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**JOURNEY INTO LITERACY FOR DEVELOPMENT:
DISCOVERING TWO WAYS OF KNOWING**

by

JUSTINE F. FOXALL, B.A., C.T.E.S.L., M.Ed.

**A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of**

Master of Arts

Department of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

December 20, 1993

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submitted by Justine Foxall, B.A., C.T.E.S.L., M. Ed.

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

the degree of Master of Arts

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Richard Darville, Thesis Supervisor

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "William Cowan", positioned above a horizontal line.

***William Cowan, Chair, Department of Linguistics and
Applied Language Studies***

***Carleton University
20 December 1993***

ABSTRACT

The initial proposal for this thesis was to examine non-formal teacher training in Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee's Non-formal Primary Education (NFPE) program for its 'participatory' and 'liberatory' characteristics especially as they impacted women. However, the writer's expectations created through her reading of texts concerning the NFPE did not match what she observed in the field.

This disjuncture consequently became the object of inquiry. The thesis investigates both the textually mediated social organization of knowledge about 'literacy for development' in the Development enterprise, and the researcher's concepts of participatory and liberatory education as they inform the knowledge produced through her observations on the ground.

Explicating the social organization of knowledge in this context is offered as a tool to fight 'in and against' the ruling practices of Development, and to clear a space for posing questions and alternative possibilities.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AEM	Area Educational Manager
ARBAN	Association for the Rehabilitation of Basic Needs
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
BTT	Basic Teacher Training
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DLO	Donor Liaison Officer
EWLP	Experimental World Literacy Program
FO	Field Officer
IRE	Initiate Respond Evaluate
NFPE	Non-Formal Primary Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PEOC	Primary Education for Older Children
PO	Program Officer
RCP	Rural Credit Project
RDP	Rural Development Program
SAP	Structural Adjustment Policies/Program
TARC	Training and Resource Centre
TOT	Training of Trainers
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific & Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Fund
UPE	Universal Primary Education
USAID	United States' Agency for International Development
USCC-B	Unity Service Committee Canada-Bangladesh
VERC	Village Education Resource Centre
WHDP	Women's Health and Development Program

GLOSSARY

<i>bari:</i>	home, homestead, household
<i>bhat:</i>	cooked rice
<i>boyati:</i>	traditional story tellers
<i>cha:</i>	tea, usually served with sweet milk and sugar
<i>gram:</i>	village
<i>kupi:</i>	small kerosene lamp
<i>mach:</i>	generic term for fish
<i>orna:</i>	scarf worn with the <i>salwar kameez</i> over chest and or head
<i>poribeS:</i>	environment, surroundings, social studies
<i>purdah:</i>	curtain or veil; refers also to the traditional institution of female seclusion
<i>puti pore:</i>	tell or give a story or song
<i>rickshawallah:</i>	the man who drives the bicycle rickshaw
<i>salwar kameez:</i>	loose trousers and tunic worn by girls
<i>sari:</i>	long wide length of cloth wrapped about the body in such a way that one end may be worn over the head as a 'veil'
<i>upazila:</i>	one of 460 territorial districts with a population of 200,000 to 300,000 people

CHAPTER ONE

LAUNCHING OUT

Introduction

Bangladesh, on the Bay of Bengal at the labyrinthine confluence of the Meghna, Jamuna and Ganga Rivers, is prone to ruinous flooding and catastrophic tropical monsoons which provide material for portraying Bangladesh in magazines, newspapers and on television screens of our country. It is, therefore, not unusual that the first pictures that came to my mind when confronted with the option of engaging in fieldwork in Bangladesh, were images of devastated homes and ravaged people stranded in the wake of another disastrous flood. Even though my substantial experience in Chad, a poor country of Africa, had taught me that Western media rarely present a well-rounded view of any Third World country, the beauty of Bangladesh's lush deltaic plains surprised me as the plane began its descent that September afternoon of 1992. Although I was somewhat ready for the crowded, shabby communities strung along the railway tracks and huddled around the building sites of the rich, I was especially impressed by the industrious hustle and cleanliness of the capital city, Dhaka. In my initial experience of Bangladesh, media accounts did not correspond with the reality I observed. This sense of disjuncture presaged further experiences of contrast between image and

observed reality.

