, diffuse and resistant and that communicating it requires the orchestration of multiple media.

So, Shakun found new supports for her writing. She learnt to use drawing as a context and used it frequently to complement the meaning in her text and in some cases as bearer of all the meaning. She often came to negotiate her purposes with me asking me to draw for her so she could write. She used my drawing competency (!!) to draw figures she could not draw, used it as a support for her story and added to it, in order to add fullness of meaning to her text as she did in this picture (see Fig. 6.2). She asked me to draw the peacock and then using the story line from one of the stories in their text

book, she composed this story, also adding the missing figures of the hunter and his friend.

FIGURE 6.1. Shakun's friends playing hopscotch



FIGURE 6.2. Once there lived a peacock



एक जंगल में एक मौर
 रहता था। एक दिन की-
 बुक शरणी लात ही
 स्क शिकारी ने मौर को लीर
 पारने लगा। इसने में उसका
 मिल जाया। इसे भला मरा।
 शिकारी ने उसे छोड़ा फिय

Once there lived a peacock in a jungle. This happened a long time ago. The peacock had gone for a walk in the jungle. One hunter was about to shoot an arrow at the peacock. In the meantime, his friend came and said — don't hit him. The hunter let the peacock go. The peacock was very pleased and he gave the boy his feather. The boy took the feather and went away.

Shakun had learnt that she could do more with printed texts than copying them, she could use them to make up her own. And so she learnt to use the texts she read, the drawings she did, the ones others did for her and the social energy provided by her friends as she grew as a writer, supported by multiple contexts and texts.

Exploring Meaning: Playing with Genres, Symbol Systems and Friends

The children had recited a poem³ and I had dictated it to them. Shakun then illustrated it (see Fig. 6.3) and wrote a short narrative description of her picture:

The monkeys are running. The gardener is chasing the monkeys. There are mangoes. There are mangoes in the orchard.

Insert Figure 6.3 here

She suggested as we were reciting once again, "This can also be dramatised."

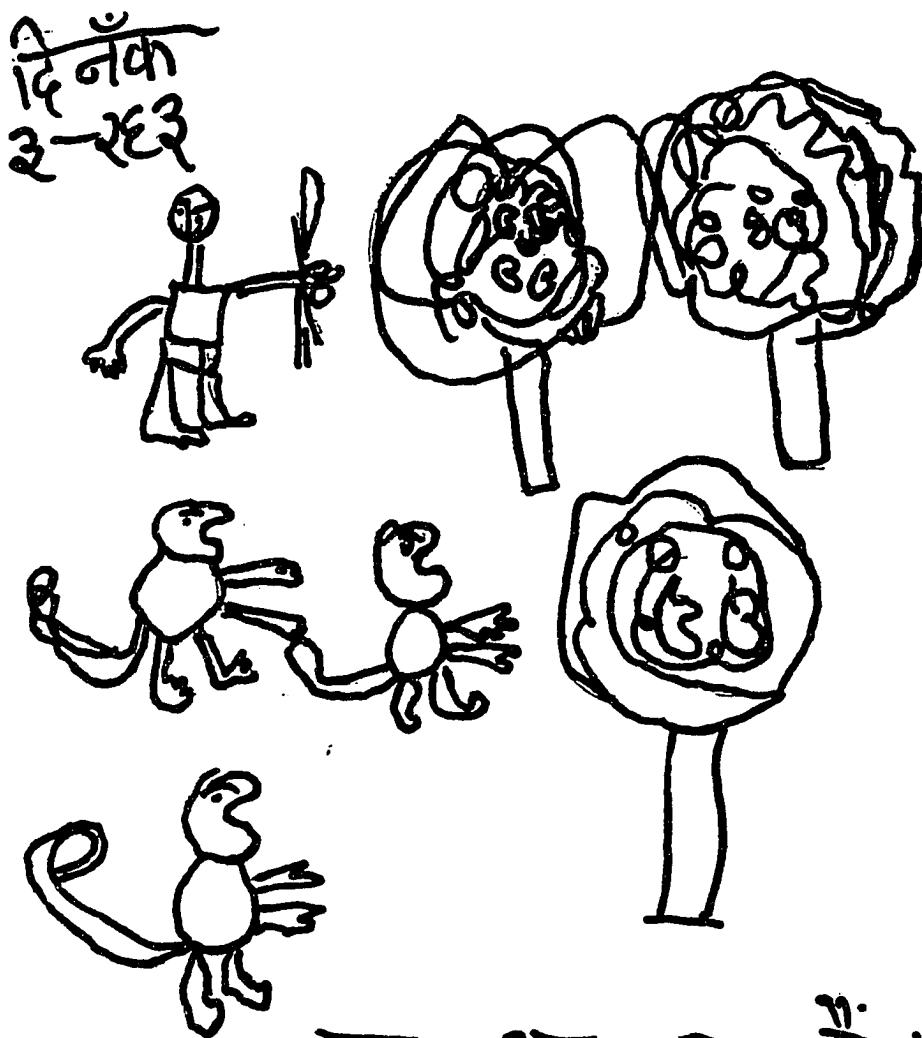
US: How will you do it?

Shakun: Some of the children will form the garden like this (She folds her hands together and raises them over her head, in the shape of a V-shaped arch)

US: OK and . . .

³(Translated sense of the poem): Monkeys come to my uncle's garden. Quietly, sneakily they eat the mangoes. Uncle gets up and chases them. The monkeys run and uncle chases them. Hot and bothered, his shirt tears and pyjama falls. Now comes the gardener. The monkeys run and the gardener is close behind. The monkeys jump over the wall and the gardener returns with his hands empty.

FIGURE 6.3. Monkeys in the garden



बन्दर भोग रहा है।

मलीबन्दर की भगा वह है।

आम लागा है। बछ में
आमलगा है।

✓

Shakun: Someone will be the mango.
 US: Uh-huh.
 Other children: Someone will be the uncle.
 Another child: He needs a stick.
 Shakun: And someone will be the gardener.

The lunch recess put an end to these negotiations. Shakun and her friends got together and enacted the poem, with Shakun directing them and reciting the poem as the actors acted. A few days later, she drew a picture (see Fig. 6.4) which had the same story idea, but she had made up her own version. In her picture-story, there was a child who was plucking flowers in the garden and the gardener was chasing him out of the garden. She used the comic book genre, putting the dialogue in the bubbles.

Insert Figure 6.4 here

Shakun interpreted the text of the poem in several ways. She drew it, interpreting it in another symbolic medium and narrativised it, changing the genre. Then she symbolised it in dramatic play along with her friends. After moving between genres and symbol systems, building one upon the other, using one to make sense of the other, she finally appropriated the poem, using it as a resource to draw her own story. She moved from a second order symbolism, the written text, to a first order symbolism — the drawing; then back to a second order symbolism in her narrative, then on to symbolic play, which according to Vygotsky is also first order symbolism and finally produced her picture story in which she combined both drawing and writing to tell her story. Adding to it also her oral narration, she orchestrated and manipulated several ways of symbolising

FIGURE 6.4. Shakun's picture story



the meaning of the text in order to make sense of it. She seemed to diffuse meaning, refracting it through several interpretive frames, casting and recasting it in different moulds, in order to clinch it. Or as the poststructuralist, deconstructionist infant does — pulling apart his toy car in order to see how it's put together.

In her picture-story, her drawn text, she uses all the figures and objects she has learnt to draw on previous visits — the flowers, the cycle, the bus and the car. She builds her symbolic repertoire cumulatively and calls upon it to help her draw and write her imaginative constructions, as she uses them to effect her purposes. She continued to use this mode of manipulating genres and symbol systems to express her self.⁴

Using Language as a Resource: Acting on Her World and in Her World

One day, Shakun wrote me a message in one of her official assignments in which the children were asked to write about themselves:

Who am I? I am a girl. My name is Shakuntla. I am a girl. I am good. I live in Rehman Kheda. My village is good. My goat and cat and dog are good. I have a mother and father and one brother. Please do what I asked you to do.

Since I had not understood what she wanted me to do, I wrote back in her notebook, "Write this out fully for me." She "wrote" it out in several ways — she drew a picture of 3 huts and scored one out (see Fig. 6.5).

⁴Given below is a particularly beautiful reconstruction of a song the children had learnt. Shakun narrativised it, using names of her friends and stylising it, borrowing the story grammar from the fables she liked so much:

"There was a small girl. Her name was Subhashini. There was a small boy. His name was Kamlesh. They both went into the garden. Beautiful flowers were blooming in the garden. Butterflies were sipping nectar from these. Subhashini said - Hey Kamlesh there are butterflies in the flowers. The trees are looking all green. The clouds look blue. The stars are shining. The moon is smiling. The sun has gone to the other side. Subhashini said - who has made all this? Kamlesh said - who has oh don't you know — God has made all this. They both went home happily. Both lived lovingly ever after."

FIGURE 6.5. Shakun drawing her meaning



Her descriptive text reads:

In one house all the people have left. There are people in 2 houses. We are all drinking water.

Then, she wrote on another page,

I am saying get my mother a job. That is my demand.

She also wrote me a letter trying to add more fullness to her explanation:

My dear mamiji,

Namaste. I am well here. You give me a copy. I am happy with you. You give me a pencil. The story book was very good. My mother wants me to leave this school.

Shakun

She used all the symbolic tools she had to effect her purpose. She seemed to be trying to infuse some coherence and order in her mobile world. Her parents' labour contract was due to finish and she knew they would have to move once again. She did not want to move and thought that if her mother found a job in the neighbourhood, she could stay in the same school. She used the symbolic tools she had acquired to take action in her world. Using drawing and writing, she solicited my help, perceiving herself as someone who could stake a claim for, she made her "demand" to have her own needs considered. She was negotiating the boundaries between her home world, the adult world, herself, and her school world. She tried to express the tensions between these along with her need to resolve them.

Harnessing the Power of Story

Shakun comes from a mobile world and she seemed to use literacy as a symbolic tool to make sense of her world. She tried to craft some coherence in her moving world,

moving between genres, symbol systems, imagined contexts, real contexts, virtual texts and actual ones. More than any of the other children, she harnessed the power of story which, according to Bruner (1986), leads to “conclusions not about certainties in an aboriginal world, but about the varying perspectives that can be constructed to make experience comprehensible” (p. 37).

Though Shakun, enjoyed the poems and dramatization like the other children, most of all she enjoyed stories. She wrote prolifically, producing three stories in one hour at times. She had understood the two principles at work in a narrative — “centering,” which is maintaining the unity of the story, and “chaining” or sequencing of ideas and events (Applebee, 1978). The stories were not personal narratives, but animal tales, myths and legends featuring winners and losers (see Table 6.1 for a list of topics she wrote about). According to Vico (1725), myth is the instrument of imagination for making sense of the surrounding world and giving it some shape and meaning. Shakun seemed to use myths and legend in this sense.

Some of Shakun’s stories were retold versions, some were her own versions of stories she had read. She valued her stories and developed a pride of authorship, refusing to allow others to plagiarise her work. She felt free to interpret official assignments to suit her own purposes and wrote stories while the others were engaged in picture compositions or dictation. Britton (1982) comments that “the world created in stories children write is a world they control and this may be a source of deep satisfaction” (p. 63). Perhaps this was Shakun’s way of exercising control over her world.

Over the course of the study, I saw Shakun rely less on drawing for support, using it more to illustrate her stories. She also needed less dialogic support from me. Her texts became independent bearers of her meaning. She had moved to “direct” symbolism,

which according to Vygotsky (1978), is the final stage in a child's developmental history as a writer. In this way, I saw Shakun develop as a writer, during the course of the study. She built rapidly on the dialogic support provided by her peers, myself and the various texts we read, sang, dramatised and wrote and also on the symbolic support from the new symbolic tools she appropriated and orchestrated as she explored the complexity of meaning and written language.

Finding respectful addressal and response, she learned to symbolise not just speech, but meanings and "voice" (Dyson, 1991). Using language as a resource (Halliday, 1976) to take social action (Dyson, 1993; Gumperz, 1981), she used written language to perform a variety of functions which I classify thus:

- communicative
- transactional
- evaluative
- descriptive or representational
- expressive
- inventive
- narrative
- self-presentational

The above terms are defined thusly: the *communicative* function of writing involves using writing to interact with others or address someone, i.e., to send messages, write letters, greetings, thank-you notes, make requests, demands, complaints. The *transactional* function involves using writing to do the "social work" (Dyson, 1994) required to establish and maintain relationships, negotiate interpersonal boundaries and intersubjective social spaces. Written language is used for *evaluative* functions in making

normative judgments like commendations, stating preferences and expressing appreciation or dislike. Using writing to perform the *descriptive* function entails making literal reportive descriptions of places, events, objects, persons or pictures. Writing is used for *expressive* functions, when used to poetically or aesthetically describe or imaginatively compose, as in poetry. The *inventive* function involves using writing to invent or imaginatively reconstrue a situation, relationship event or person. Writing is used to perform the *narrative* function in composing stories, retelling them or in storying events and experiences real or imagined. Writing performs a *self-presentational* function when it is used to make a statement about oneself or to position oneself in relation to another person, institution or structure, i.e., to present oneself to others in some particular way for some particular purpose.

She used drawing

- to illustrate text
- to communicate messages
- to complement meanings
- to create meanings (e.g. her picture stories)
- to construct supportive contexts for her writing

She interpreted official tasks and texts in her own way to suit her own purposes and, in the process, developed also as a decision maker and risk taker, realising herself as an autonomous, purposive person. As she learned to control various symbol systems, she grew in symbolic power and as she used writing to voice her demands and make claims, she grew in dialogic power. She had developed from a copier of texts to a composer of her own texts and owning her texts, she also owned herself more, growing thus in personal power.

RAJESH

Finding a voice

His Home World

Rajesh is a thin, gaunt-looking boy, with short-cropped hair and a very wide smile. His large, black eyes leap out from his thin face, his look as tentative as his smile. He has a high-pitched voice and a shy, retiring demeanour. Rajesh lives with his mother, his sister, and younger brother in Habirpur, which is 1.5 kms from the school. Habirpur is like any other village in the area — dirt roads and mud huts lined one next to the other. Rajesh lives in a mud hut which has a raised platform in front, a courtyard inside with a couple of rooms around it — one served as their kitchen and store and the other as the bedroom. The family did all their living in the verandah and the courtyard. Since there was no electricity, they lit oil lamps when it got dark in the evenings and went to bed early in order to save on fuel cost, as did most of the people in the village.

Rajesh's father, now dead, used to hire himself out as a labourer in the fields. His mother now does the same work. His sister Sheela is about 18 years old, married and expecting to leave for her husband's home soon, she also works in the fields as a labourer. Sonu, the youngest child in the family, is 7 and does not go to school as yet. His mother and their neighbour argued about Rajesh's age, finally settling at 10 years. Rajesh is the only member of the family who has any education and his mother has her hopes pinned on him. She hopes that he will "progress in life and not be a 'mere' labourer like her and her husband." She values education greatly for her sons and intends to educate Rajesh till high school. She seemed to have great faith in education and its benefits, defining a good school as one in which the "teachers taught and the children learnt how to read and write." She was pleased that Rajesh spent much of his time at

home with his school work. "I don't know what he does but he certainly spends a lot of time learning his lessons," she said. The only books available to Rajesh are his Hindi and Math text books, 2 notebooks and a story book I had lent him. He valued these greatly, keeping them very carefully in his school bag, which he insisted on wearing while posing for a picture (see photograph 3 in Appendix B).

An Uncertain Follower

Rajesh had a beautifully formed handwriting, of which he was very proud as it earned him the esteem of his teacher and friends. He worked and played in his friendship group composed of Ravi, Arjun, Changalal and Rammilan. He considered them all as being better spellers than he, so he revelled in the fact that his handwriting "is better than any one else's." He formed his letters very carefully and took a long time over them. Rajesh was a copier. Having no faith in his ability to spell, he copied faithfully from the text and from the blackboard, but most of all he copied from his friends. When faced with an official assignment like dictation or sentence composing, he moved close to his friends, either copying from their books or asking for spelling, seeking confirmations even when he knew the spelling:

Rajesh: How do I write Santosh?

Ravi: S/ a/n/t

Rajesh: Does it take an /o/?

Ravi: Yeah - S - a - n - t - o - s - h.

He not only copied freely from others, he also helped as freely wherever he could, as seen in the episode described in Chapter 5, where he brought his book for Kamlesh to model his sentences on.

For Rajesh, writing meant copying from the text or the blackboard or someone else's text in a beautiful handwriting. Owning it meant having it on his slate or page. His focus was on the precise and ornate formation of the letters. The letters seemed to symbolise only sounds and words, though not his own. At this point, he was "drawing" the letters which had aesthetic meaning for him and gave him the sense that he was writing, much in the sense in which an early writer scribbles, pretending to write. He had not yet reached a first order symbolism.

Rajesh was very afraid to take risks or follow an independent path, unable to perceive his own competencies and own them enough to use them for himself. Even though he relied so heavily on copying, he did have a fairly sound sense of the letter sound association required for spelling. At times, when he copied, he provided editorial proofing help, as is evident in this episode:

Arjun is composing a song we have sung and Rajesh is copying from his notebook

Arjun: tara (star)

Rajesh: What?

Arjun: I've written tara

Rajesh (copying from Arjun's book): T - a - r - a. OK so tara chamka
cham - hey what's this you've written?

Arjun: Chamakta (shines) (He's written "chamta - the 'k' is missing")

Rajesh: Why didn't you make the 'k' - ch/ma/k - k/ta

Arjun (re-reading his text): Tara chamakta

Rajesh: Where's the /k/? You've written 'chamta' - see

Arjun: Oh — forgot (corrects his word and carries on composing).

Rather than lacking ability, Rajesh seemed to be afflicted with a fear of autonomy, which might be rooted in his personal history. He is the first literate in his family. Landless, fatherless, the eldest son of a widow, he knows the family's hopes are all pinned on him. This is probably a tremendous pressure on a 10 year old, unsupported by any literate member or literacy in his home. Lower caste labourer, widow in a feudal patriarchal casteist society, his mother's social place, and his too consequently, is not one that inspires hope and it is one that is based on respect for the authority of one's "better." It is in following rules that survival and security lie, and this is what he seemed to do.

Further, the literacy instruction in the classroom emphasised *following*, in terms of correct modeling of the rules of language (i.e., spelling and handwriting), and this is what he worked at. His guiding purpose was to do literacy and to get it right, so he used all the supports he could find. He asked for and found much social support from his peers, but he had not found any symbolic supports as yet. He even copied drawings. As seen in the episode described earlier, even as he criticised Ravi he asked him to draw for him, having no faith in his own ability to draw and not yet having learnt to use drawing as a supportive context for writing.

Finding His Own Words: Tentative Moves

Selective copying: Having initiated the "friends" assignment, I called Rajesh to me and he managed to generate these sentences with my help:

US: Write your name

Rajesh writes "Rajesh Kumar Class 2, village: Habirpur." (This was the way in which the children signed off their slate assignments every day.)

US: Who is your friend?

Rajesh: Rammilan

US: OK so write his name now.

Rajesh writes, "Ram Milan Kumar Class 2."

He then moved over to Rammilan and copied from his notebook, "Both are friends from Habirpur. Live happily." He then went over to the group around Shakun. Shakun was reading out her sentences loudly as she wrote. Sheela and Geeta were copying from her. He joined the group and copied the following sentence from her notebook:

Mamiji teaches us poems. She greets us with a namaskar. We greet her with a namaskar.

He did not copy Rammilan's text about friendship (which he could have) since it is about them both and was more extended than his own. He seemed to be reaching out for support, using Shakun's words to express his own purposes. Perhaps he was learning that one can copy not only words, but speech — even if it is someone else's. One can copy it to say what one wants it to. Like Shakun, perhaps he, too, was trying to establish his circle of mutuality. After this, he hovered around me every time the class began a composing assignment, waiting for me to provide the oral support he needed.

He even began to copy selectively from his peers, as illustrated by this episode:

I had suggested to Ravi that he draw and write about his mango grove. Rajesh picked up on Ravi's idea and moved closer to him to copy. He first drew two large trees, then seeing that Ravi had drawn 6 small ones, he erased his own and drew 6 small ones like Ravi's. Though he had no orchard of his own, Rajesh copied Ravi's composition:

There are 35 trees in this Rajesh's garden. Now they are flowering. In two months they will bear fruit

He copied two more sentences and then erased them. He watched as Ravi and Changalal wrote about their mango groves for a while and then moved over to chat with Kamlesh the rest of the time.

Perhaps he saw that these words belonged too much to Ravi, and he had difficulty making them his own. He had not yet found words of his own to write and, not owning a

mango grove, these words did not describe his world. Perhaps he learnt that words can represent meanings which, though shared, also come with individual “accents” (Volosinov).

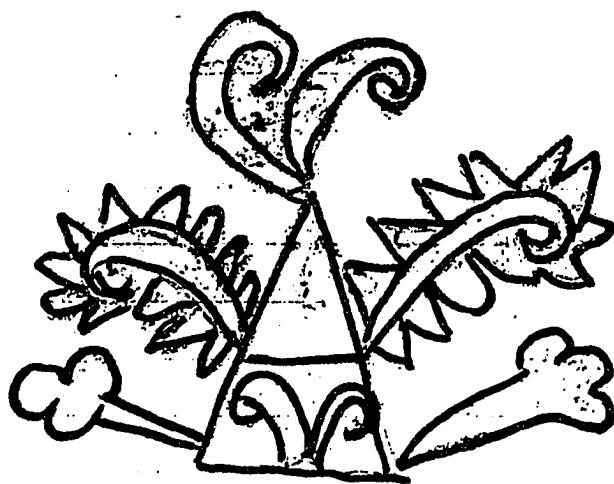
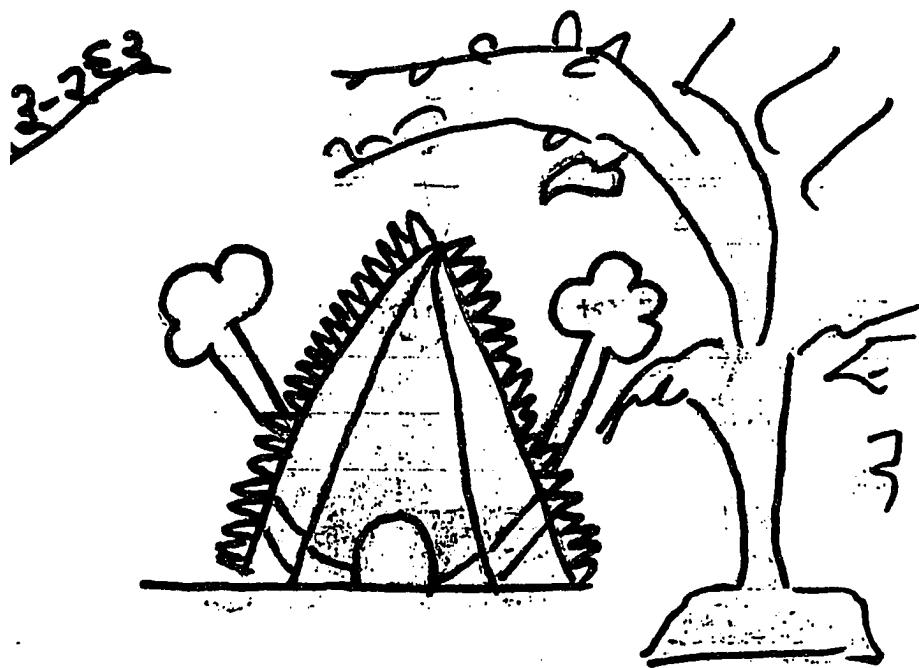
Moves towards independence: Rajesh first showed signs of independence in his drawing. He continued to copy writing from his friends despite my insistence that he “write on his own” and “from his own mind.” Though he worked with his friend, Changalal, on a drawing of a house, he copied only the first figure (see Fig. 6.6), adding his own accent by making a large mango on one of the branches. He drew another house at the bottom. Enlarging it and embellishing it, he drew another one on the next page, under the butterfly that he asked me to draw for him, which he labeled “butterfly.” He then asked me to draw a parrot for him, and he wrote the following sentences, with dictated help from me and Ravi:

“The parrot speaks. The name of the parrot is Mithu. Ram Ram.”

Insert Figure 6.6 here

Rajesh is beginning to appropriate drawing as a symbolic support for his writing. The houses are not like any houses in the village, his drawing as ornamental as his writing; he is still drawing for aesthetic purposes, colouring his figures meticulously. But he is using his figures to contextualise his writing.

FIGURE 6.6. Rajesh: Moves toward independence



He wrote a narrative on his own a few days later. Mrs. S had just told the children about her bus catching fire that morning. The children were engaged in writing out their own narrative accounts of this incident. Rajesh came to me for help. He stood book and pencil in hand, waiting for help:

Rajesh: How shall I write?

I prompted him with questions and composed each sentence for him, after which he wrote it out himself, coming to me after each sentence, using our talk as support for his writing.

“Babenji was (coming) this morning.”

US: And then what happened?

Rajesh: Everyone started yelling.

US: Yes, so write that.

Rajesh: What shall I write?

US: Write, “everyone started yelling.”

Rajesh goes back and writes out “On the way, everyone started yelling.” He brings his copy to me.

US: And then?

Rajesh: Raakhi started crying. (Raakhi is Mrs. S’ infant daughter, and Rajesh is very fond of her)

US: So write, “Raakhi started crying.”

In this way, Rajesh wrote out the whole incident, persisting with the task till he had completed it. Though he composed the sentences on his own, and the narrative structure was his own, he needed oral support and confirmation to organise his writing

and he *knew* that he needed it and came for help. He did this increasingly, driven by his need to become a writer in this new sense. He began to focus less on his handwriting, which was valued less now by his friends, too. They commented on it less and more on his drawing or his text.

Insert Figure 6.7 here

This morning Bahenji (was) coming. On the way every one started yelling. Bahenji's Raakhi started crying. Every one started jumping off. There was a lot of noise. All the men brought water. Every one started putting out the fire. The fire was put out. Bahenji sat in the bus once again. Bahenji then came to school.

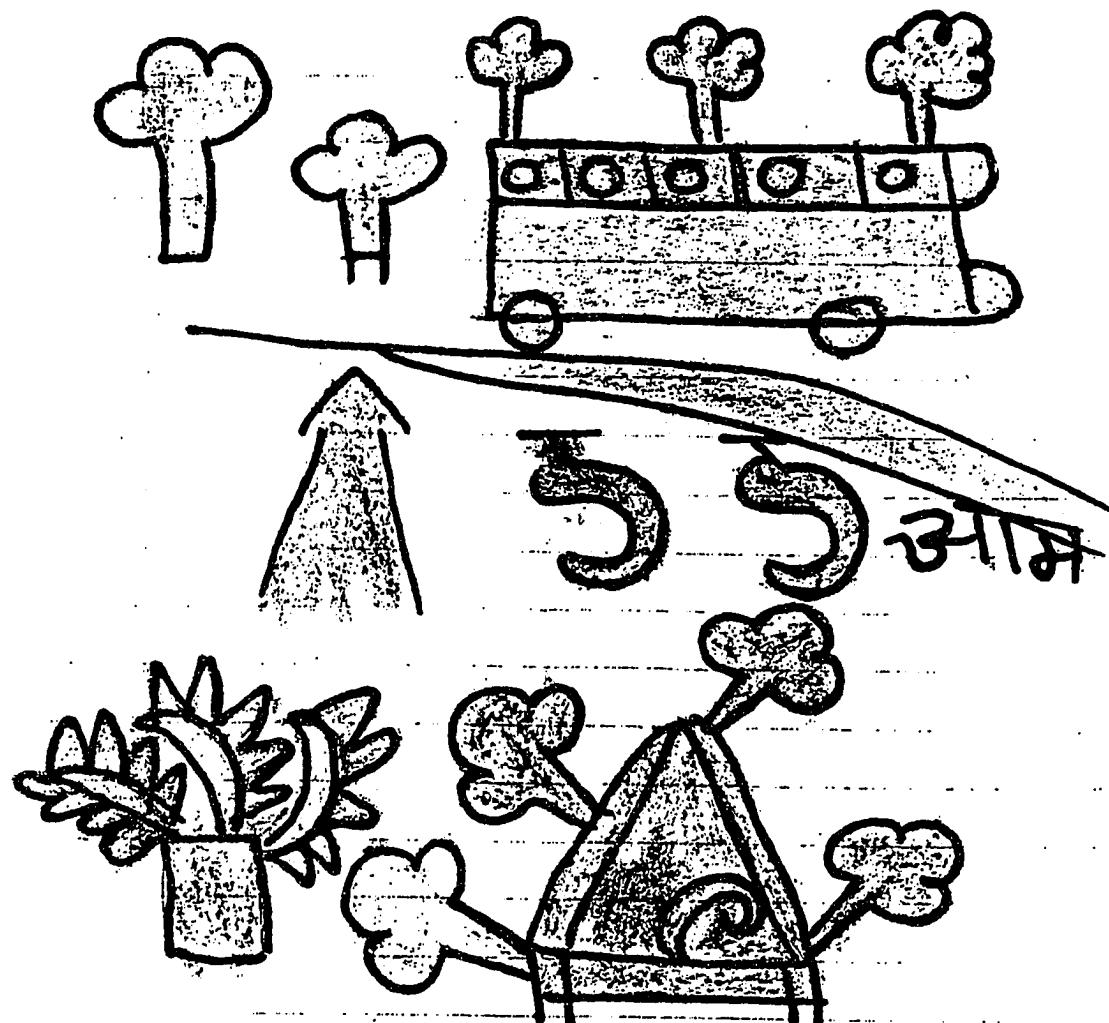
He illustrated his narrative, and his drawing was representative (see Fig. 6.7) and symbolic — The trees mark the country side, the huts the village and the mangoes stand for mango orchards. Rajesh is beginning to see the symbolic function of drawing, and he is beginning to make the connection between speech and writing. He added two symbolic supports — drawing and talk. He responded to the new definition of writing now functioning in the classroom and the new demands and expectations it generated. It also generated a requirement for new supports which he went actively looking for, physically moving from friend to me to other friends.

Real Words

Three months into the study, Rajesh wrote the following narratives by himself, relying less on supportive talk from me and more on contextual and personal supports like the topic, its relevance to him and his own purposes. He wrote about his friend Dashant and the game they played together. I started him off with the first sentence, "My friend's name is Dashant," after which he wrote:

If Dashant comes to my house, then I will play bat ball with him. And we (will have a) match and who ever has more runs he wins. I will win.

FIGURE 6.7. Rajesh finds a symbolic support in drawing



He did not need a drawing as a supportive context. Rajesh seemed to move to a second order symbolism — he was writing speech, not mine but his own. He seemed to have transform our “inter-personal” composing into an “intra-personal” composing (Vygotsky). He announced his intention “to win,” which I interpreted as a sign of increased confidence in himself and the possibilities of his life.

On another day he wrote this narrative, choosing the topic himself —

(A) My house is in Habirpur. It is a mud hut and my brother and sister are there. One is called Sonu and my sister's name is Sheela.

In an earlier assignment from his copying days Rajesh had copied this from his friend -

(B) My house is nice. My father and mother live in my house. They all sleep in the house. There is a tap in my house. We all drink water.

His recent, composed piece (A) is more real, not a school-task like the latter one (B). It is contextualised in a real context. He talks about his brother and sister and is willing to say his house is “kuccha” — of mud instead of being generally “nice.” He writes about his brother and sister using real names, while in the earlier piece he had mentioned a father and mother, even though he has no father and knows that I know this. Rajesh is beginning to write real words, his own words about his world - to use Freire's words - he is beginning to “write his world.” He is appropriating language and infusing it with his own “accents.”

Building Cultural Bridges

I gave all the children a notebook for home use during the summer vacation, in order to see what they would write when left absolutely free to do as they pleased. Rajesh drew several animals, traced some, birds, trees, some geometrical patterns, fruits,

the hand pump, with and without birds on it, women at the hand pump, a peacock. He then wrote a 3 page description of all his drawings addressed to me:

Mamiji see I have made a bird. Made some guavas and see I've made some leaves. Now see I've made some pigeons and see are the trees good or not. Mamiji see now I have made flowers.

After every 2-3 lines he adds:

Mamiji see is it good or not — when you go to your house show it to everyone that is this good or not.

While many of the other children copied poems in their books, Rajesh used the freedom of the activity and the privacy of his home, to experiment with drawing, exploring both the symbol systems he had acquired, exploring the connections between both. He wrote me no messages during the term when we had many face-to-face interactions. He suddenly began to use writing to communicate with me, asking for my evaluation and more significantly asking me to take it to my world, reaching out to my world with his writing, seeking to bridge the distance between our worlds. By directing me to his pictures “See I have made some pigeons” - he tries to achieve “joint reference,” which as Bruner says is way of “achieving a kind of solidarity,” binding two people in a “transactional calibration,” not only of minds but of worlds. He is building cultural bridges, reaching out with his writing and pointing out that *cultural bridges are two way channels*. As I came to his world, so he reached out to mine. He uses his writing to communicate, to bridge distance and to display his skill.

Inventing Imagined Worlds

Rajesh began to use writing to imagine and fantasise with. In an official assignment in which the children were asked to write about all the things they liked to do, Rajesh wrote this piece towards the end of the study:

I like the fair a lot and I like drama and I like apples and I like mangoes and I like my mother and father and I like my mamiji and my teacher and I like food and I like books and there are many mangoes in my orchard and when the mangoes ripen then I will give my mamiji mangoes from my orchard and then she will like them a lot.

Rajesh has no father and no orchard, but he has learnt to invent imagined worlds and possible worlds with his writing. He has acquired symbolic power and is able to create symbolic worlds, hoped for worlds and wished for worlds. In this and the next piece he adopts what Britton calls the “spectator role,” which includes fantasising and day dreaming, his writing has also acquired the inventive function — in which he is “*making something with writing*” (Britton, 1982).

He composed the following piece in response to an assignment when I gave them the option of writing either a story, a dream, a personal anecdote or anything they wished.

My Story

Tonight I dreamt that I went to my mamiji’s house and I liked the house very much. Mamiji received me very lovingly and I sat in mamiji’s car and I went all over the city. I liked that very much. Then with mamiji, I went to Bahenji’s house. There I met Bahenji’s mother and she received me very lovingly. She sent for tea from the restaurant and I went with love. On the way I met Ekta in the lane. I did not recognise her but she did. She took me home and we sat for a while. Then Ekta showed me some flowers and I liked the pretty, pretty flowers. Now I think I’ll be leaving. Namaste to all. Namaste to Raakhi too.

Rajesh had learnt to take symbolic action. He “made” a cultural bridge between our worlds and walked over to the other side, where he was treated lovingly and with respect by all the people he knew in that world. This was the way he expected to be treated. *He traversed social power boundaries and distances, positioned himself socially, staked his claim to love and respect and created a respectable, hospitable place for*

himself in a socially distant world, with his writing. He envisioned possibilities for himself - a possible self and a possible world, and reached out for them symbolically. In appropriating literacy as an expressive, inventive tool and a self-presentational medium, he acquired the power of imagination or envisagement as he became a writer.

Towards the end of the study, Rajesh became a confident composer, writing easily without any help from me, using me as his addressee and occasional helper, leaning on his friends for social support and occasional spellings, but writing his own words and meanings, for purposes of his own. His composed texts had a distinct dialogic character, so that though he could now symbolise his meaning directly in writing, his writing and its meaning was contextualised in the dialogue. The writing was always addressed to someone, either to me or to his friends and its addressive context provided the support he now needed. It was the dialogic import of his writing that he valued.

Rajesh grew also as an autonomous person, a decision maker, a risk taker and a choice maker. As is evident from his “story” presented above, he perceived himself as a person worthy of respect. He seemed to grow in personal power. Most importantly, he seemed to find his voice through the medium he used for expressing it and it seemed to grow stronger the more he exercised it, thus acquiring dialogic power. Like Shakun he learnt that writing could be used to perform a variety of functions for purposes of his own.