Although Bangladesh has indeed been the recipient of countless tons of emergency aid and the site of endless aid projects ever since its independence in 1972, a number of success stories have emerged from this "international basket case" (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee [BRAC], 1992a, p. 2). One of these success stories is the phenomenal growth and major achievements of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), a national non-governmental organization, which has been involved in aid and rural development from the dawn of Bangladesh's independence.

As groundwork for three months of field research within BRAC's renowned Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) program, I read a number of documents about BRAC and conversed with a few of its mid-level managers studying in Canada at the time. From these readings and encounters I formed an image of how BRAC's program might operate and looked forward to experiencing it directly. I was not prepared for the discrepancy between my expectations and the reality which I observed. This experience of incongruity launched me into an inquiry that was broader than what I had anticipated. I had set out to examine models of non-formal teacher education for literacy, but was later compelled to inquire into the ruling processes which organize the general project of literacy for development, and into Development's¹ relationship to organizations like the one I studied.

¹ I distinguish development with a capital 'D' for reasons I explain in the next section.

Originating in the fields of literacy and international Development, this thesis directs its attention to the *textually mediated social relations and processes* which organize activities and create knowledge about literacy for development, and about women and girls targeted by literacy for development programs. Development activities and the construction of knowledge about them are accomplished not in isolation but through *social relations and processes*.

The term "social relation" indicates actions and situations that are fundamentally, but perhaps not superficially, connected to one another, through social courses of action, in which the activities of various individuals over time are co-ordinated or concerted. (Darville, 1992b, p. 7)

By *textually mediated* I mean that documentary forms of communication, that is texts and talk about texts and acts of reading and writing, co-ordinate actions and decisions of people who, in this case, are involved in development.

This introductory chapter aims first of all to provide the background of my conceptions of development and literacy for development. Then it presents my original research intention before discussing how it was recast in the light of my field experience. The chapter concludes with an overview of the remainder of the thesis.

Development

In the context of international assistance, the term development has been used *descriptively* and *normatively*, that is to depict a present condition or

to project a desirable alternative (Goulet, 1992). It may refer to the ends of social change, for example, "a life materially richer, institutionally more 'modern,' and technologically more efficient" (ibid., p. 467). And it may refer to various means employed to achieve those ends ranging from "economic planning to propaganda campaigns, from comprehensive social engineering to sectoral interventions of all sorts with a view to altering values, behaviours, and social structures" (ibid.).

A sketch of the history of today's international assistance industry and the above understanding of 'development' would take us back to the implementation of the Marshall Plan after the Second World War (Gendzier, 1985). That plan set in motion the social and economic reconstruction of Europe's infrastructure through emergency relief programs and through financial aid for economic growth. The success in Europe was followed by similar development policies in colonial and emerging independent nations, then called "underdeveloped" countries.²

Recent work has opened up for inquiry the term and the practice of 'development.' Adele Mueller (n.d.), for example, distinguishes the term

² The evident bias of this term soon caused its removal from the official vocabulary of international development and relations. For many years "Third World" nations has been used in its place. It too, is inadequate and is now often replaced by terms such as 'developing countries' or the 'South.' But, degrees of 'development' are a matter of perspective, values, and definition and 'South' and 'North' aggregate countries with dissimilar levels of industrialization as well. However, as a matter of convention I have chosen to use, where necessary, 'developing country(ies)' and 'Third World' and the 'South' as interchangeable terms to refer to those countries which are not part of the dominant advanced industrialized group of countries. (See also Gendzier, 1985, p.1; Goetz, 1991, Note 1, p. 153 for further arguments on the use of these terms.)

development with a capital "D" to signify to the reader that she means "official Development organizations and their multiple connections into other societal institutions" (p. 3). Development with a capital "D" is "embedded in a very powerful apparatus of domination" (ibid., p. 2). By delimiting and qualifying the term in this way her intent is

...to specify the set of planning, management, and administrative procedures in bureaucratic and professional organizations which are warranted to conduct social change actions in Third World countries. (1987, p. 15)

Mueller conceives of small "d" development as an ideological construction of the "abstract forces and processes of international social change" (ibid.). For the purposes of this paper, I have adopted this distinction. For example, I write of 'literacy for development' meaning that literacy is viewed as one instrument for furthering social change. And I write of Development's conception of literacy to signal that I understand Development to be a powerful and pervasive industry, which propagates uniform concepts of literacy through co-ordinated practices of discourse. Mueller's analysis of Development as 'a set of organizational and discursive practices' has been instrumental in my own understanding. The thrust of this study concerns capital "D" Development and how 'literacy for girls and women for development' comes to be understood as literacy for Development.

Literacy for Development

Literacy as Technological Input

When advanced industrialized nations began 'doing Development' in countries of the South, the lack of an educated labour force with modern skills posed an enormous obstacle. Investing in education and training seemed the obvious solution for overcoming this dilemma. Frequently this solution entailed establishing basic and/or functional literacy for the majority of the population and passing legislation for universal primary education while making secondary education accessible to a greater number of youth.

We commonly think of literacy as the skills of reading and writing, that is, we consider it an *individual* ability. Either one has literacy or one doesn't. It may even be seen as a **necessary** attribute, enabling adults to "function' across various contexts as workers, consumers and citizens" (Darville, 1992a, pp. 5, 8). Furthermore, Street (1984) argues, many representations of literacy such as those in Development literature rest on the assumption that literacy is a *neutral technology* that can be detached from specific social contexts.

Indeed, literacy comes to be viewed as a

prerequisite to equality, to individual success...a commodity, an object, an 'it' to be acquired....That is, literacy is treated as though it is outside the social and political relations, ideological practices, and symbolic meaning structures in which it is embedded. (Rockhill, 1987, p. 158)

These concepts of literacy shape our perceptions of individuals who fall on either side of the standard (what a 'literate' or 'nonliterate' is like) and

inevitably affect both the essence and practice of educational programs (Scribner, 1984).

UNESCO's Experimental World Literacy Program (EWLP) in the 1960s (International Bureau of Education [IBE], 1990; Ryan, 1990; Street, 1984) is perhaps the best known, large scale, international effort to address the concern of developing countries to train their populations. The EWLP implemented a functional literacy approach. Ryan (1990) defines functional literacy succinctly and a little wryly:

The theory of work-oriented literacy was simple: the trainee was to master a vocational skill in conjunction with literacy instruction; this would enable him to increase his productivity; his income would rise; national output would increase and, by and by, there would be pie in the sky. (p. 8)³

As an aside, but relevant to the forthcoming discussion in Chapter Four about literacy for women and girls in developing countries--the EWLP program had not anticipated that the majority of those who would express interest in literacy training were not considered part of the active labour force and therefore had not been included in the initial target population. This majority were not men, but women, who often worked 10-12 hours of every day; (ibid.).

Literacy became associated with "progress,' 'civilisation,' individual liberty and social mobility" (Street, 1984, p. 2). In a conception dominant at this time it was held that investments in human capital formation, that is, literacy and schooling, would result in increased productivity, upward mobility

³ See also Bhola, 1982, p. 14; Levine, 1986, p. 32.

for the individual and economic expansion for the nation (Fuller, Edwards, & Gorman, 1987; see also Street, 1984, chap. 7). In my reading of this assumed tie between economic gain and literacy I was arrested by the critique implied in Ryan's definition of functional literacy which appears to echo the following analysis by Street (1984):

...the concept of 'functional' literacy disguises the relationship of a particular literacy programme to the *underlying political and ideological framework* [italics added]. The earlier Unesco input...subverted the interests of foreign investment and multinational companies on the premise that productivity and profits could be raised if 'literacy levels' were raised. From the point of view of many States, who badly needed such investment, literacy programmes represented an input factor whose success was to be assessed in terms of the economic return. This meant that ultimate determination of the programme lay with financial and commercial interests, with governments acting simply as mediators and as providers of the 'risk capital' in terms of the infrastructure of education and training. *The subjects themselves were a form of 'plant' whose effectiveness could be maximised by the employment of new 'education technology' in the form of 'literacy skills,' thereby enabling greater surplus to be extracted from them* [italics added]. (p. 184)

As Rockhill (1987) argued, literacy is handled as a 'commodity' or, put another way, literacy has become an object of knowledge separated from the lived actualities of people's experience.⁴ But, as we shall see below, Development counts on "banking" the commodity in the minds of receptive individuals in order to achieve its ruling and managing objectives.