SHEELA

A person addressed and addressing

At Home

Sheela is an eight year old, tall but slightly built little girl. She has large expressive eyes set in a round face and a wide disarming, charming smile (see photograph 4 in Appendix B). She lives in Sannasibagh with her parents and brothers and sister. Her house a few minutes walk from the school, looks much like Rajesh's. Youngest of 4 children, Sheela's older sister, 14, is enrolled in the 6th grade in the same school. Her oldest brother Vijay is an 8th grade drop out. His wife and infant son live in the same house. He runs a cycle repair shop in the village and is the chief provider for the entire family. There is another brother, enrolled in high school in Sehlamau, another neighbouring village. He has been trying to graduate from high school for the last 2 years and is a source of great concern to his family. Both Sheela's parents are illiterate.

When interviewed, Sheela's mother displayed apathy towards her daughters' education. Though she had enrolled both her girls in school, she expressed sceptical doubts about its value for girls:

I'm going to marry them off as soon as they pass 8th grade. What will they do with literacy. This is a village.

She complained that her daughters did very little housework "all they do is go to school and loaf." She had very little to offer by way of comment about the effectiveness of the school, saying that she really couldn't judge it given that she was illiterate.

School would be good, if it didn't cost them anything and if it paid some economic dividends at the end.

Very concerned that her son graduate from high school, she discussed her son's lack of proficiency in school at length, ignoring all my comments about Sheela's progress in school. She saw nothing wrong with corporal punishment:

Of course you have to hit them. If you don't hit them how will they learn?

Our conversation took place in front of Sheela, her sister Bimla and many of Sheela's friends, who had accompanied us. They listened attentively, giggling at comments like this. Sheela sat with her nephew in her lap and said nothing throughout the interview.

There was a sign on their entrance door that said "WELCOME" in English and "Vijay" in Hindi. This is unusual for the village, and I expected to find more literacy materials at home. This turned out not to be the case, however, the only print available to Sheela being her own text books, her sister's texts and some of her brothers.

Sheela's home environment is not a very unusual one in the village, especially in its gender stance. Girls are supposed to be silent little creatures, who should try to make themselves useful around the house as soon as they possibly can. Both Sheela's mother and her sister-in-law (herself a third grade dropout) grudged the girls the hours they spent in school. Since the only end in mind for their daughters is marriage as soon as they attain puberty, Sheela's parents take very little interest in their daughter's education.

At School

Though very shy and diffident in her relationship with her teacher and me, Sheela participated actively in her friendship group, laughing and chatting with Geeta, Saroj, Mira and Shakun as she worked and played, allowing them to copy from her, sharing her things, reading together and trading texts and competencies. I saw Sheela and her friends, more than any of the other children bring in texts from home — especially poems on scraps of newspaper or from their siblings' text books and they would all copy these onto their notebooks, trying to increase their stock of textual materials. Sheela liked to sit at the back far away from the teacher's gaze and tried not to attract too much attention. A very careful child, she was afraid of making mistakes and worked cautiously and

painstakingly — whether it was drawing or writing. Not a risk taker, she was happy to follow Shakun's lead, using her ideas and copying from her book. She seemed to be groping her way cautiously, looking around for help, leaning on her friends for support.

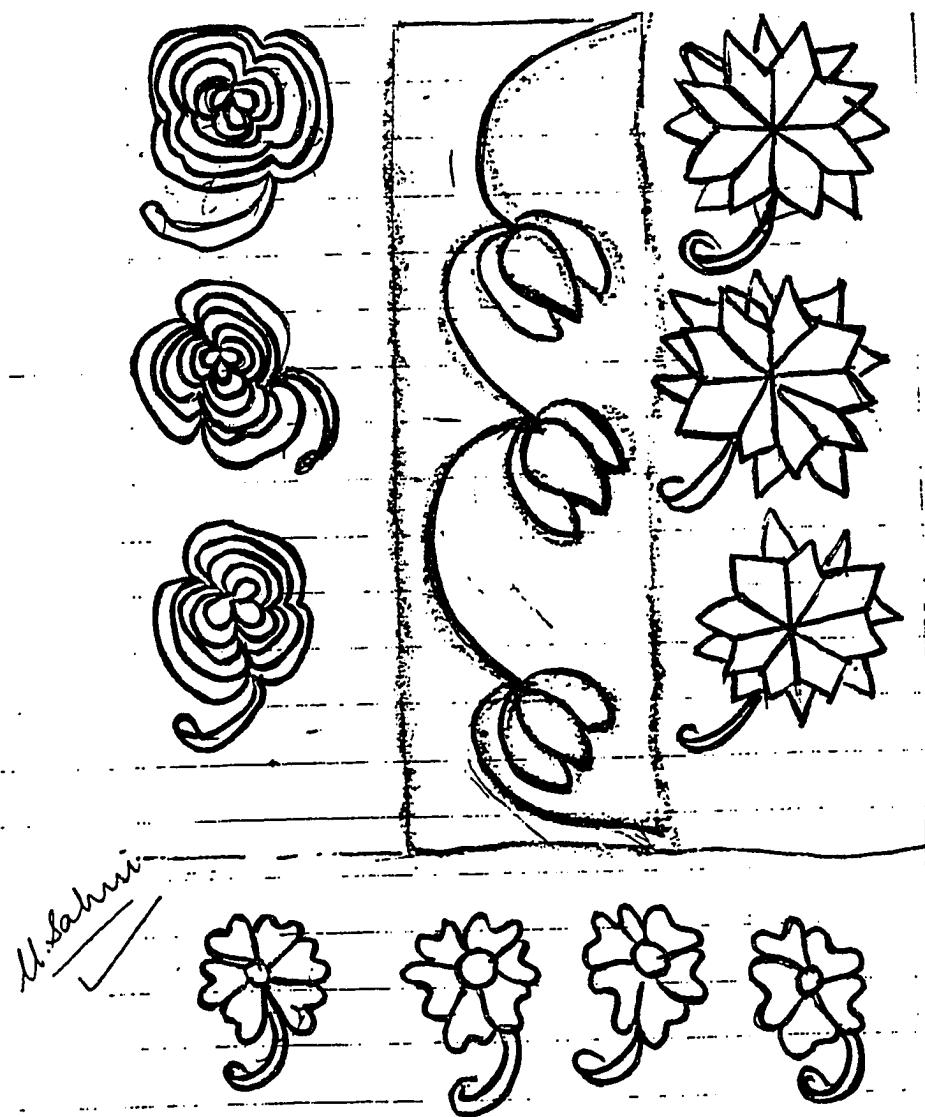
Early Conception of Literacy and Competencies

Sheela was very interested in writing and reading, working busily at all the official and unofficial literacy tasks in the classroom. Like the other children, she conceived of literacy as “copying” print. She had good orthographic control over the letters, could make the letter sound connection, and could take dictation of simple sentences. She had not yet understood that speech could be written down and was unable to generate any sentences of her own. Sheela was one of the few children who liked to draw and drew flowers and saree borders for fun (see Fig. 6.8). She told me she had learnt these from her sister, who got this from the art class in 5th grade. She had not, however, learnt to use her pictures as supportive contexts for writing as yet.

Insert Figure 6.8 here

Sheela used written language like an object to be transferred from page to page and handed to others as in the form of the poems she so liked to share with her friends. It was still an external “thing,” a “fun” thing, to be played with, a valued thing, to be stored and an attribute to have, one that lent prestige. She had not yet discovered the potency of written language as a subjective and intersubjective transactional medium, nor its constitutive, constructive and creative potential as a symbolic tool with which to represent, create and construct personal and interpersonal meanings.

FIGURE 6.8. Sheela's saree borders



Contextualising/Internalising Literacy: Finding Personal and Interpersonally Relevant Contexts.

Early in the study, Sheela wrote, “I greet mamiji with folded hands,” and she brought it to show me. It was her first sentence generated without any help from me. It was her way of making a connection with me, adopting me as addressee and forming her circle of mutuality. She had found a *dialogic context* in which to embed her writing.

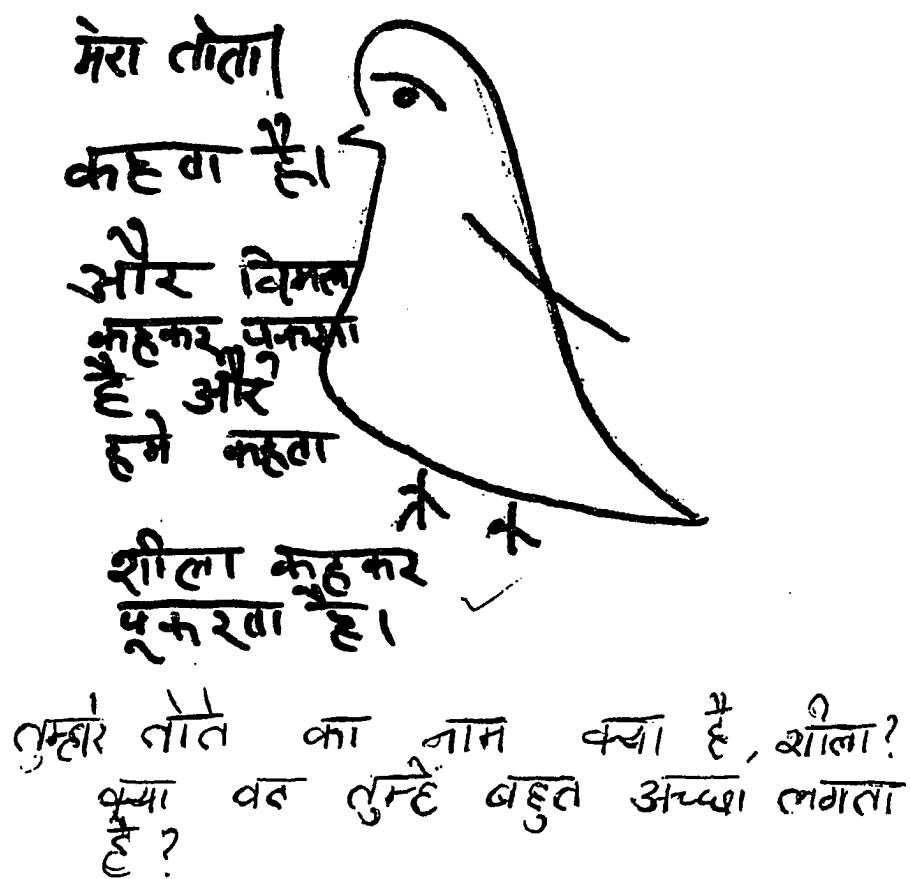
Sheela began to find other contextual supports for her writing. As described earlier, she wrote responsively to Shakun, “Your ball is pink.” The sentence emerged from — and was embedded in — the *social context* which was physically present in the social moment. It was in her mind, and her writing was embedded in her purpose to communicate with her friend, writing speech instead of speaking it.

Like Rajesh and Shakun, Sheela, too, began to discover drawing as a symbolic support. She copied a poem about a parrot from her friend and brought it to me, asking me to draw a parrot for her. As I was drawing, she told me she had a parrot at home. Expressing interest, I told her she could write about her parrot. She gave me very tentative look, willing to try me out to see what she would find, surprised, too, that I should be asking her to write and draw about herself (see Fig. 6.9). She then took the drawing, coloured it and generated these sentences:

My parrot speaks and he calls out ‘Bimla’ (her sister) and calls out to me, calling out, ‘Sheela.’

Insert Figure 6.9 here

FIGURE 6.9. Sheela's parrot



She built on the dialogic support she got from me to compose these sentences, as I prompted with questions like, “What does your parrot like to talk about?” Most importantly, she had found a real, live *personal context* to write about. In response to her, I wrote, “What is your parrot’s name, Sheela? Do you like him a lot?” hoping to firm up the circle of mutuality that she had begun to build. Interested in my interest in her, and responding cautiously, Sheela began to write and draw her worlds, adopting me as her addressee. The few minutes I spent with each child negotiating topics, providing verbal scaffolding or drawing supportive contexts, were moments of individual addressal for them and extremely important for Sheela. Her writing developed as she discovered its transactional potential, that with it she could build and maintain relationships with distant others.

Building Relationships: Her Guiding Purpose

The main purpose that seemed to drive Sheela’s writing was maintaining the relationship with me and through me, with her teacher. She continued to write me messages, expressing her appreciation for the poems and the responsive addressal, which she characterised as “love.” These were the only sentences she composed in the beginning, addressing me always in the third person:

Mamiji loves us a lot. She teaches well and bahanji also teaches us well.

In another “message,” she borrowed Ravi’s idea to write about the car and wrote:

Car: Mamiji’s car is brown. She comes to our school. And she teaches us poetry and loves us a lot.

Being “loved,” featured increasingly in her writing. In a more extended composition later in the study she wrote,

If I was a parrot then I would eat guavas, jamun (a berry like fruit) and apples and oranges and I would sit on trees. Would eat many nice things. Would fly with my green wings. A parrot is the best bird. The parrot calls out "Mithu, Mithu." If you catch the parrot and keep it at home then it will run around in the cage. A parrot has a red beak. If the parrot was in Sheela's house then it would love me a lot. I would feed it bananas.

The subject shifts constantly as Sheela alternated between writing about herself, her parrot and "love." She alternated between a sense of a subjective self that describes objects and labels and "a narrated self" that weaves into a story elements from other senses of the self (agency, intentions, causes, goals and so on) (Stern, 1985, p. 174). In writing, she seemed to have found a self-referential and a self-objectifying tool.

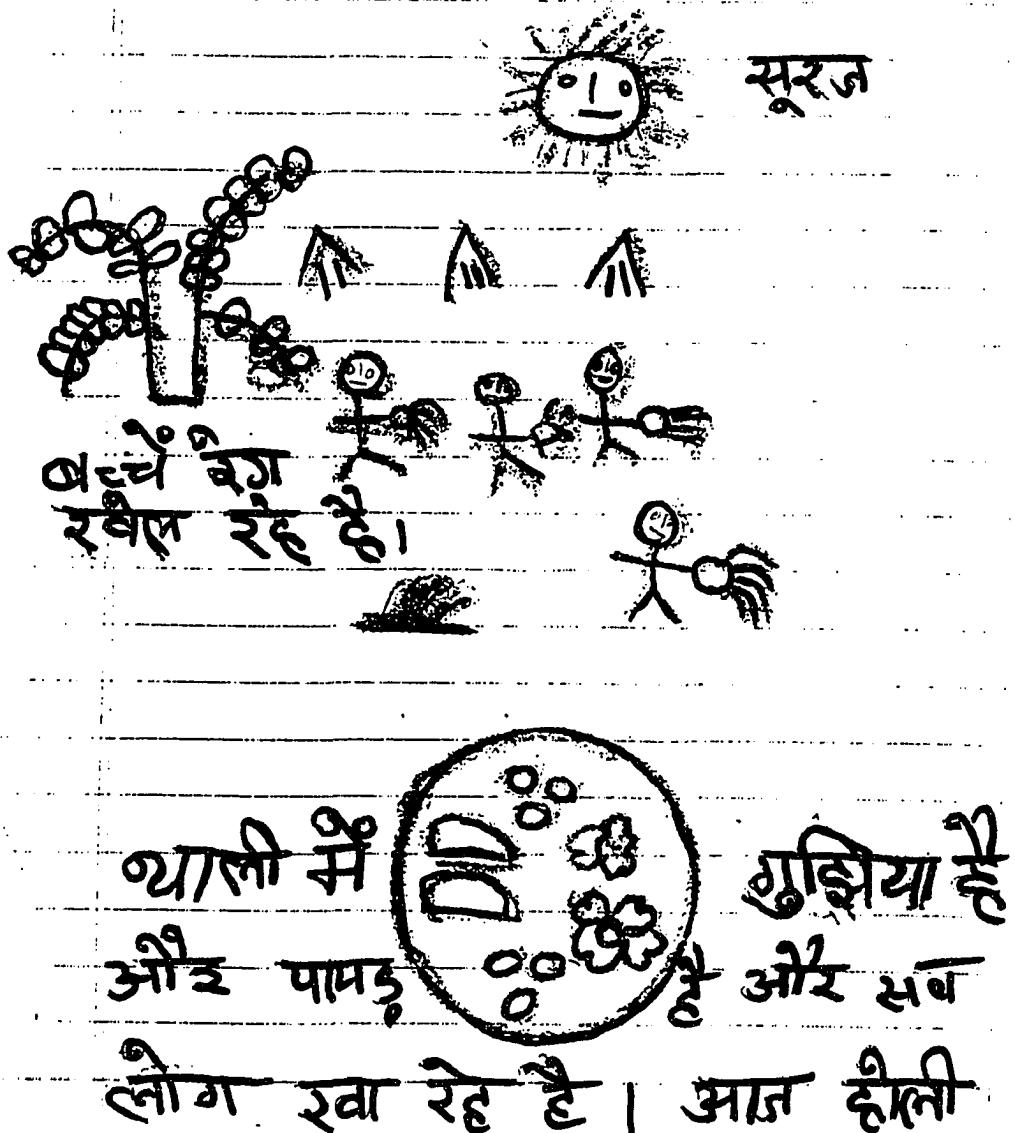
Expressing Personal Worlds

Sheela stayed close to dictated forms and would not experiment with drawing, unless she found a context which gave her an opportunity to express her personal world. She first began to use drawing as a symbolic support when she wrote about Holi (an Indian festival of colours). She drew a picture (see Fig. 6.10), writing all around it to express her meaning. She drew the plate with the food in it, labeled it, "there are gujiyas and papad in the plate and everyone is eating it. Today is Holi." She didn't draw people around the plate, using writing to refer to them instead. The words stand for the people eating from the plate. She used the drawing to organise her writing, and used both symbolic media to express her meaning. She wrote this narrative to go with it:

We played with colours on Holi and had great fun. We throw colours on each others. Saroj threw colour on me and it felt cold. When I had a bath it felt very cold.

Her composition is supported by the social and personal context of her personal world and by the symbolic support provided by the drawing. She first tried to represent the narrative with her drawing, labeled it, and then wrote out the narrative.

FIGURE 6.10. HOLI - Sheela uses drawing to organize and express meaning



Though she participated interestedly in all the literacy activities in the class, she bloomed as a composer most in the context of personal writing, as she declared, once heading her composition, “I liked this dictation very much.” It was not a dictation, but she had no other label for the stories she composed, so she called it, “dictation.”

She picked this topic out of several options they had been offered:

Sunita (her friend) was coming to school. On the way she saw a golden stick. She picked it up. Sunita made the stick dance (waved it around) and it gave off shining stars and the stars began to say — Sunita we will give you whatever you ask for. Sunita said that clothes and laddoos (candy) to eat. A plate full of laddoos came. You should not eat it (she thought). She took this to the police than the police said that you did very well. Then the police loved Sunita a lot.

Bruner (1990) mentions that “stories define the range of canonical characters, the settings in which they operate, the actions that are permissible and comprehensible (p. 91). Sheela’s story line is well in consonance with the stories in their text book, taking the same moral stance. In the stories in the text book, children are portrayed as “good” little altruistic children denying themselves little pleasures in obedience to moral principles of honesty, being rewarded then with adult approval. Here she seemed to be negotiating the tensions between her own desires, her perception of their legitimacy and the legitimacy of her claims to them. She articulated her desires and her vision of herself as having no claims to them, but asserted her claim to “love” once again. She used writing to explore the tensions between her experienced self and the permissible self as officially given to her by the stories in her school text book. It seemed to give her the opportunity to objectify her self, to step back and take a self-reflexive look, or adopt the “spectator role” as Britton calls it, important in the construction of a self.

Writing as Social Presentation of “Self”

Sheela realised that writing was a way of committing herself socially or presenting herself socially and was careful about what she committed and how she presented her self socially. In trying to help her compose some sentences on herself, I asked her what her father did for a living.

Sheela: (after a brief pause) Nothing.

US: Oh, then who supports the family?

Sheela: My brother supports us all.

She brought her writing to me, in which she had written

My mother, father and brother live in my house. My brother pays the household expenses. Mother and father are there.

She had erased the last two lines, however. When I asked her why she had erased them, she just took the book back, shaking her head, and said, “No, no.” Viewing this in the context of our conversation prior to the writing, it seems as though she did not want to admit that her father did nothing. Her writing had acquired real meaning, and she saw it not simply as descriptive but as a presentation of her personal world, and she wanted to be careful about how she presented it.

In another composition much later, the children were writing about their personal histories in school. She wrote:

I am my story

I am studying from class one to class three. My mother came to enroll me. My mother understood very well that is why my mother wanted to educate me — that if I educate my daughter it will be very beneficial to me. Mother says — I like

educating my daughter. My mother liked sending me to school so she sent me to school. (If) I will educate my daughter then it will be good for me.

My interview with Sheela's mother, during which Sheela was present, revealed her apathy towards her daughters' education. Sheela was using writing to re-construct her reality according to her own needs and desires. It was a "wished-for-representation" (Stern, 1985) and presentation of her life. She had discovered the constructive possibilities of writing — it's "constitutiveness" as Bruner (1990) calls it — "the capacity of language to create and stipulate realities of its own" (p. 89) and was using it to reinterpret her own lived reality, to "distort it and transcend it" (Stern, 1985, p.182).

Declaring Her "Self": Negotiating Difference and Distance

In the same composition she wrote:

Mamiji is my friend. Friend means she is Sheela's friend (using a synonym). Why do I like to study — because my teacher teaches then I like it. I like bahanji's way of speaking. Bahanji and Mamiji are very good friends and I am very good friends with bahanji and Mamiji.

She brought this to me and showed it to me, beaming brightly, as though she had made an important discovery. Mrs. S was standing close to me and read it over my shoulder. Not very pleased at the declaration of friendship she frowned gently:

"What's this about friends. How can you be friends?"

Sheela was undaunted. She stood her ground without saying anything and kept smiling at us. I find this very significant considering the traditional norms of distance between adult and child, teacher and student, upper and lower caste and class, specifically in the village and generally in the Indian context. Sheela seemed to transcend all these boundaries with this declaration of friendship. Friendship is a relationship of equality and she was

declaring herself an equal person staking her claim to an equal relationship. In using writing as a personally expressive and exploratory tool, Sheela had found its empowerment potential, that with it she could position herself in the power structure and alter the structure for herself as she did so (Bakhtin, 1986; Dyson, 1994). She had appropriated literacy as a symbolic tool to define her self in relation to others in a way that was compatible with her vision of herself. After this, she continued to write narratives peopled with "friends." She referred to another visitor to our classroom, also upper class adult, as "mataji (mother) is my friend." Then she extended her claims to friendship to Mrs. S' daughter Ekta as well, writing, "Ekta (Mrs. S' daughter) is my friend."

Her relationship with her peer-friend, Shakun, had changed over the course of the study. She now did not follow Shakun's lead and their relationship seemed to have assumed a more equal transactional nature. In this event, *Shakun* appropriated Sheela's statement of friendship and wrote in her composition on my next visit, "Mamiji and Raakhi are my friends and Kanchan is my friend." In the course of negotiating her relationship with me, Sheela had negotiated her relationship with her teacher and with her peers too.

Like Rajesh, Sheela used literacy to take symbolic action in the world, though they each did so in different ways. Rajesh built a bridge, trying to *bridge* power differences and distances. Sheela *dissolved* these differences by redefining herself and her relationship with the distant powerful others in the school context, an important one in her life. She declared the differences dissolved with her redefinition of our relationship in terms friendship. Retaining the third person form of addressal and the suffix of deference, "ji," she acknowledged the difference of age and the deference

traditionally due to it in the Indian cultural context, but with her declaration of friendship she refused the power differences.

Scott (1981) argues that “equality is not the elimination of difference and difference does not preclude equality” (p. 38). Sheela demonstrates this well. She sought to eliminate the power differences that are the salient differences which do preclude equality, since these are the differences that construct inequality. The binary opposition of equality/difference was deconstructed by the statement that her difference of age, caste and class did not preclude the equal relationship of friendship, though the power differences associated with the other differences did. Any equalising action must address itself to the salient differences, and she, Shakun and Rajesh both addressed themselves to it. This has significant implications for the theorists making the “cultural difference” argument, which I explore in the concluding chapter. Sheela transcended the power differences and the power distance and, thus, completed the symbolic circle of mutuality, the construction of which had driven her development as a writer.

Using Distance to Negotiate Distance

The way in which both Sheela and Rajesh used writing indicates that written language mediates relationships, especially differential power relationships in ways different from oral language. Writing facilitates or enables self-presentation in ways sometimes not possible in oral language. Both Rajesh and Sheela could not have *spoken* any of the things they wrote. Sheela could not have declared her status as “friend” in speech, given the power difference between us. Ricoeur (1981) posits distanciation as being constitutive of writing. It was the distanciation offered by writing that lent itself to self-presentation in a unique sense. Itself a distancing medium, it lent itself to a reduction of power distance and served as a bridging tool. It provided a safe distance from the powerful other, creating a space which is safer than the one created by verbal interaction,

thus enabling Sheela to make a statement that involved a risk. It created a larger intersubjective space than the one created by face-to-face verbal interaction, which latter space, in cases of power difference between the interlocutors, is disconcertingly small, and uncomfortably close. Sociolinguist Tannen, finds that in cases of power differences, the person with less power tends to use more indirect means of addressal than the one with more power. Writing, because of the distance it provides, is a more indirect channel of communication.

Writing lends itself to the construction and expression of “voice,” because of its distancing potential. It seemed to create a bounded context insulated from the real world, providing a private space for the construction of a possible self, a private identity in opposition to an externally imposed negative social identity. It also provides the space and time for the newly constructed self to coalesce and gain in strength before it is declared. According to Ricoeur (1981), a text creates “a proposed world, which I could inhabit and wherein I could project one of my ownmost possibilities” (p. 142).

Both Rajesh and Sheela used *writing* to aid them in their “agonistic struggle,” thus offering counter-evidence to Ong’s (1988) argument that the agonistic tone is the unique quality of oral language, which is closer to human life-worlds. According to him, oral language is “agonistically toned in that it is situated within a context of human struggle” (p. 133). Written language, according to him, Havelock, and Olson, is characterised by more decontextualised, abstract, objective thinking. Sheela and Rajesh, however, used writing in personally situated, subjectively contextualised ways, using the distancing property of writing to reduce power distances.

Over the course of the study, I saw Sheela grow not only as a writer but more importantly as a “person,” as she accessed literacy in a personally empowering way. Like

her friend Shakun, and her classmate Rajesh, she learnt how to use writing in a variety of ways to perform all the functions listed earlier in order to serve purposes of *her own*.

RAVI

Appropriating codes of power

Ravi is an impish looking 8-year-old. He has short-cropped hair, beautiful eyes, a bright smile and a very tentative, earnest manner (see photograph 5 in Appendix B). Comfortable in his friendship group, he enjoys easy camaraderie with them at play and work. In class, he is a very serious, careful student, working diligently at his assignments, monitoring his writing painstakingly with extensive self-directive dictation, to ensure correct spelling. He is one of the best spellers in the class and uses his competencies to manipulate his peer relationships. He enjoys leadership status because of his spelling proficiency and values it, valuing also his rating by the teachers as one of the “smart” students, he works at keeping it.

Eldest of four children, Ravi has one brother and two sisters, none of whom go to school as yet. His sisters are 2- and 4-years-old respectively, and his brother is 6. They all live in Kanar, a neighbouring village 1 km from the school. His house seemed much like Rajesh’s in its structure, and it is typically like the other homes in the lower caste quarter of the village. Ravi’s father owns a mango grove and is a fifth grade dropout. He looked like a very confident man, exuding a positive feeling about his son’s education and life prospects. Ravi’s mother who has had no schooling, sat in on our conversation during my visit to their home. She kept nodding her agreement to everything her husband said, getting no chance to answer any of the questions I addressed to her. Both Ravi’s parents seemed to have great faith in education and its potential for better life prospects for their son.

Bhagwandin, Ravi's father, hoped an education would get Ravi a white-collar city job. He was very forceful in his views that the children in the village should get English and every curricular subject that the city children had:

Our children already know a great deal about village life and what will they do with it. What are the opportunities in the village? They need to have their horizons widened, they should learn about the outside world. The city children are more intelligent, more articulate and speak better. We want our children to be like them.

He didn't think children should have to work at home and condemned corporal punishment, blaming much of the student truancy and absenteeism on it:

The children say if we get so much love at home, why should we go to be beaten in school?

Ravi seemed to have a very supportive family environment. The eldest male child, he was a valued and loved member of the family. His father provided much moral support. He not only involved Ravi in the male world of work, he provided some literacy support too, since he could read and write. He showed me an old song book, and some used text books, which he said he used to read with Ravi.

Ravi seemed to carry with him a secure, happy home world into the classroom and, to me, it seemed to be a more hopeful one than any of the other focal children had.

Becoming a Writer: From Spelling to Composing:

Ravi had good control over form, his spelling being near perfect. His early conception of literacy was much like the other children — writing meant copying letters that made up words and sentences, from books and reading meant decoding them. He perceived written language as a rule-bound system, found in books, having no connection with his personal or interpersonal contexts or his own lived experiences. He had not

discovered its connection to ordinary speech or to other symbol systems like drawing, or its representational and referential connection to meanings of his own. He was unable to generate his own sentences, reluctant to take any risks. He took dictation with ease, though, and when asked to compose sentences, stayed close to the dictated form.

As shown in the event described earlier, the oral-written connection was made for him by one of his friends who was not as good a speller as Ravi. Ravi made a slow and reluctant transition from spelling to composing, helped by various social, personal and symbolic supports which also helped the other children.

Having already described some of the ways in which Ravi found these supports in Chapter 5, and since he shared the others in common with the other children already described, I will focus on the salient feature of Ravi's development as a writer — his driving purpose and the way in which it affected his appropriation of literacy.

Writing His World

Ravi was very reluctant to take the risk that composing involved and would only venture forth when he found a context in which he could describe his home world, which seemed to provide a safe and familiar context, adding to his security, which the risk of composing seemed to threaten. Unlike Shakun, he did not use his writing to move into imaginary worlds. He had his feet planted very firmly in his secure, stable home world and it was in contextualising his writing in this that he found his growth as a writer. He enjoyed my interest in his home life and used his writing to share it with me. His stories were straight descriptions of practices and events in his home as is evident from the three writing samples given below:

1. There are 35 trees in Ravindra Kumar's garden. Now they are flowering. In two months there will be mangoes in the trees. Then we break the mangoes and load them on the truck and take them to the market. Then we sell

the mangoes and then we come home. ("You should show me your garden sometime" — my comment)

2. This happened one night. The mangoes were on the trees. We were all in the orchard. And thieves came to my grandfather's house. They hit my grand mother. If we had found out at night then we would have taken sticks, knives, spears and forks and would have killed them and later taken the guns from two thieves and handed them to the police. We didn't find out, all four dacoits ran away and when we were returning from the orchard in the morning, then we found out. We felt very sad then we got very clever and after that no body came.

3. My father runs an engine. The engine runs with petrol. There was no diesel and mobil. So my father ran the engine when the mobil was over. But papa did not know that the mobil was over. When the engine didn't start, then papa opened the engine and there was no mobil so papa said this does not have a ring. And there's no mobil. This is why the engine was not starting. Now papa brought the ring and the mobil and put them then the engine started and began to run. The next day the engine head got spoilt then (he) opened the head. Papa said — now I'm very upset now then papa went to Malihabad on his cycle, then got (the engine) fixed and then fitted it and ran it then started engine and now it keeps on running.

Slowly, almost reluctantly, Ravi became an independent composer. He kept at the same time a close watch on his spelling making sure to get them correct. As he became more conscious of authorship, he also became more possessive of his compositions and refused to let others plagiarise his work, often moving to a more isolated spot to ensure this. As described in Chapter 5, he took a special interest in English. Recognising it as a language of power, he worked hard and enthusiastically to learn it, his efforts supported by his parents at home.

Ravi became a confident composer by the end of the study, but he used writing mainly for descriptive and narrative functions, paying very little attention to its expressive, inventive, evaluative potential. When he wrote stories they were either memorised stories or personal narratives. He did not compose picture stories, nor did he illustrate his drawing often. He did not feel the need to invent worlds with writing and he did not exploit the constitutive potential of writing as much as the others did.

It seemed to me as though Ravi was driven by the need to appropriate the codes of power. This was the guiding purpose driving his development as a writer. He wanted to do well and worked hard at it. “Doing well” in school was very important to him, as he expresses in this composition:

Story

I dreamt that school is on. Masterji came and the exams were on. Masterji was distributing the papers. We got the papers. Masterji said whoever gets mistakes I will fail him the (he) will have to stay one more year in the third grade. Shivprasad said I’m going to write all wrong. I want to fail. I said I want to pass. Who (ever) fails, he loses interest in studying. Shivprasad said don’t keep telling me what you do. (This sentence is written in the dialect.) After this (my) stomach started paining, then I went to the toilet. Then I got the runs. Papa said here son wash your mouth with water, then study then go to sleep.

Ravi also used literacy to “name” his world but not in order to transform it. He seemed not to need to reposition himself in his social world, rather he needed to secure his position further, which he did. Adopting me as his addressee, he used his writing to display his world, his skill and his relationship with his father, one that was very valuable to him.

Ogbu’s (1982) explanation for school failure or success characterised by Erickson (1987) as the “perceived labour market explanation” seems to apply in Ravi’s case. According Ogbu, groups who believe in the possibility of social mobility for themselves and the potential of schooling as a crucial helping factor convey this sense to their children, who have greater chances of succeeding in school as a result. Ravi’s social position, his vision of his world and its possibilities led him to believe that his interest lay in appropriating the code of power. If he did well in school, the windows and doors of the larger social world would open out to him, so he strove to live up to the expectations and standards of the classroom.

Ravi took fewer imaginative risks than any of the other focal children did. His writing was not “agonistically toned” like Rajesh and Sheela’s. First born and male, he did not perceive himself as living on the margins either in his home world or his school world and he felt no need to negotiate margins or boundaries. The power structure did not seem oppressive or restrictive to him, so he did not grapple with it.

SHAKUN, RAJESH, SHEELA AND RAVI

Similarities and differences

All four children appropriated literacy in the sense that they achieved a direct symbolism and learned to use it as a symbolic tool. They made it their own, helped by the following supports:

- *Social-Peer supports*, in terms of the social energy provided by friends; their own roles as helpers, in the cases of Shakun and Ravi also as leaders and the collective negotiation of important connections
- *Symbolic supports* provided by dramatic play and drawing
- *Conceptual supports* in terms of the important conceptual connections they were helped to make (e.g., that speech can be written)
- *Dialogic support* provided by my oral scaffolding and that of their friends along with my role as responsive audience and addressee
- *Contextual supports* provided by relevant contexts - social and personal
- *Textual supports* provided by the oral and written texts used at home and in class
- *Material supports* in terms of the literacy materials provided
- *Personal supports* provided by their needs and purposes
- *Structural support* provided by a classroom structured to nurture their growth as writers, enabling and allowing them the freedom to negotiate their purposes and needs

In Ravi's case also the

-*Parental supports* provided by the encouragement and attention he received at home.

All the children progressed well beyond the minimum levels of learning recommended by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (1991). According to these, children in second grade should be able to "copy words and sentences; take simple dictation of know words and write simple guided descriptive sentences" (pp. 15-16). In terms of language use, they should be able to "speak politely and be attentive while listening" (p. 17). The children did much more than "write simple guided descriptive sentences." They all became composers writing about a variety of topics, many of them chosen by them independently or in collaboration with their friends (see Table 6.1).