⁴ I take the idea from Dorothy Smith (1990) who introduces her work, *The conceptual practices of power*, by characterizing the sociological practices of writing that objectify "society and social relations and [transform] the actualities of people's experience into the synthetic objects of its discourse..." (p. 2nd). She names these practices "ideological" (ibid.).

The concept of literacy as neutral technology, arises "within the practices of governing...that is, within the activities of, and from the perspective of, government, corporations, agencies of 'social control,' and the forms of knowledge that serve them" (Darville, 1992a, p. 8).

Those same apparatuses of ruling (Smith, 1984) "portray illiteracy as a dismal state outside of an unquestioned normal order" (Darville, 1992b, p. 1) or as "an intellectual, moral, and economic darkness and depravity..." (Darville, 1992a, p. 6). Institutions of Development view *illiteracy* as "part of a tragic circle of underproduction, malnutrition and endemic disease" (UNESCO, 1951, p. 1, cited in Levine, 1986, p. 27). Thus, application of literacy is viewed as the remedy to an individual's deficiency and the means by which a nation will break out of that tragic circle. This is most graphically illustrated on the cover of one of the primary texts of Western academic literature regarding the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee as shown in Figure 1.

At first, the alliance between economists and educators, as well as the view that human capital investments would promote both social equality and economic growth, held together. However, by the early 1970s the World Bank reported that economic and educational development had been "shockingly lopsided and inequitable" (Coombs, 1985, p. 16). For example, when examined closely, "rural schools...contrasted sharply with the glowing impressions of progress conveyed by the upward-trending statistics of nationwide enrolments for individual countries found in UNESCO's *Statistical*

Figure 1 (Lovell, 1992)

Yearbooks" (ibid., pp. 16-17). It was also found that the number of girls enrolling in (much less completing) primary grades continued to lag behind the number of boys (Herz, Subbarao, Habib, & Raney, 1991, pp. 1-2; Lockheed, Verspoor, Adriaan, & Associates, 1991, pp. 148-50). The gap at the secondary level was even greater (Lockheed et al., ibid.). Evidently, measurements of literacy and their impact on the population and economy of a developing country were open to question.

Literacy as Social Practices

An alternative to viewing literacy as a correlate of economic development is to conceive of literacy as social practices, as the way we in our reading and writing engage with, create and depend upon certain social relations (Darville, 1992b). For example, as I leave campus today, I may first stop at the library to pick up a study listed in the bibliography of another article. Then I will check the schedule posted at the bus stop to see when I can expect to be on my way home. You may go to the bank to pay the hydro bill. My neighbour may find a ticket on her car because she left it parked on the street in one spot for too long (a sign halfway down the block says **P 3H 700am - 700pm.**) There's a note on the fridge asking you to pick up a child from a piano lesson. My brother calls me to say there's a job advertised in his local newspaper and that I might want to fax my résumé halfway across this country to apply. At the end of the day I jot down a few thoughts in my

journal.

Literacy thus engages me with other readers and writers through the conventions of academic writing. It mediates our use of public transportation and services. It links me with others, and co-ordinates an application for employment. Even in my journal I note the date as though one day I or (heaven forbid) someone else might read it. Bus schedules, bibliographies and articles, bills, signs, parking tickets, job applications, personal journals, all, and more, testify to the pervasive "phenomenon of textually mediated communication, action and social relations" (Smith, 1984, p. 59).

There is a sense in which individual skill is a requisite of 'literacy,' but there is a tendency to fixate on this part of the term's meaning (Darville, 1992b). As we have seen above, "the single most compelling fact about literacy is that it is a *social* achievement....Literacy abilities are acquired by individuals only in the course of participation in socially organized activities with written language" (Scribner, 1984, pp. 7-8). Taking the idea further, Darville (ibid.) argues that literacy is a constituent of social relations and mediates social organization:

If we ask what actions active readers and writers are active *in*, we are pointed towards the social relations of literacy. One's literate activity, in an event of reading or writing, or talking about writing or print, is enchaind with the literate activities of others. Practices of reading and writing bring communication and organization into being. (p. 5)

This applies as much to the Bangladesh context as it does to our Western context. Knowing what is written in a marriage registration or on

land record forms, and understanding what rights they accord the signing parties, for example, is of current concern to women's movements in Bangladesh (Notebook [Ntbk] II, pp. 29, 34). Women who are not only able to read these forms and sign them, but are enabled to assert their claim to the rights and privileges stated therein, may be less vulnerable to abandonment and more insistent on keeping land to which they are entitled, which provides them a source of food and income.

Being able to calculate the cost of hatching and raising a brood of chicks and the gains made in selling them, affects many women who are involved in trying to increase their income. It connects them with the network of the agricultural extension agents who sell the fertilized eggs, the vaccinations to keep the chicks healthy, and the feed to help them grow. Those agents, often employees of Development organizations, are tied into a system of accounting for the loans made to the women who raise the chicks, and reporting on the results of the project.

Bangladesh also has train schedules, newspapers, voting ballots, and other literacy mediated communication. Bangladeshis apply for jobs, write letters, listen to Koranic prayers, and to speeches made by political leaders. And all of these literate practices, and programs which promote the learning of literate skills are indeed linked to underlying political, economic and ideological projects.

An early independent venture to the post office introduced me to one

Bangladeshi context for a common social practice of literacy. Determined to send a letter home that first day, I had persuaded the Guest House manager to show me how to hail a rickshaw and assured him I'd be fine unaccompanied. (I had not yet realized the interpretations that might be made of a woman travelling alone even to her local post office.) Then I realized with a shock that I could not read any of the signs on the buildings or even numbers on gates. I was now completely dependent on the *rickshawallah*⁵ to take me to where the Guest House manager had instructed him.

Once there, I had an opportunity to practice some of the 'textual co-ordination' that I knew regulated international correspondence. I knew that the letter's destination had to be written in the middle of the front of the envelope, and I knew that I had to signal that the letter was to go airmail. I knew I needed to purchase a stamp even though I could not read the signs which would tell me the correct queue for purchasing it. What I didn't know, because I was the only woman waiting to purchase stamps that day, was that there were two queues for purchasing stamps: one for women and another for men. However, after interpreting gestures made in my direction I managed to negotiate my way through the local realization of posting a letter. I was confident that I could make the postal system work for me. This small incident brought home to me that literacy is more than the ability to read a sign or decipher a number. It is a constituent of textually mediated practices and

⁵ The man who drives the bicycle rickshaw.

social relations.

Conceptions of Literacy Teaching and Learning

All practice of literacy education implies a theoretical stance adopted by program designers and practitioners (Freire, 1985). Furthermore,

literacy can only be understood within the broader framework of education's socializing functions which always either reinforce or challenge the status quo, supporting learners' assimilation into the existing system or their ability to participate in its transformation. (Auerbach 1992, p. 72)

Conceiving of literacy as a technological input for projects of Development and assuming it is a neutral technology at that, would be realized in literacy programs that Freire (1970) described as using a "banking model" where learners are seen as empty vessels who passively and uncritically receive "deposits" of knowledge in a one-way transfer from experts. In such a model, knowledge is conceived as "a static, objective commodity (taking the form of skills, decontextualized sounds, and words and texts in the case of literacy) which has an existence independent of learners" (Auerbach, 1992, p. 72; see also Freire & Macedo, 1987). Freire (1985) also described this as a "nutritionist" model in that learning literacy is seen to be a process of breaking down this knowledge into digestible chunks which teachers feed to students. The 'word' thus disconnected from the 'world' treats learners' own experiences as separate from and irrelevant to this legitimated knowledge (Auerbach, 1992).

Freire (1985) argues that this kind of education essentially domesticates, that is, incorporates marginalized people into the very system which is responsible for their dependency. It does not enable learners to challenge the constraints which relegate them to the margin (Auerbach, 1992; Bruss & Macedo, 1985).