Insert Table 6.1 here

TABLE 6.1 LIST OF TOPICS (continued on next page)

| Shakun | Ravi | Sheela | Rajesh |
|--|---|--|---|
| 1. Friends 2. Message to me: greeting* 4. Games we play 5. Car* 6. Bear's dance* 7. Balloon man* 8. Letter *- request 9. The tea shop* 10. The child who got caught* 11. My class 12. Hens* 13. The duck* 14. Myself 15. All the people leave* 16. Stars* 17. My doll - I play with my sister* 18. Butterfly 19. I like flowers* 20. The lion and the rabbit | 1. Friends 2. Games* 3. Mango and parrot* 4. Mango grove 5. Flowers* 6. Parrot 7. Butterfly 8. The rabbit and the lion 9. Holi 10. Mamiji's car* 11. The cats and the monkey 12. Raakhi 13. Monkeys and the cap vendor 14. Kites* 15. Fire in the teacher's bus 16. The deer, rat and crow* 17. The bear and the farmer 18. My school 19. Sheela and the cats 20. Moving to Class 3* | 1. Friends 2. Games 3. Balloon man* 4. Myself 5. I like this poem 6. Holi 7. Car* 8. The cat and the monkey 9. Fire in the teacher's bus 10. Flowers* 11. The tap* 12. Butterflies, stars, garden 13. My school 14. Sheela and the cats 15. One day I found a magic wand* 16. If I were a bird* 17. My story: How I came to school* 18. What I like: stars, clouds, rivers, my sister, teacher, the world. 19. My parrot* 20. The saree border* | 1. Friends 2. Games 3. Message to me: greeting* 4. Mango grove 5. Myself 6. Butterfly 7. Flowers* 8. The foolish lion 9. Holi 10. The Monkey and the cap vendor 11. Fire in the teacher's bus 12. My friend and I play cricket* 13. My house 14. Bears 15. The rabbit and the tortoise* 16. Sheela and her cats 17. Kites* (copied) 18. Patriotic song* (copied) 19. I met a bear on my way home* 20. The magic wand |

*Indicates that the topic was chosen independently by the child, either individually or in collaboration with peers.

TABLE 6.1 LIST OF TOPICS (continued)

| Shakun | Ravi | Sheela | Rajesh |
|--|---|--|---|
| <p>21. Holi 22. There was once a princess 23. Peacock and the hunter* 24. Raakhi 25. The monkeys and cap vendor 26. Fish* 27. Fire in the teacher's bus 28. Bears 29. Friends in a garden 30. The Rabbit and the fox* 31. Bears stealing butter* 32. Letter - invitation* 33. The dog and washer man* 34. Mythology: Vishnu and Shiva; Ram, Laxman and Sita* 35. The dog bites a child* 36. Poem sounds 37. Fox and eagle* 38. The honest dog* 39. The elephant and lion* 40. The crow and nightingale* 41. Returning from school*</p> | <p>21. Poem - Sounds 22. The banana vendor and the naughty boy 23. The thieves came home* 24. The things that I like: wind, games, cats, boats, playing with my brother and sister. 25. My father's engine* 26. School, friends and exams*</p> | <p>21. Flowers* 22. The butterfly 23. The lion and the rabbit 24. The monkeys and the cap vendor 25. Bears 26. Poem - on sounds 27. The bus and the cat* 28. The fat man* 29. Birds* 30. I dreamt that you were teaching us.*</p> | <p>21. The parrot's story* 22. Swings in the monsoon* 23. What I like: the fair, drama, everything, mangoes , my mother and father, my teacher, food, books, my mango grove 24. My dream: visiting teacher*</p> |

*Indicates that the topic was chosen independently by the child, either individually or in collaboration with peers.

Further the children used writing for the following *variety* of functions not even considered by the minimum levels criteria:

communicative

transactional

descriptive

expressive

evaluative

inventive or constitutive

narrative

self-presentational

They used them in varying degrees, though, depending on the purposes which drove their development as writers. Shakun used writing for all the functions listed above. Rajesh and Sheela used the communicative, transactional, expressive, inventive and self-presentational functions more than the other functions. Ravi used mainly the narrative and descriptive functions of writing.

The children also depended varyingly on the supports listed above. They all relied on the dialogic support provided by my oral scaffolding, though this decreased as they internalised the scaffolding process. They all continued to rely heavily, however, on my role as responsive audience and addressee, growing as writers and persons in the circles of mutuality that each constructed.

Shakun and Sheela had the literacy support of their siblings at home and Ravi had parental support while Rajesh had very little literacy support from home. They were all

driven by personal supports which directed a differential use of the other supports. Shakun used textual and symbolic supports more, driven by her need to construct a textual interpretation of her worlds. Sheela relied on dialogic, contextual and peer supports more, driven by her need to reconstruct her self in her personal and social world. Rajesh used peer support and dialogic support more as he tried to extend the possibilities of his world and reach out. Ravi used contextual, textual and symbolic supports as he wrote to describe his worlds.

As the children learnt to use literacy to pursue their own purposes and to negotiate their practise of it, they also learnt to view themselves as autonomous, purposive agents, as “persons” having negotiating rights which they exercised increasingly in

- making decisions about topic and genre (see Table 6.1 for each child’s list of topics);
- evaluating the teaching and the assignments;
- making choices;
- interpreting official assignments to suit their own purposes; and
- staking claims and making demands.

From being passive copiers of other people’s words, the children became composers of their own texts, writers of their own words. Owning their texts, they learnt to own themselves more. In feeling addressed, responded to and heard, in writing their own words, they found their own “voice,” which again they used to do different things.

Sheela and Rajesh used it to address the power differences and distances in the classroom. They located power in the institutional power space, occupied by their teacher and myself and tried to negotiate it in their transactions with me and the teacher.

They both staked their claims to equality by negotiating the differences, each in a different way. Rajesh tried to bridge distance while Sheela tried to dissolve it. Shakun located power more in herself. She used the symbolic voice that she had discovered to imaginatively construct and interpret her reality by authoring and creating fictional texts, trying to get a firmer grip on her world. Ravi used his voice to validate his world, by sharing it and having it valued.

I focus on the differences between the children in order to emphasise the importance of being sensitive to and attending respectfully to *individual* differences, rather than positing generalised, blanket “cultural” explanations. It cautions, also, against the tendency of dominant groups, to think of subordinate groups in terms of their group identity alone — the “poor unwashed,” the generalised “them.”

In terms of gender differences, too, gender was relevant in interesting ways. Both Ravi and Rajesh were first born male children, a very privileged position in patriarchal societies all over the world, but they accessed literacy and used it in very different ways. Sheela and Shakun both female children, marginal positions in patriarchal societies, displayed marked differences, too. Both Ravi and Rajesh took longer to overcome their fear of risk, burdened with the need to do well in school and to live up to the expectations of their families, who had their hopes pinned on them. Even though Rajesh’s position was less hopeful than Ravi’s, he learnt to take greater risks in order to extend the possibilities of his world. Ravi continued to take a more conservative stance. Shakun and Sheela both learnt to use their anonymity in their homes to their advantage, taking more imaginative and creative risks than the boys.

Most importantly, all the children were empowered by literacy. They practised “critical literacy,” but in *personal and interpersonal ways that are unique to children* —

the very point missed by critical educators and theorists like Freire, Giroux, McLaren, and others, who take primarily an adult male stance, defining critical literacy in large sociological, structural terms. This difference is made apparent in significant ways by Sheela and Rajesh, both, and I address this difference more fully in the next concluding chapter, in which I sum up the directions offered by this study.

CHAPTER 7

THE CHILDREN SHOW THE WAY

Reflections and Directions

In this concluding chapter, I reflect upon the original research questions and summarise some of the answers that emerged during the course of the study. I discuss the issues of relevance and empowerment pedagogy in the light of the understandings gained from my observations and interactions with the children in this study. Articulated throughout are the directions provided by the children for educators, planners and policy makers.

REFLECTIONS

This study was motivated by a concern for school failure — why and how were schools failing children? I went into the classroom hoping to reach some understanding of this complex phenomenon in the nitty-gritty details of daily practice. In the fourth chapter, I presented the classroom as an extremely complex social, cultural and political site; and failure was an outcome of several factors. Policy documents like the NPE, along with scholars like Kumar (1993) and Mitra (1987), have suggested that social factors like poverty apart, faulty pedagogy or poor quality education is one of the main reasons for the failure. My observations in the classroom show that the matter is more complex than that. “Poor quality education” is a complex construct, requiring further elaboration and understanding in all its complexity. The quality of education or pedagogy, poor or good, cannot be understood in isolation. It cannot be abstracted from the context of the social relationships in which it is practised and the political structure in which these relationships are transacted. This study situates and studies literacy in context and locates the failure in the social, cultural and political contexts in which it is practised.

Chains of Alienation and Disrespect

My observations and interactions with all the participants revealed, as described in detail in chapter 4, that the setting was an alienating, non-responsive, uncaring one. It was one more sad story like the ones enacted in schools all over the world as described by Rist (1973), McLaren (1989), Giroux (1989), and Fine (1989). The pervasive theme was “no one cares,” “no one listens,” parents, teachers, principal, children, they all felt disrespected, unsupported, unresponded to. No one felt a sense of ownership over the school or the curriculum. Literacy was conceived mechanistically, practiced minimally and passively, doled out grudgingly and without faith to a population conceived and treated marginally, by teachers who placed very little value upon themselves and their work as teachers. The “poor quality education” lamented by policy planners and scholars reflected and was a product of a “poor quality” social and political structure. The school setting reflected a class and caste divided, non-egalitarian, non-participatory, hierarchically structured, social and political structure which was reproduced in the school setting, which necessitated and perpetuated the disrespectful, depowering multiple chains of power and oppression I saw at work. Poverty, caste and gender were important factors as often cited by social scientists (Kumar, 1993), but my observations reverse the causal relationship. Children did not fail *because* they were poor, or lower caste, the school failed them with the poor treatment it meted out to them because of their poverty and low caste and status.

Indeed there is much cause for concern, not only for the failure of schools to address and engage meaningfully the children who drop out, but also for the ones who remain. Policy planners in India as else where in the world place much premium on literacy, viewing it as “a crucial input in national building” (Raza & Agarwal, 1986, p. 100). As I observed the teaching learning process in the classroom, it reconfirmed

what scholars like Graff, Gee, Lankshear, Street, Gumperz and others have pointed out — that *how* literacy is practised, the contexts in which it is practised and the ideology underlying it, will determine its consequences. In and of itself, it will do very little. Merely achieving 100% literacy will not achieve the social, economic and political goods expected of literacy. If literacy is practised commonly as observed in this study, then policy planners would do well to consider the kind of nation that is being built with this literacy practise. More importantly, they need to ask, “In what sense do these children become literate?” and “What possibilities will such literacy open for them?” It seems to me that such a practise can only build an arid, alienating social ground, harden social barriers and produce individuals alienated from each other and themselves, instead of the thriving, strength giving shared public spheres that our constitution promises, in its commitment to participatory democracy.

The Children Show Directions: Building Circles of Respect and Response

Though the fourth chapter tells a tale of overwhelming despair, it refers also to the ray of hope offered by the children. As always happens, no tale of oppression is complete without mention of the counter forces at work. The children offered resistance in the way they knew how. They held out hope and showed the way. They were keenly interested in literacy and in each other. The only responsive actors in this setting, they had formed what I call “circles of mutuality” amongst themselves. They listened to each other, addressed each other and tried to construct a meaningful social and literate world for themselves despite the severe constraints of their universe.

Aware of my interest in them, the children invited me to join their circles of mutuality and, in Chapter 5, I describe the new shared life that we built, as *together* we began to explore the possibilities and potentialities offered by the children, in an attempt to construct a curriculum that would be responsive to the needs and purposes of the

children. Though there was little we could do to alter the larger institutional structure, several possibilities opened up as we collaboratively constructed our classroom into a bounded context, within which we could and did take action. We re-constructed the social structure of the classroom and assigned different roles to each other with a corresponding reordering of rights, responsibilities and duties. We constructed a connective ideology and transformed the political structure of the classroom from a chain of oppression to several circles of mutuality. These circles were spaces of inclusion, participation, addressal and response. The circle of performance during dramatic play and recitation, in which the whole class was included, was one such circle as were the spontaneous friendship circles in which groups of children shared and traded competencies and so also the smaller dialogic circles they formed with me.

A mutually responsive curriculum. The children began to appropriate a more central role in the construction of the events of the classroom, as we entered into several negotiations and collaborations while transacting the literacy curriculum, described in Chapter 5 and 6. The curriculum developed in the context of our mutual interaction and like all products of interaction, it belonged neither to my culture nor to theirs, it was a mutual construction and quite unique in that. There ensued several cross-cultural negotiations and dialogues. Even when the dialogues were initiated by me emerging from my historical background, the eventual outcome was a unique construction by the children and me — it was cross-cultural or mutually responsive, informed by our respective life experiences, needs, purposes and intentions. I did have my own agenda for the children, but I made a deliberate effort to keep it flexible and open-ended, watchful and responsive to cues given by the children, to ensure that the literacy we practiced was related to and embedded in the cultural worlds of the children. It was a mutually responsive practice in that the children responded to my initiatives and I to theirs. The difference in our backgrounds proved to be an advantage, engendering a

mutual curiosity which caused us to be genuinely attentive and responsive to each other. Learners both, I was there to learn about them from them and they were curious about me enough to want to learn from me.

The responsive curriculum: Universal features and culturally specific differences. The children played a decisive role in the constructing the literacy *we* practised and, in Chapter 5, I point out the various points when the curricular decisions were made by the children. It was in responding to their demands that the curriculum took the performative shape that it did. They were the ones who “decided” that the curriculum should be woven around poetry, song, drama and story. Interestingly, this is well in consonance with current pedagogical theory in language arts (Dyson, 1989, 1993, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978; Miffed, 1976; Daiute, 1992; Rosen, 1984; Heathcote, 1984; Cazden, 1994). Our curriculum illustrated well what Vygotsky (1978) means when he says that “make-believe play, drawing and writing can be viewed as different moments in an essentially unified process of the development of written language” (p. 116) or what Dyson (1991) means with her observation that “drawing, social talk and dramatic play help infuse writing with meaning” (p. 113). The children seemed to know what they needed in order to become writers. Furthermore, the ways in which children use writing to engage with their friends and to negotiate their relationships with each other in this study, parallel, in some instances, similar negotiations between child writers observed by Dyson (1989, 1993) in the American context.

This points towards a universality in child-culture, suggesting that children in different cultural contexts need much the same supports in order to learn to read and write in ways meaningful to them. Children seem to *need* play, performance, story, poetry and song and thrive in an environment enriched childfully thus. The content of the stories, poems, songs and games varies depending on the cultural context. In the context

described, the children's stories centered around the rural environment in which the children lived their lives, revolving around animals, birds, flowers and trees, unlike the stories composed by the children in Dyson's study (1989), many of which centered around rockets, space ships, guns and motorcycles. The common feature however is that the children's stories in both contexts centered around and involved their *friends*.

My study reconfirms Dyson's insight that children need also a fertile social ground for their writing to emerge from and grow, i.e., someone to write for, someone and a mutual something to write about and someone to write to. It vindicates, too, the developmental view of written language held by scholars working in the Western context (Dyson, Graves, Britton, Moffitt & Wagner, Holdaway) that writing develops best when it is embedded in and emerges from familiar worlds and is used to execute personal and interpersonal intentions and purposes.

Differences. While pointing out the common ground on which the children from diverse contexts seem to grow, it becomes important to sound a cautionary note to international child observers, who often ignore the fact that most of the children of the world do not enjoy the abundant material conditions assumed and taken for granted by their theories of children's literacy development. This study shows that *material conditions* of the literacy environment in the school and at home, the availability of literacy materials, the curricular constraints of the official curriculum, determine the directions of children's literacy development. In contexts where children find many material and curricular opportunities to experiment with writing, children seem to figure out the writing system by manipulating written symbols as observed by Clay (1975) and Ferreiro, 1986). As is evident from the descriptions of the literacy events in the fourth chapter, where there were severe material and pedagogical constraints on writing, the children seemed to use *reading* to figure out the writing system.

Furthermore, my observations seem to question the assumption made by Vygotsky (1978) about the developmental direction of writing and the order in which the symbol system is built — from the “drawing of things to the drawing of words.” Much depends on the literacy environment in school, the materials used and the nature of the literacy instruction given. In the context studied, the literacy materials (described in Chapter 4) were not conducive to drawing, given their restrictive functioning, nor did the curriculum include free drawing. There were no literacy materials at home, nor was drawing encouraged as part of literacy development. Writing instruction began with drawing of the letters copied from a model. As a result in this context, though the children used the printed pictures to make meaning, drawing was not used or accessed by the children as a symbol of meanings to be expressed, till they were given more appropriate materials and were taught to make the symbolic connection between drawing and words.

A further cautionary point emerges, with reference to what constitutes ‘good’ pedagogical strategy or method. Much has been written about the value of autonomous development of writing in the Western context (Clay, Ferreiro, Goodman). Teachers are told that the best practise is to allow children to independently figure out the conventions of spelling, which they do best if they invent spell words by sounding them out. In the setting studied by this research, an alternative pedagogy was found appropriate. I was conscious of and sensitive to the cultural value attached to autonomy. Not all cultures value autonomy as it is valued in Western cultures. In the cultural site of this study, collectivity was prized more than autonomy. Children were expected to be obedient respectors of authority, reading defined as decoding printed texts and writing identified with spelling and good penmanship. It would have been highly inappropriate and impractical to come in with preconceived ideas of “good” pedagogy. It was necessary to

carefully survey the cultural terrain and move cautiously, to build on ideas and practices familiar to the children, before moving them to the culturally unfamiliar ground of independent writing and composing, choice and decision making.

For several weeks, I found that the children responded best to a pedagogical stance that was based on direct guidance and assistance and in the early days we used the traditional methods of dictation and copying extensively, though we embedded these in the experiences, needs and purposes of the children, as described in Chapters 5 and 6. As our relationship progressed, I combined dictation with composing as I describe in Chapters 5 and 6. We used guided spelling far more than invented spelling and found it to work better in this context. The children found the spellings they needed, from friends, the text, from me and invented some as they went along, some like Ravi, focusing more on spelling than others. I dealt with spelling by shifting focus from spelling to meaning. I accepted their misspelt words or invent-spelt words most of the time, drawing attention only to very frequent mistakes and focusing only on spelling from time to time. Interestingly, I found that as the children became composers, their spelling also improved. This re-emphasises Dyson's warning against the sanctification of any pedagogical strategy. Any method is good only when it responds to the needs of the learners and the underlying values must be redefined in culturally responsive ways.

The children in this study suggest another more culturally responsive meaning of autonomy — a *related autonomy*. They seem to show that there is value in being independent but not necessarily in being alone. They exemplified the social nature of development. They always worked in groups, sharing competencies, lending and borrowing skills from each other, leaning upon and learning from each other, building upon each other's sense to make sense collectively. They enjoyed whole class activity very much and asked for it frequently. The children illustrate that learning to be

independent is a collective, social process, suggesting an alternative to the Piagetian idea of development as an individual process. They also point towards another view of the autonomous person, not as an atomistic individual, free from others and free to be alone, but as a person more in possession of herself but at the same time, connected to others, responsible to and responsible for others — a sovereign autonomous person in a dialogic kingdom-of-ends.

A culturally responsive stance though not culturally appropriate. The study demonstrates the important distinction between being culturally responsive and culturally appropriate. I was conscious of the lack of literacy support in the home background of the children and responded to that by not expecting it or assuming it and providing extra supports in school. It proved not to be such a major stumbling block, once the expectation was removed. I was aware also of the cultural definition of literacy and the classroom pedagogical practices prevalent in the classroom before the participation phase. While this made me more cautious, it also tempered my expectations from the children. I refused, however, to accept either the classroom or community's definition as final, even though it might have been more culturally appropriate to do so, because it seemed to be a very minimal limiting one, one that limited possibilities rather than extending them. Defined minimally as basic skills of decoding and encoding, literacy functioned minimally, as described in Chapter 4. I therefore continued to push the limits of the official definition in that classroom, in my attempt to negotiate a new meaning of literacy with the children. I did not view this as a culturally disrespectful or domineering act, rather it was culturally responsive in that I was responding to the needs expressed by the children. Further, I was guided by the perception that the community valued literacy because they believed in its potential to extend the possibilities of their lives. As one parent said to me, "literacy is important for our children, because with it they will be able to function better in life. They can deal with city people better — talk to them,

understand them." It seemed necessary to redefine and reconstruct literacy in order for it to fulfill some of its promise as a social and personal tool.

I also found it more culturally responsive to the girls in my class, though less culturally appropriate, to counter the gendered perspective of the community. Sheela's mother was sceptical of the value of literacy for her daughter in that it seemed irrelevant to her future as mother and wife, a view shared by many of the women in the community. I chose to respond to Sheela instead, who seemed to have many purposes and uses for literacy. She accessed literacy and used it eventually to reinvent her gendered reality, as described earlier.

Similarly, I treated the children and interacted with them in ways that were not in consonance with the adult-communities' view of children and their perception of how they should be treated. It was not culturally appropriate to negotiate decisions with children, who were expected to offer complete obedience to adults, maintain a respectful distance and offer no resistance to adult authority. I decided to honour the universal right of children to be treated with respect, instead and to respond to them as persons. I was guided by the belief *that being culturally responsive does not include honouring culturally indigenous or culturally appropriate forms of oppression.*

I also found it more culturally responsive though less culturally appropriate perhaps to use standard Hindi in my interactions with them and for purposes of literacy, rather than their local dialect. Standard Hindi is the power language in the state and an important link language for the entire country. As such, it was much valued by the community and using the local dialect would have been rejected as an exclusionary practice. Given the power realities, it would indeed limit the possibilities of the children of this community. Instead, we included English too in response to the needs of the

children and their perception of what was appropriate for them, even though there was almost no English in the local environment.

Communication mismatch? There were very few instances of mis-communication or “communication mismatch,” arising from our different cultural and language backgrounds. My experience with the children leads me to agree with Cazden (1976) that language is a transparent medium once “we hear through the (words), the meaning intended” and that we should put “language forms used by children where they belong, out of focal awareness” (p. 79). I found that because we were trying so hard to attend to each others “voice,” the difference in our language backgrounds did not interfere in significant ways. Their dialect expressed itself in their spelling, “misspelling” and unique sentence structure, from time to time, which I accepted as dialect related. They were more than willing to help me when I had trouble understanding some words. My observations are more in agreement with Erickson (1987) that, more than a mismatch of communication, school failure is caused by a mutual lack of faith and trust between the community and school. According to him, regardless of the cultural differences between the teachers and students, if the children and their parents believe that the teachers care about their work and have faith in the children’s ability to succeed, the children will succeed. In the context of this study, we built up this mutual relationship of trust which helped us bridge language related cultural differences. In my view, the researchers emphasising the communication mismatch overemphasise differences in language and patterns of communication, whilst ignoring important considerations of mutual respect, trust and “voice.” I found that *the children in my study made a claim to have their “voice” honoured rather than their culturally different “ways with words.”*

Cultural difference or power differences? The scholars making the communication mismatch argument, referred to above, often ignore the power differences

between cultural groups. Heath's (1983) study, an extraordinarily rich ethnographic description of the communication patterns or "ways with words" of three communities in the USA, *masks* the asymmetric relations of power between different cultural groups, by avoiding reference to the vital facts of race and class — "The (teachers) tried to recognize and accommodate group differences among students without stereotyping behaviours according to race or class membership. They brought into their classrooms the people, ideas, and practices of the communities of their students" (p. 354). Heath mentions the construction of "cultural bridges" between the school and community ignoring the unequal social positions occupied by the various communities studied and the teachers. Given the social relations of dominance and subordination between the two, these seem more like *slides*, the dominant group graciously stepping down into the world of the subordinate population — "their central role was to pass on to all groups certain traditional tools and ways of using language" (p. 354).

This makes me question the motive underlying the cultural relevance argument. The legitimate role of culturally relevant education should be to eliminate social inequalities, between cultural groups. To this end, power differences should be clearly recognised and distinguished in order that they might be addressed and eliminated. Race, class and caste are not politically neutral categories and it is not only unhelpful, but it clouds the real issue, when differences related to class, caste and race are glossed over by identifying them with cultural differences and discussing them in politically neutral terms as Heath does and as the proponents of locally relevant education do.

Subordinate groups, if these are also racial, ethnic, class or caste groups as is usually the case, will not accept the cultural difference argument, particularly when it is made by the dominant mainstream, even if it is couched in the most subtle terms of cultural neutrality. More than a validation of their cultural identity, they want social and

political equality, an equal participation in public social and political spheres and a voice in the structuring of the institutions that define the limits and possibilities of their lives.

As long as power inequalities remain in place, subordinate “cultural” groups will want the “codes of power.” All the parents interviewed in my study rejected a locally relevant rural-oriented education and wanted a city-type, English medium education for their children, because it spelt possibilities of greater inclusion in the larger power spheres. They understood well the social and political implication of a locally relevant education and its exclusionary potential and they taught me the importance of distinguishing between cultural differences and power differences. This highlights the point that subordinate groups do not view difference in politically neutral terms, while members of dominant groups have a tendency to do this. Perhaps this is a politically safer stance for dominant groups to take, less threatening of their power position and less conducive to feelings of class or race guilt. Taking a political view of difference necessitates the problematisation of existing power structures and the legitimisation of our own place in it.

I emerge from this study with the view that in dealing with questions of relevance and difference, the perspective of the cultural insiders is the most useful one. The important questions to ask being, “How do they construct their difference and what do they want to do with it?” “Which differences do they want to define themselves by?” “Which differences do they want celebrated and honoured by the larger mainstream community and which do they see as constructing their marginality and are best eliminated?”

We must realize that the relevance of the curriculum ought not to be — and cannot successfully be — decided without the participation of the local populations. They know best what they want and need, what responds to their needs, hopes and

aspirations and what does not. This calls for a decentralization in educational planning. The current practice of highly centralised planning apart from being undemocratic has proved to be highly inefficient. The power elite must first of all relinquish monopolistic control over curricular planning and include the “voice” of local populations or minority cultural groups, i.e., the men, women, and, most importantly, *children* in the planning process. That is the first and the most vital equalising move.

This does not imply, however, that there is no role for the cultural outsider. There is a special role for the cultural outsider especially if he/she belongs to a historically dominant group. The dominant cultural outsider is the bearer and owner of a cumulative inherited cultural advantage or cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977) in terms of educational and material advantages and social advantages (the self-worth that comes from belonging to a socially advantaged group), which must be shared with historically deprived groups consequently at a distinct disadvantage. The adults in the community viewed urban teachers as a resource and a link to the power domain represented by the urban middle class world, though they made an important caveat as one of the parents said to me,

We prefer teachers from the city, especially if they are English educated. They have more exposure and so know more than our rural teachers. Rural teachers can only teach what they know and it leaves our children where they are. Our children would benefit more from city-teachers. But they don't respect us and don't care about our children, so what's the use?

He seems to sum it up nicely — the value of the cultural outsider's role depends entirely on the stance adopted by him/her. Much damage is done, as I show in Chapter 4, if it is an implicitly or explicitly culturally patronising stance or a disrespectful, uncaring one. A teacher, planner or researcher from a dominant group can actually help to close the gap of inequality if she enters the setting aware of her advantage as an *unearned privilege*, is convinced of the intrinsic equality of all people and is prepared to adopt a participatory, negotiatory, respectful and responsive stance towards the members of the community.

There is much need for the building of cultural bridges but as Rajesh shows, authentic bridges are built mutually on rafters of mutual respect. These bridges must facilitate the flow of movement from both sides and most importantly they must be constructed with the inclusionary intention of bridging the chasm of inequality between unequally positioned groups.

I reiterate that children inhabit a special subculture and their purposes are different from adults. The central point this study makes is that *a culturally relevant curriculum must necessarily emerge out of participatory negotiations with children*. Curricular content, achievement standards and assessment procedures cannot be decided in central education departments located in distant power centres by adults as they are currently done all over the world. The much cited “child-centered” education must be understood chiefly as moving children to the centre of the classroom and the curriculum, honouring their participatory and negotiating rights and giving them more control over their own learning, rather than the current practice of centering adult-conceived curricula, standards, definitions and purposes of education *on* children. My study demonstrates how much richer the curriculum became when it was constructed in responsive participation with the children, showing, too, the form that such negotiations might take. For those not convinced by the moral argument that in a participatory democracy children have the right to negotiate the curriculum, my study offers pragmatic reasons. The samples of writing produced by the children demonstrate that when they were invited to be key participants in the construction of the literacy curriculum and when they could engage with literacy in a way largely defined by themselves, my focal children far outstripped the minimum levels of learning stipulated by the department of education in Delhi.

A significant finding of this study has been that the children were empowered by the literacy largely because they were given the right of autonomous negotiation and participation in the construction of the curriculum. In the next section, I present a reconstructed definition of empowerment in children's terms as it emerged from this study.

DIRECTIONS:

Empowerment pedagogy from young children's perspective

Reconceiving Power

Power was reconfigured in more participatory ways in the reconstructed political structure of the classroom as described in Chapter 5. Power was no longer monolithically and hierarchically located in the institutional structure and authority figures alone. Rather, it was laterally distributed in several centres, thus becoming a positive force not a negative oppressive one. When institutionalised in a hierarchical linear structure, power is oppressive, but when it is diffused and distributed, as it was in this classroom, it proved to be empowering. We found *varieties of power*, which I refer to as *social power*, i.e., the power they exercised in their friendship circles; *performative power* they exercised during the performances they participated in; *the symbolic power*, they acquired as they grew to control a multi-modal symbol system; the *dialogic power*, they exercised and acquired as they became negotiators of the curriculum; *the narrative power*, they acquired as they became authors of their own stories, oral and written and most importantly the creative *power of imagination*, or the power of envisagement as Berthoff (1987) calls it, which enabled them to envision new possibilities. I as teacher, occupied the *institutional power* space, yet there were other power spaces that opened out, which the children occupied. Critical educators have emphasised institutional political power far more than the other varieties of power that revealed themselves in our classroom

which might be a result of taking a predominantly sociological and political view of education and classrooms.

The children provide thus a new way of conceiving power. They reveal a more personal conception of power — power not only as a relational category (i.e., as the ways in which groups and people are related), or as a weapon wielded to exploit other people, but as a positive, creative, transformative force or energy that we infuse into our lives, which then enhances and expands our living, opening out transformatory possibilities.

Reconceiving Empowerment

Empowerment has been conceived in largely political terms, by critical educators. Lankshear (1994, personal communication) defines it in relation to power structures pointing out that a subject is empowered in relation to a power structure, through certain processes in order to take action upon or within a given structure. Giroux (1989) takes a similar stance, defining empowerment as “the ability to think and act critically” (p. 138), he conceives empowerment pedagogy as teaching for social transformation. McLaren (1989), too, views empowerment as a kind of knowledge and “courage needed to change the social order.” According to him, emancipatory knowledge

helps us to understand how social relationships are distorted and manipulated by relations of power and privilege. It also aims at creating the conditions under which irrationality, domination and oppression can be overcome and transformed through deliberative, collective action. In short, it creates the foundation for social justice, equality and empowerment. (p. 182)

Following Freire’s lead, all these educators define power and empowerment both in social and political terms. According to them, education for empowerment involves primarily the cultivation of a “sociological imagination” which Mills (1959) defines as “a quality of mind which enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society” (p. 6). Freire refers to this as “conscientia” or a critical

consciousness which involves naming the world and our position in it as historically, socially, politically constituted beings, in order that we may transform the world.

It is significant that the Freirean perspective described above comes from *men*, who because they are *men* in a world structured largely by *men*, locate both power and empowerment in political and social *structures*. They view the larger structures as being within their reach and can conceive of the possibility of action upon them. I suggest that this conception of empowerment and critical pedagogy is more appropriate for adults than for children. Children (and most women) given their place in the power structure feel too distanced, too far down on the power ladder, to think of it within reach. Further, they live in *peopled worlds*, personal and interpersonal worlds, not *structured worlds*. Children, particularly, do not conceive of reality in a structural sense, in terms of social, political or logical structures, except as these social structures are embodied in the people they live their lives with. As Donaldson (1978) points out, children make child-sense of themselves and the world, which is different from an adult-sense. In my view, this is a more peopled, personal and interpersonal, intentional, *narrative* sense, one contextualised in human purposes, feelings and endeavours.

Nurturing the narrative imagination. More than nurturing a “sociological imagination” in children, empowerment involves nurturing and developing children’s “narrative imaginations.” The children gave very few cues for “social dialogues” of the kind referred to by critical educators (i.e., discussions about the “realities” of their lives — poverty and caste). They preferred instead to talk about the imagined possibilities created by poetry, stories and songs. Children inhabit a special place as children. We should respect their childhood and allow it space to grow. They are not miniature adults, and the social structure, while it impinges on their lives, imposing limits and constraints, is still too distant to matter. More than helping them to acquire the ability to “think and act

critically” about the realities of their lives, I found it more useful to help them compose creative and imaginative stories. They need the symbolic and social tools with which to construct stories in which their own role is a more powerful one. It is with these stories — personal narratives like Sheela’s and Rajesh’s and fictional ones like Shakun’s — that children construct their identities and negotiate relationships and position themselves in the world.

Reflecting upon the focal children of this study, and their development during the course of this study, I think they were all “empowered” by the literacy practise, though not perhaps in the sense in which Giroux and others conceive of empowerment, as the acquisition of “critical knowledge about basic societal structures.”

They were empowered in the sense that they *owned themselves* more as they grew in autonomy and a realisation of their selfhood. The children were empowered because of the various kinds of power they harnessed. They grew in dialogic power, in symbolic power, in creative and imaginative power as they appropriated literacy and thus found important self-constructing tools.

Sheela and Rajesh both illustrate how when the imagination is released its power can be harnessed for self-construction and transformation. The imagination is powerful because it enables thinking in terms of possibility, rather than actuality. The first step in transcending or transforming a “real” world of despair is to be able to conceive of a possible world and a possible, wished-for, hoped-for self positioned comfortably in it. Sheela repositioned herself in the power relationships she encountered and effected thereby a structural change as well, changing the power realities in the world she was constructing. The larger structure remains stable only if its components remain in their designated positions; otherwise it is destabilised by any shift. Sheela seemed to make

such a destabilising shift, though not by acting on distant abstract social and political structures, but by creatively restructuring her relationship with me and the teacher, the powerful others in her school life. She seemed to be empowered by a self-knowledge, a growing creative, imaginative understanding of who she was and could be in relation to others in her world. She was able to envision a possible self and was finding ways of actualising this self.

“What’s the point of all this literacy, given the stark reality of his life?” “What will change in his life because of it?” I was confronted with this by a skeptical friend, as I recounted Rajesh’s progress enthusiastically. Perhaps it is the naive optimism, born out of the comfort of my own world, but as I consider Rajesh, it is with a sense of possibility rather than one of futility. Nothing had changed in the external conditions of his existence, but his personal world had changed. He had grown in confidence and in self-respect. He had learnt to become an active composer of his own thoughts and ideas, a writer of his own texts, rather than a passive copier of other people’s words. He had appropriated a valuable symbolic tool and with this had gained an important self-construction and life-transformation tool. He had not moved up in the power structure, but there had emerged a power space within himself, with which he could now act more powerfully as a *person* among other persons in the world. He could also symbolically construct possibilities for his life, which he did (described in Chapter 6), building bridges to extend his life into other alien more powerful worlds.

As the children negotiated the curriculum and participated in structuring the events in the classroom, they learnt to make decisions, take risks and make choices and, thus, grew in autonomy. Most importantly, *they acquired a view of themselves as persons with a voice that counted*. They learnt that they had the right to participate in structuring the classroom life. Further, they learnt that their composed texts crafted out of

their lived and imagined experiences, were as valid as the revered text-book, a legitimate part of the curriculum. They learnt too, I hope, that they had the right to participate in the construction of knowledge and gained with this a special power — the power associated with knowledge, used in specially oppressive ways in schools.

The children in my study thus point towards another conception of empowerment, one missed by the critical educators discussed above — one centered in and around relationships. It is people who empower and depower each other in their daily interactions with each other. From the children's perspective, empowerment has more to do with relationships than with structures. Redefined in children's terms, empowerment is a relational term (Lankshear, 1994) but, with reference to children, it is better understood perhaps in relation to the self and to people in immediate contexts, rather than to abstract, large social and political structures. Empowerment involves transformatory action as Giroux says, but instead of a direct social transformation as he along with other critical educators suggest, empowerment with reference to children takes the form of imaginative self-transformation and creative symbolic action in their own social lives most importantly an achievement of their personhood. More than naming the real world, children's "conscientzia" manifests itself in an imaginative narrative and poetic invention of possible worlds and possible selves.