On the other hand, a liberating model of education incorporates the lived experiences of the learners placing them at the centre of the educational process, and facilitates a collaborative construction of knowledge through dialogue and critical reflection (Freire & Macedo, 1987). We may also speak of the literacy process as an act of knowing (Freire, 1985):

If learning to read and write is to constitute an act of knowing, the learners must assume from the beginning the role of creative subjects. It is not a matter of memorizing and repeating given syllables, words and phrases, but rather of reflecting critically on the process of reading and writing itself, and on the profound significance of language. (pp. 49-50)

A liberatory model of education would be characterised by the active participation of both facilitators and learners in a process of critical analysis of their reality as it relates to the broader social context, with a view to transforming it. Conceiving literacy as a social relation is a way that may integrate people's lives with the act of reading and writing their world.

With these educational models in mind, I approached the literature which introduced BRAC to me from a distance. Essentially, I wanted to see liberatory education in action. I wanted to learn about the process and how I might become involved in its "cultural action for freedom" (Freire, 1985, p. 43).

Original Research Objectives

I initially prepared a thesis proposal which outlined my objective: to investigate the participatory and learner-centred process of non-formal teacher training as conducted by the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee in its Non-Formal Primary Education program. My research topic and questions were based on written reports of BRAC's NFPE program appearing as UN documents, newspaper/journal articles, annual reports, citations in Development literature, and academic work. My topic and key questions also drew on conversations with BRAC staff then studying in Canada; Canadians who had spent various lengths of time in Bangladesh and knew BRAC's work directly or indirectly; and, a brief meeting with the NFPE program coordinator at a conference supported by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). According to these sources, I had every reason to expect that I would have the opportunity of observing firsthand the most successful non-formal primary education program for children and adolescents in the developing world and a program that was advancing the emancipation of rural women.

A principal factor to which this success was attributed was the participatory, on-going, non-formal training of village women who were recruited to become para-professional teachers. Studying this factor more closely presented several interesting angles. First, the villagers recruited to teach had an intermediate level of educational attainment and I expected a participatory training approach would have an impact on their own practices of

literacy and their consciousness of themselves in the broader world. Secondly, whereas the majority of Bangladesh's education resources have benefited males, most of the teachers recruited for this particular program were women, and students were girls. Thirdly, a participatory education experience that favoured women and invested learners and teachers with a deeper understanding of literacy than its mechanistic uses, offered me, an adult educator and a woman, an opportunity to learn about literacy education in a developing country.

Before leaving for Bangladesh, I met three BRAC staff members who were studying in Canada at Queen's University in Kingston. I asked the woman, a BRAC Program Organizer (PO), to tell me about how the teacher recruits respond to the teacher training. She said that new teachers gain self-respect and confidence; their social awareness becomes heightened; and they exercise some of the reflective and critical capacities which one might expect as a result of a learner-centred teacher-training program.⁶

The two male staff members insisted that the strength of this training program lies in the Monthly Refresher courses. They mentioned that the Refreshers incorporate modelling by "stronger" teachers for "weaker" teachers.⁷

⁶ Conversation July 9, 1992.

⁷ Conversation July 9, 1992.

A part of these Refreshers is dedicated to sharing and solving problems that the teachers have encountered in the previous month. Problem-solving together with the aid of a facilitator often functions as an empowering activity for adults (Arnold & Burke, 1983; Arnold, Burke, James, Martin, & Thomas, 1991; Marshall, Chigarire, Francisco, Gonçalves, & Nhantumbo, 1990). I anticipated observing this kind of dynamism in BRAC's program. I assumed it would also demonstrate the extent to which the experience and knowledge of the village teachers was valorized and how they were engaged as creative subjects in the act of knowing.

I came to think that instances of **modelling** presented an appropriate starting point for investigating participatory and learner-centred processes. And given the factor of group problem-solving, I envisioned a possible contrast between **modelling** and **mentoring**. Both terms may describe the relationship between more and less experienced (or competent) teachers; the first suggesting the development of imitative knowledge, the other a dialogic engagement fostering the development of generative knowledge. My understanding was that a truly liberatory education would favour the latter.

Another and related research question asked: Does this program of training open new opportunities for the women teachers, so as to contribute toward their empowerment and liberation?

A Warning Signal

The first indication that BRAC's stated theory of employing learner-centred approaches in its teacher development program might differ from its practice came from a few Canadians who had viewed BRAC's method in Bangladesh or had visited other similar programs. They warned me that, in practice, a didactic approach predominates. New teachers are essentially trained how to administer the curriculum provided. That is, they are shown how to teach the curriculum step by step in what might be seen as a mechanical way. Nevertheless, these teachers carry out a non-formal primary education program which, according to statistics regarding the student population, achieves its objectives.