LEARNING FROM THE CHILDREN

From Structures to Relationships

The main change in the classroom from Chapter 4 to Chapter 5 was in terms of the restructured relationships. The classroom was constructed into a circle of mutuality in which several such circles proliferated. The chief feature of this circle was a relationship of respectful response. The children learnt to write because they had someone to write

for. Relationships were very important to the children. They wrote because the relationship mattered to them and they wanted to nurture it. They used writing to nurture their relationship and the relationship nurtured their growth as writers and persons. The curriculum was responsive because it emerged from and was grounded in a set of responsive relationships. It was empowering, too, because of the special relationships in which it was contextualised. The important more prior factor was the relationship, even more so than the literacy, though both developed simultaneously or interactively. Given the power difference in any student-teacher relationship, this relationship assumes special significance in terms of its empowering or depowering potential. A teacher occupies a power-space in a child's world and she can be empowering or depowering depending on how she uses her power-space.

Perhaps critical educators, planners and policy makers could take a leaf out of the children's book because they seem to point in an important direction. Perhaps we need to reconceive society and polities in terms of relationships, circles of mutuality based on mutual respect and response which coheres well with our commitment to participatory democracy, defined well by Dewey (1985) as "more than a form of Government — it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (p. 93). With specific reference to education, this implies that the institutional structure of education should be reconfigured in participatory terms of mutually responsive and respectful relationships between teachers, supervisors, planners, students and communities. Teachers as much as students need to be responded to respectfully as *persons doing important work*.

Furthermore, we need to reconceive the role of schooling and literacy, taking a view of children as persons and ends-in-themselves having legitimate ends of their own to pursue. Critical educators like Giroux take too reductive a view of schools, viewing

them primarily and often exclusively as political sites. While Giroux (1989) criticises traditional educators of using schools and literacy to reproduce the “logic of capital through the ideological and material forms of privilege and domination that structure the lives of students” (p. 128), he seems to fall into a similar trap, since he defines the role of schools and critical education in predominantly political terms, defining its primary purpose as “the formation of a critical and engaged citizenry.” If the conservative educators are using schools and education to further their political ends, the radical educators would like to do the same, but with a different political agenda in mind.

The critical educators have done invaluable work in pointing out that the political ideology underlying the institutional structure and practise in schools deserves critical examination and uncovering. Yet they should guard against falling into the ideological trap of taking an exclusively political view of literacy and schools. While I agree with Giroux that public education should be linked with the imperatives of democracy, in that the institutional structure of education should take a participatory form in line with the ethical principles of democracy, I argue that he defines the purpose of schooling in reductionist political terms, as do policy planners who view literacy predominantly in its potential for national development and modernization. I protest on behalf of the children, at being objectified and instrumentalised thus, viewed as national resources or political agents and the school perceived primarily as a political arena. Children are not national resources, they are persons and the purpose of schooling is primarily to nurture their growth as persons, and to help them appropriate literacy for their *own* purposes. My study suggests that young children would reconceive the school as a playground rather than a political arena and redefine critical literacy as “creative literacy,” construing it as a tool with which to creatively and imaginatively construct a self related to others in the world, a tool they can use to imagine possibilities for their lives and consequently for the larger public spheres. The critical educators speak of the schools as “democratic public

spheres" — and so they should be — but not ones that obliterate or swallow up the personal spheres. Viewed from the perspective of young children, literacy is not for social and political revolution or national development, it is for people to relate with each other in empowering ways, and perhaps they have a point, perhaps that is another form that social and political revolution might take. A destruction of power structures not by attacking them frontally but a transformation of these into empowering relationships, or as the children show — circles of mutuality.

The children remind us of the value of considering multiple perspectives, pointing out that reality is defined differently by people in different places. They stake a claim for their own perspective as a valuable legitimate one, and say to policy planners, political activists, social scientists, educators, researchers, who are concerned about the failure of schools, that the only helpful way and one that honours the democratic principles on the bases of which the arguments are made, is to move from high lofty distant places into the children's world, to engage with them respectfully, to listen to what they say, to watch what they do and to develop solutions collaboratively and responsively *with* them. My study demonstrates how the problem of relevance was resolved, rather dissolved, when it was taken into the classroom, to the children. When they were responded to respectfully as persons, they made the curriculum relevant to themselves and showed useful directions.

FURTHER RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

I end this dissertation well aware of its many limitations. Their value lies however, in that they point towards areas requiring further research. The study was deliberately focused on the children in the classroom, as such this dissertation does not consider the perspective of the teachers as fully as it deserves. Teachers could provide

valuable insights regarding the problem of *teacher training*, which is an important one. As revealed by my observations, the present system seems to be failing. Present teacher training programs in the Indian context and elsewhere are too decontextualised and distant from real classroom settings. Further, they seem to fail to “train” teachers out of traditional prejudices and towards an ethic of respect for children. There seems to be a need for a critical, responsive, creative, participatory training of teachers. Research is required to explore the forms that such training might take, asking the question: How can teachers be trained responsively to teach responsively and respectfully? My study indicates that methods of inquiry would involve an active participation of teachers and student teachers who are probably the best experts on this matter.

Further, there is the issue of *assessment*. Given that education is driven largely by assessment procedures everywhere in the world, assessment procedures must be in coherence with the conception of literacy, development, teaching and learning (Masuda, 1993). The present system views literacy as a technology, a decontextualised “competency” (Minimum Levels of Learning at the Primary Stage, 1991) or skill. According to the current system children are assessed individually, the unit of assessment is the literacy product which is considered to adequately represent the competencies and skills of literacy acquired by the child. Given the vision of literacy, language, development, knowledge and learning proposed by extant research and used in this study, such a system seems to be highly inadequate. It takes too minimal a view of literacy, teaching, learning and of children. A system of assessment is required which is equal to the complexity of literacy as a socio-cultural *process* and to development as the development of the “self,” not just of abstract skills and competencies. The unit of assessment requires reconceptualising. What would this be? Research is required for the development of assessment procedures which are *responsive* to culturally embedded needs and purposes of children, appreciative of literacy, teaching and learning as a

complex, social processes and most importantly ones that are respectful and nurturing of children's development as *persons*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Althusser, L. (1969). For Marx. (Trans. by B. Brewster). London: Allen Lane.
- Anderson, C. A. (1965). Literacy and schooling on the development threshold: Some historical cases. In C. A. Anderson & M. J. Bowman (Eds.), Education and Economic Development. Chicago: Aldine Publishing.
- Apple, M. W. (1979). Ideology and Curriculum. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Apple, M. W. (1982). Education and Power. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Applebee, A. N. (1978). The child's concept of story: Ages two to seventeen. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Arendt, H. (1963). On revolution. New York: Viking Press.
- Au, K., & Jordan, C. (1981). Teaching reading to Hawaiian children: Finding a culturally appropriate solution. In H. Trueba, G. Guthrie & K. Au (Eds.), Culture and the Bilingual Classroom: Studies in Classroom Ethnography (pp. 139-52). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Austin, J. L. (1962). How to do things with words. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ayer, A. J. (1966). The problems of knowledge. Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1986). Speech Genres and other late essays. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Bauman, R. (1977). Verbal art as performance. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Bauman, R. (1982). Ethnography of children's folklore. In P. Gilmore & A. A. Glathorn (Eds.), Children in and out of school (pp. 172-187). Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Bereiter, C., & Engelmann, S. (1966). Teaching disadvantaged children in the preschool. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Bergin, T. G., & Fisch, M. H. (1970). The New Science of Giambattista Vico. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Berlin, I. (1976). Vico and Herder. London: The Hogarth Press.
- Bloomfield, L. (1933). Language. New York: Holt, Rhinehart & Winston.
- Bolton, G. (1986). Selected writings: On drama in education. London: Longman.
- Bolton, G. (1984). Drama as education. London: Longman.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. C. (1977). Reproduction in education, society and culture. London: Sage Publications.

- Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (1989). Can there be a liberal philosophy of education in a democratic society? In H. A. Giroux & P. McLaren (Eds.), Critical Pedagogy, the state and cultural struggle (pp. 24-32). New York: State University of New York Press.
- Britton, J. (1970). Language and Learning. London: Penguin Books.
- Brown, R., & Gilman, A. (1960). In T. Sebeok (Ed.), Style in language. Cambridge, MA: Technology Press of Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Bruner, J. S., Jolly, A., & Sylva, K. (Eds.). (1976). Play, its role in development and evolution. New York: Basic Books.
- Bruner, J. (1984). Language, mind and reading. In H. Goelman, A. Oberg & F. Smith (Eds.), Awakening to literacy (pp. 192-201). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Bruner, J. (1986). Actual minds and possible worlds. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bruner, J. (1990). Acts of meaning. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Buch, M. B., & Govinda, R. (1987). Educational research in India. An overview. New Delhi: NCERT.
- Cazden, C., & Leggett, E. (1981). Culturally responsive education: Recommendations for achieving Lau remedies II. In H. Trueba, G. Guthrie & K. Au (Eds.), Culture and the bilingual classroom: Studies in classroom ethnography (pp. 69-86). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Cazden, C. (1976). Play with language and meta-linguistic awareness. In J. Bruner, A. Jolly & K. Sylva (Eds.), Play: Its role in development and evolution (pp. 603-608). New York: Basic Books.
- Cazden, C. (1976). How knowledge about language helps the classroom teacher — Or does it: A personal account. The Urban Review, 9, 74-91.
- Cazden, C., & Steinberg, Z. D. (1979). Children as teachers — Of peers and ourselves. Theory into Practice, XVIII(4), 258-267.
- Cazden, C. (1994). What is sharing time for? In A. H. Dyson & C. Genishi (Eds.), The Need for story: Cultural diversity in classroom and community (pp. 72-80). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Challenge of education: A policy perspective. (1985). New Delhi: Ministry of Education, Government of India.
- Chomsky, N. (1968). Language and mind. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.
- Chukovsky, K. (1963). From two to five. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Clay, M. (1975). What did I write? Exeter: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Cook-Gumperz, J. (1986). The social construction of literacy. Cambridge: Cambridge

- University Press.
- Cook-Gumperz, J. (1991). Children's construction of "childness." In B. Scales, M. Almy, A. Nicolopoulou & S. Ervin-Tripp (Eds.), Play and the social context of development in early care and education (pp. 207-219). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Corsaro, W. (1985). Friendship and peer culture in the early years. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Corsaro, W., & Schwarz, K. (1991). Peer play and socialization in two cultures: Implications for research and practice. In B. Scales, M. Almy, A. Nicolopoulou & S. Ervin-Tripp (Eds.), Play and the social context of development in early care and education (pp. 234-255). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Cressy, D. (1990). Literacy and the social order: Reading and writing in Tudor and Stuart England. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Daiute, C. (1990). The role of play in writing development. Research in the Teaching of English, 24, 4-47.
- Das, R. C. (1975). A comparative study of educational wastage in urban and rural areas. Assam: State Institute of Education.
- Delpit, L. (1988). The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children. Harvard Educational Review, 58, 280-298.
- Descartes, R. (1986). Meditations on first philosophy. (Trans. by J. Cottingham). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dewey, J. (1985). Democracy and Education. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Di Bona, J. (1989). Critical perspectives on Indian education. New Delhi: Bahri Publications.
- Donaldson, M. (1978). Children's minds. New York: Norton.
- Dunn, J., & Kendrick, C. (1982). Siblings: Love, envy and understanding. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Dyson, A. H. (1986). Staying fee to dance with the children: The dangers of sanctifying the language arts curriculum. English Education, 18, 135-146.
- Dyson, A. H. (1988). Unintentional helping in the primary grades: Writing in the children's world. In B. A. Rafeote & D. L. Rubin (Eds.), The social construction of written communication (pp. 218-248). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Dyson, A. H. (1989). Multiple worlds of child writers: Friends learning to write. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Dyson, A. H. (1991). The roots of literacy development. In B. Scales, M. Almy, A. Nicolopoulou & S. Ervin-Tripp (Eds.), Play and the social context of development in early care and education (pp. 98-117). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Dyson, A. H. (1991). The word and the world: Reconceptualising written language

- development, or, do rainbows mean a lot to little girls? Research in the Teaching of English, 25, 97-123.
- Dyson, A. H. (1992). The case of the singing scientist: A performance perspective on the "stages" of school literacy. Written Communication, 9, 3-47.
- Dyson, A. H. (1993). The social work of child composing. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Dyson, A. H., & Genishi, C. (Eds.). (1994). The Need for story: Cultural diversity in classroom and community. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Eagleton, T. (1991). Literary theory. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Ellsworth, E. (1992). Why doesn't this feel empowering? Working through the repressive myths of critical pedagogy. In C. Luke & J. Gore (Eds.), Feminisms and critical pedagogy (pp. 90-119). New York: Routledge Chapman and Hall, Inc.
- Erickson, F. (1977). Some approaches to inquiry in school-community ethnography. In H. Trueba, G. P. Guthrie & K. Au (Eds.), Culture and the bilingual classroom: Studies in classroom ethnography (pp. 17-36). Rowley, MA: Newbury House Publishers, Inc.
- Erickson, F., & Mohatt, G. (1982). Cultural organization and participation structures in two classrooms of Indian students. In G. Spindler (Ed.), Doing the ethnography of schooling (pp. 131-74). New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston.
- Erickson, F. (1987). Transformation and school success: The politics and culture of educational achievement. Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 18, 355-356.
- Feinberg, W. (1989). Fixing the schools: The ideological turn. In H. A. Giroux & P. McLaren (Eds.), Critical pedagogy, the state and cultural struggle (pp. 69-92). New York: State University of New York Press.
- Ferdman, B. (1991). Literacy and cultural identity. In M. Mashiko & B. P. Kennedy (Eds.), Language issues in literacy and bilingual/multicultural education (pp. 347-372). Reprinted Series No. 22: Harvard Educational Review.
- Ferreiro, E. (1986). The interplay between information and assimilation in beginning literacy. In W. Teale & E. Sulzby (Eds.), Emergent Literacy: Writing and reading. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Feyerabend, P. K. (1988). Against method. London: Verso.
- Firth, J. R. (1964). The tongues of men, and speech. London: Oxford University Press.
- Fifth All India Educational Survey. (1989). New Delhi: NCERT.
- Fine, M. (1989). Silencing and nurturing voice in an improbable context: Urban adolescents in public schools. In H. A. Giroux & P. McLaren (Eds.), Critical pedagogy, the state and cultural struggle (pp. 152-174). New York: State University of New York Press.
- Florio, S., & Walsh, M. (1977). The teacher as colleague in classroom research. In H. Trueba., G. P. Guthrie & K. Au (Eds.), Culture and the bilingual classroom: Studies

- in classroom ethnography (pp. 87-105). Rowley, MA: Newbury House Publishers, Inc.
- Freire, P. (1970). The Pedagogy of the oppressed. New York: Seabury Press.
- Freire, P. (1973). Education for critical consciousness. New York: Continuum.
- Freire, P., & Macedo, D. (1987). Literacy: Reading the word and the world. New York: Bergin & Garvey.
- Foucault, M. (1980). Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977. New York: Pantheon.
- Gadamer, H. G. (1975). Truth and method. New York: Crossroads.
- Garvey, C. (1990). Play. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gee, J. (1988). The legacies of literacy: From Plato to Freire through Harvey Graff. Harvard Educational Review, 58(2), 195-211.
- Gee, J. (1993). Postmodernism and literacies. In C. Lankshear & P. McLaren (Eds.), Critical literacy (pp. 271-297). New York: State University of New York Press.
- Geertz, C. (1973). The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays. New York: Basic Books.
- Genishi, C., & Dyson, A. H. (1984). Language assessment in the early years. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Genishi, C. (1991). The research perspective: Looking at play through case studies. In B. Scales, M. Almy, A. Nicolopoulou & S. Ervin-Tripp (Eds.), Play and the social context of development in early care and education (pp. 75-84). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Giroux, H. A. (1983). Theories of reproduction and resistance in the new sociology of education: A critical analysis. Harvard Educational Review, 53(3), 257-293.
- Giroux, H. A. (1989). Schooling as a form of cultural politics: Toward a pedagogy of and for difference. In H. A. Giroux & P. McLaren (Eds.), Critical pedagogy, the state and cultural struggle (pp. 125-152). New York: State University of New York Press.
- Goffman, E. (1959). The presentation of self in everyday life. New York: Anchor Doubleday.
- Goodman, Y. (1984). The development of early literacy. In H. Goelman, A. Oberg & F. Smith (Eds.), Awakening to literacy (pp. 102-110). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Goody, J., & Watt, I. (1988). The consequences of literacy. In E. B. Kintgen, B. Kroll & M. Rose (Eds.), Perspectives on literacy (pp. 3-28). Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Goodenough, W. (1971). Culture, language and society. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

- Gore, M. S. (1982). Education and modernization in India. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.
- Graff, H. (1988). The legacies of literacy. In E. B. Kintgen, B. Kroll & M. Rose (Eds.), Perspectives on literacy (pp. 82-95). Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Graves, D. (1983). Writing: Teachers and children at work. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Greene, M. (1986). In search of a critical pedagogy. Harvard Educational Review, 56(4), 234-248.
- Greene, M. (1988). The dialectic of freedom. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Grewal, J. S., & Gupta, I. D. (1991). Research in elementary education: A trend report. In Fourth survey of research in education, 1983-1988 (pp. 1249-1285). New Delhi: NCERT.
- Gudlach, R., McLane, J., Stott, F., & McNamee, G. (1985). The social foundations of children's early writing. In M. Farr (Ed.), Children's early writing development (pp. 1-58). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Gumperz, J. (1981). Conversational inference and classroom learning. In J. Green & C. Wallat (Eds.), Ethnography and language in educational settings (pp. 2-24). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1973). Explorations in the functions of language. London: Arnold.
- Harris, S. (1991). Indigenous writing in Northern Territory aboriginal bilingual education. In P. Cormack (Ed.), Literacy: Making it explicit, making it possible. Selected papers from the 16th Australian Reading Association Conference. Adelaide: South Australia.
- Havelock, E. (1988). The coming of literate communication to Western culture. In E. B. Kintgen, B. Kroll & M. Rose (Eds.), Perspectives on literacy (pp. 27-135). Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Heath, S. B. (1983). Ways with words: Language, life and work in communities and classrooms. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Heath, S. B. (1988). Protean shapes in literacy events: Ever shifting oral and literate traditions. In E. B. Kintgen, B. Kroll & M. Rose (Eds.), Perspectives on literacy (pp. 348-371). Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Heathcote, D. (1984). Drama as challenge. In L. Johnson & C. O'Neil (Eds.), Dorothy Heathcote (pp. 80-89). London: Hutchinson.
- Holdaway, D. (1979). The foundations of literacy. Sydney: Ashton Scholastic.
- Holt, J. C. (1964). How children fail. New York: Pitman.
- Hull, G., & Salvatori, M. (1991). Literacy theory and basic writing. In M. G. Moran & J. J. Martin (Eds.), Research in basic writing (pp. 49-74). New York: Greenwood Press.
- Hussain, M. (1982). Wastage and stagnation in primary schools of rural areas of Bhilwara District. Rajasthan: State Institute of Educational Research and Teaching.

- Hymes, D. (1974). Models of the interaction of language and social life. In J. Gumperz & D. Hymes (Eds.), Directions in sociolinguistics. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Hymes, D. (1980). Language in education. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- James, W. (1976). Essays in radical empiricism. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Jordan, C. (1985). Translating culture: From ethnographic information to educational program. Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 16(2), 105-23
- Kant, I. (1965). Critique of pure reason. (Trans. N. K. Smith). New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Kant, I. (1964). Groundwork of the metaphysic of morals. (Trans. H. J. Paton). New York: Harper & Row.
- Kelly-Byrne, D. (1989). A child's play life: An ethnographic study. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Kuhn, T. (1961). The structure of scientific revolution. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kumar, K. (1993). Literacy and primary education in India. In P. Freebody & A. R. Welch (Eds.), Knowledge, culture and power: International perspectives on literacy as policy and practice. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Labov, W. (1972). Sociolinguistic patterns. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1992). Culturally-relevant teaching: The key to making multicultural education work. In C. A. Grant (Ed.), Research and multicultural education. London: Falmer Press.
- Lankshear, C., & Lawler, M. (1987). Literacy, schooling and revolution. New York: The Falmer Press.
- Lankshear, C., & McLaren, P. (Eds.). (1993). Critical literacy: politics, praxis and the postmodern. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Lomasky, L. E. (1987). Persons, rights and the moral community. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Luria, A. R. (1976). Cognitive development: Its cultural and social foundations. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Masuda, W. (1993). Reliability and validity in portfolio assessment: Toward definition and redefinition. Unpublished manuscript.
- McLaren, P. (1989). Life in schools. New York: Longman.

- Mehan, H. (1982). The structure of classroom events and their consequences for student performance. In P. Gilmore & A. A. Blathorn (Eds.), Children in and out of school (pp. 59-87). Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Mills, C. W. (1959). The Sociological imagination. London: Oxford University Press.
- Mitra, S. K. (1987). Priorities in educational research. In Third survey of research in education, 1978-1988 (pp. 1023-1029). New Delhi: NCERT.
- Moffett, J., & Wagner, B. (1976). Student-centered language arts and reading, K-13. A handbook for teachers. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Mohatt, G., & Erickson, F. (1981). Cultural differences in teaching styles in an Odawa school: A sociolinguistic approach. In H. Trueba, G. Guthrie & K. Au (Eds.), Culture and the bilingual classroom: Studies in classroom ethnography (pp. 105-19). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Naik, C. (1982). Wastage in agro-climatically different areas of Pune. Pune: Indian Institute of Pune.
- Naik, J. (1975). Elementary education in India: A promise to keep. New Delhi: Allied Publishers.
- A Nation at Risk: The full account. (1984). Cambridge, MA: USA Research.
- National Policy of Education, 1986: Programme of action New Delhi: Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Education.
- Nayar, U. (1989). Education of the child in India with special focus on girls: A situational analysis. New Delhi: NCERT.
- Newman, R. (1989). Grassroots education in India: A challenge for policy makers. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private, Ltd.
- Nicolopoulou, A. (1991). Play, cognitive development and the social world: The research perspective. In B. Scales, M. Almy, A. Nicolopoulou & S. Ervin-Tripp (Eds.), Play and the social context of development in early care and education (pp. 129-143). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Nurullah, S., & Naik, J. (1964). A students' history of education in India (1800-1965). Bombay: Macmillan and Co., Ltd.
- Ochs, E. J. (1988). Culture and language development. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ogbu, J. (1987). Variability in minority school performance: A problem in search of an explanation. Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 18, 312-341.
- Olson, D. (1991). From utterance to text: The bias of language in speech and writing. In M. Minami & B. P. Kennedy (Eds.), Language issues in literacy and bilingual/multicultural education (pp. 151-177). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Educational Review Reprint Series No.22
- Ong, W. (1988). Some psychodynamics of orality. In E. B. Kintgen, B. Kroll, & M.

- Rose (Eds.), Perspectives on literacy (pp. 28-44). Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Opie, I., & Opie, P. (1959). The lore and language of schoolchildren. London: Oxford University Press.
- Paley, V. (1980). Wally's stories. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Paley, V. (1986). On listening to what the children say. Harvard Educational Review, 56, 122-131.
- Pattison, R. (1982). On literacy: The politics of the word from Homer to the age of rock. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Peters, R. S. (1970). Ethics and education. London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd.
- Phenix, P. H. (1964). Realms of meaning: Philosophy of the curriculum for general education. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Phillips, S. U. (1972). Acquisition of rules for appropriate speech usage. In C. B. Cazden, V. P. John & D. Hymes (Eds.), The functions of language in the classroom. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Piaget, J., & Inhelder, B. (1969). The psychology of the child. New York: Basic Books.
- Pradl, G. M. (Ed.). (1982). Prospect and retrospect: Selected essays of James Britton. New Jersey: Boynton/Cook Publishers, Inc.
- Prakash, N. (1989). Scheduled castes: Socio-economic changes. Allahabad: Chugh Publications.
- Prasad, I. (1986). Reservation: Action for social equality. New Delhi: Criterion Publications.
- Rao, S. (1985). Education and rural development. London: Sage Publications.
- Raza, M., & Aggarwal, Y. (1986). An Analysis of the equities in the levels of literacy in India. In School education in India: Present status and future needs. New Delhi: National Council of Educational Research and Training.
- Reid, L. A. (1986). Ways of understanding and education. London: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Report of the Committee, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Education, Government of India. (1991). Minimum levels of learning at the primary stage. New Delhi: National Council of Educational Research and Training.
- Report of the Committee for Review of the National Policy of Education. (1990). New Delhi: Ministry of Human Resource Development.
- Ricoeur, P. (1976). Interpretation theory: Discourse and the surplus of meaning. Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press.
- Ricoeur, P. (1981). Hermeneutics & the human sciences. Cambridge: Cambridge

- University Press.
- Rist, R. (1973). The urban school: A factory for failure. A study of education in American society. Boston, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Rogoff, B. (1990). Apprenticeship in thinking: Cognitive development in social context. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rosaldo, R. (1989). Culture and truth. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Rosen, H. (1984). Stories and meaning. New Jersey :Boynton-Cook.
- Rosen, H. (1980). The dramatic mode. In P. Salmon (Ed.), Coming to know (pp. 152-169). London: Routledge.
- Rosen, C., & Rosen, H. (1973). The language of primary school children. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin.
- Rosenblatt, L. (1982). The literary transaction: Evocation and response. Theory into Practice, 21(4), 301-310.
- Rorty, R. (1980). Philosophy and the mirror of nature. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Roy, P. K. (1987). Research on Indian education abroad. In Third survey of research in education, 1978-1983 (pp. 1019-1023). New Delhi: NCERT.
- Russell, B. (1959). The problems of philosophy. London: Oxford University Press.
- Saussure, F. de (1959). Course in general linguistics. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Sartre, J.-P. (1956). Being and nothingness. New York: NY Publishers.
- Schiefflin, B. (1990). The give and take of everyday life. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Scott, J. W. (1988). Deconstructing equality-versus-difference: Or, the uses of poststructuralist theory for feminism. Feminist Studies, 14(1), 33-50.
- Scribner, S., & Cole, M. (1988). Unpacking literacy. In E. B. Kintgen, B. Kroll & M. Rose (Eds.), Perspectives on literacy (pp. 57-71). Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Scribner, S. (1988). Literacy in three metaphors. In E. B. Kintgen, B. Kroll & M. Rose (Eds.), Perspectives in literacy (pp. 71-82). Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Seetharamu, A. S., & Usha Devi. (1981). Education in rural areas. New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House.
- Sellars, W. (1967). Philosophical perspectives:Metaphysics and epistemology. Roseda, CA: Ridgeview Publishing Co.
- Sharma, R. C. (1982). Wastage in education at the primary level in Rajasthan. Rajasthan:

- State Institute of Educational Research and Teaching.
- State Institute of Education (U. P.). (1986). A study of dropouts and failures in primary classes. Allahabad: State Institute of Education.
- Stern, D. (1985). The interpersonal world of the infant: A view from pshychoanalysis and developmental psychology. New York: Basic Books.
- Strawson, P. F. (1963). Individuals. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Street, B. (1984). Literacy in theory and practise. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Szwed, J. (1988). The Ethnography of literacy. In E. B. Kintgen, B. Kroll & M. Rose (Eds.), Perspectives on literacy (pp. 303-312). Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Tannen, D. (1984). Conversational style: Analyzing talk among friends. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Thompson, I. E. (1981). Being and meaning: Paul Tillich's theory of meaning, truth and logic. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Vakil, A. K. (1985). Reservation policy and scheduled castes in India. New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House.
- Vogt, L., Jordan, C., & Tharp, R. (1987). Explaining school failure, producing school success: Two cases. Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 18(4), 276-86.
- Volosinov, V. N. (1973). Marxism and the philosophy of language. (Trans. by L. Matejka & I. R. Titunik). New York: Seminar Press.
- Vygotsky, L. (1976). Play and its role in the mental development of the child. Soviet Psychology, 12, 6-18.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). Thought and Language. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). Mind in society. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Warner, S. A. (1963). Teacher. New York, London: Bantham Books.
- West C., & Zimmerman, D. (1982). Small insults: a study of interruptions in cross-talk conversations between unacquainted persons. In B. Thorne, C. Kramarae & N. Henley (Eds.), Language, Gender and Society. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Williams, B. (1981). Moral luck. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Williams, R. (1977). Marxism and literature. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wittgenstien, L. (1958). Philosophical investigations. New York: The Macmillan Company.

APPENDIX A

CASTE IN INDIA — A brief note

The caste system, unique to India, has been functioning in one form or another for several thousand years, its origins traced to the vedic period, which is undated but located earlier than 3000 BC. Caste is an endogamous group, membership to which is hereditary, entitling group members to certain power, privileges and restrictions, defining occupations and social status. The caste system is a hierarchical ranking of people with definite rules regulating the relations between the groups along with the powers, rights and obligations of each. Caste can be classified broadly into four groups: a) the Brahmins who are the highest castes; b) the Kshatriyas and Vaishyas who are the upper castes; and c) the lowest castes once called the Shudras, are now divided into several subdivisions; two main divisions are the other backward castes and the scheduled castes, the latter consisting of the very lowest castes. There is a clearly defined system of super-ordinate and subservient relations in terms of mutual obligations towards different caste groups by each caste.

The primary purpose of the caste system according to Prasad (1986) was “the distributing of privileges in society and the most stable way to perpetuate privileges was to put it in an order based on birth” (p. 40). The areas of education, administration and commerce were reserved for the three upper castes whereas manual and dirty work was assigned to the lower castes. To this was added the Hindu concept of “pollution” according to which those engaged in manual, dirty work were polluted and therefore not fit to be mingled with socially. From this emerged the concept of “untouchability” and the label “untouchables” for several of the lowest castes engaged in scavenging, cleaning the sewage, removing dead cattle from the village, and other menial tasks. Occupying the bottom rungs of the social hierarchy, severe restrictions were imposed upon the

“untouchables.” Their residence was restricted to certain quarters, they were forbidden entry to temples, water from public wells and the use of public places like rest-houses and shops. They were banned entry into higher occupations and education. Religious sanctions were applied to ensure that the caste regulations were maintained. Ancient texts reveal an elaborate and detailed penal system for violation of caste rules (for details, see Mishra, 1989). Prasad (1986) summarises it well:

The primary producing castes had the worst of both the worlds as a partner in society to lead a depressed life of servility without any participation in its management; and as a work force to do heavy and dirty manual work and to be satisfied with the remuneration dictated by the necessity of upper castes who remained entitled to enjoy all good things in life. In this sense the caste system became the instrument of deprivation by reserving education and administration, which in turn assured power, income and wealth for those at the top of the hierarchy. . . . The Indian system is unique in the sense that there is not provision of rights to individuals. Each one in Hindu society inherits social characteristics of the caste to which he belongs. . . . Theoretically, according to the caste system, no man could enter into any kind of a contract, arrangement or understanding with any other man of his own choice independent of the caste consideration. The remuneration for work was determined by the social status of workers rather than by the use of value of work performed. Every individual had ascriptive personality and there was nothing for him to achieve on his own. Life chances of individuals were shadowed by the chance of the caste. The relations of dependence or dominance between individuals were the by product of relations between castes. There was complete absence of any mechanism by which the needs and aspirations of individuals could change the caste rules. In cases of violation of rules by individuals there were sanctions (like excommunication) including the death penalty administered to the erring individual. (pp. 41-42)

Dharma, or the Hindu religious and moral code, placed the highest value on the acceptance of one’s station in life, and Indian history does not provide any examples of rebellion by the untouchables against the upper castes (Rudra, 1981).

In the nineteenth century, several Indian social, political and religious leaders lead reform movements, propagating the removal of untouchability. Tilak, Vivekananda, Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Mrs. Anne Besant are prominent amongst these. In the twentieth century Mahatma Gandhi, Ambedkar, the National Congress of India and other social, political and religious agencies laboured in the same direction (for details of these movements, see Prakash, 1989). After gaining Independence in 1947, the government of

India took up the removal of untouchability as one of its main and important tasks. Article 17 of the Indian constitution banned the observance of untouchability. In 1955, the Untouchability (Offences) Act was passed, set into operation, and was later amended several times to strengthen it. In 1976, it was renamed Protection of Civil Rights Acts. The term “scheduled caste” was the expression standardised in the Constitution, used to refer to the “untouchables.”

There have been several progressive changes because of the social, economic and political efforts to weaken the caste system. The major change that occurred in Indian society is the declaration of a welfare state, committed to take political action in order to redress historically disadvantaged and crippled groups. The Indian government has provided many facilities in the field of education and occupation to scheduled castes in order to promote social mobility amongst them. A definite social policy called, “reservation,” has been adopted, which is briefly, “a quota representation in education and jobs” (Prasad, 1986, p. 63).

Attitudes fostered over centuries do not die easily, and caste rigidities and prejudices, though weakened to some extent, continue to exist, especially in the rural areas. Members of the scheduled castes have migrated to urban centres seeking urban employment, moving from the rural caste bound society. Studies show that in the rural areas all over India, caste attitudes prevail, as do caste restrictions, the practices of untouchability, isolation of lower castes and atrocities against lower castes when they exercise their rights (Vakil, 1985; Pimpley, 1980; Tata Institute of Social Sciences, 1982). The caste structure is not uniform throughout the country, the number of castes and the numerical strengths of different castes varying regionally, yet casteist attitudes are found in almost all regions of the country, not only among Hindus, but also among the Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and Jains. As Prasad (1986) puts it, “Caste is a

fundamental reality of Indian society.” Positions of administrative, economic and political power are still controlled by members of the upper castes due to centuries of social advantage, especially control over education and therefore entry into positions of power and privilege. Political and social efforts continue to work towards the abolition of this cruel system, however, which often has the unfortunate counter-effect of increasing caste-consciousness and solidarity.

APPENDIX B
PHOTOGRAPHS

1. The school



The second grade



APPENDIX B
PHOTOGRAPHS

2. SHAKUN in school



In her friendship group

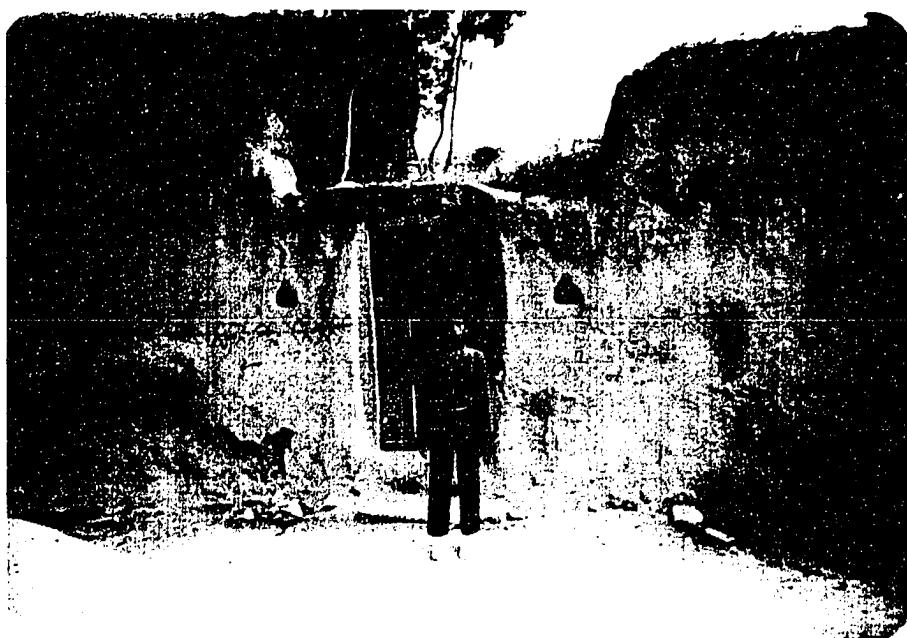


APPENDIX B
PHOTOGRAPHS

3. RAJESH at home with friends



Posing alone



APPENDIX B
PHOTOGRAPHS

4. SHEELA at home



In school, reading her text book



APPENDIX B
PHOTOGRAPHS

5. RAVI at home with his family



↑

In school, working conscientiously with head bent



↑

APPENDIX B
PHOTOGRAPHS

6. Activity at the hand pump



Sheela and friends playing after school