In spite of the warning that my image of the BRAC NFPE program might be unrealistic, I forged ahead expecting to observe a participatory program which engaged girls and their women teachers in exercising their right to education, enriched them intellectually (Bagla-Gokelp, 1990), and, furthermore, empowered them to use literacy to negotiate an increasingly complex network of social relations. I hoped to gain insight into the process of promoting an enduring, profound exercise of literate practices in every day life and beyond.

Re-orienting

The research journey did not result in what my proposal had projected.

Early in my work in Bangladesh, the reality of basic teacher training seemed not to match the 'map' I had been reading. My observations in the classrooms and the teacher training processes did not jibe with my beliefs of what 'participatory' and 'learner-centred' meant, how it was supposed to be practised, and of what 'literate' consisted.

The strength or weakness of a teacher seemed to depend on how accurately she executed the lesson plan or teaching script.⁸ Modelling took place apparently only in the controlled environment of the refresher course or when a PO was present. Mentoring as I had conceived it was not apparent. So, like all travellers who purchase a guide or map at home but find that some things don't match reality, I rechecked the signs in the classroom where the training was taking place. Was I really observing a class where people did not contribute their own thoughts or decide together about what the important topics were, but rather one where the trainer took the topics from the manual and requested the teachers in training to recite the main points back to him? Were children memorizing the stories? If so, had I read the map wrong? Didn't the brochures, reports, manuals and staff members say that the training program was conducted in a participatory manner?

I did not readily welcome the sense of intellectual rupture I struggled with in the midst of my research. However, it thrust me back into the very

⁸ In my field notes I have recorded a number of instances where a teacher is identified as "weak" because she failed to follow the sequence of teaching steps accurately, her class was behind in the curriculum, her handwriting was poor, or other similar 'faults' (Ntbk I, p. 95; Ntbk II, pp. 87, 100, 112-113).

documents and discourse on which I had based my initial impressions of BRAC. The disjuncture between the version of BRAC I had formulated from reading the documents and speaking to the managers and Development experts, and the description I made when I visited BRAC programs on the ground, was clearly about something more or different than a false version and a true version.

One simple response to my experience of rupture would be to see the documents as distortions or cover-ups of some kind. But I've come to think that it makes more sense to see the documents as involved in a social process, in a set of social relations, that account for their portraying the program in ways that reflect the strategies of donor agencies and for their not reflecting what I observed. And so I needed to think through a way of reading them that would allow me to see what they were doing, what courses of action they were involved in.

I found Dorothy Smith's (1990) work, *The conceptual practices of power - A feminist sociology of knowledge*, very helpful in this regard. She writes of a similar rupture, one which appeared for her in the context of sociology, "calling into question the objectified modes of knowing characteristic of the relations of ruling" (p. 12). It compelled her to rewrite "the methods of knowing" with which she worked and to explore as an insider "the socially organized practices that constitute objectified forms of knowledge" (ibid.).

Fully developing this "other" way of knowing or reading--reading the documents to see the way they constitute a part of the managing and ruling practices of Development, rather than reading them as factual accounts of what they present themselves as reporting--could be a vast project. What I propose to do in this thesis is a preliminary investigation of such an alternative reading.

I came to see, when I read documents about BRAC and when I listened to managers describe their NFPE program, that the principal subjects of the program, that is its teachers and students--the grassroots participants--had been silenced. It was not their voices I heard in the reports and accounts of BRAC's success. Their experience of teaching, learning and knowing had been written over; it had been objectified as in Smith's (1990) description of how ideological practices occlude the standpoint of experience.

This objectification happens when concepts (like participatory) are separated from their ground in the actual co-ordering of people's activities (in this case, teachers', trainers' and students' activities) (Smith, 1990). It does not, however 'just happen.' Objectified knowledge is socially and materially organized in management. It is produced by individuals in actual settings, and is organized by and organizes definite social relations. And to a great extent this knowledge is mediated through texts of various forms. Thus to inquire into another way of reading the texts I encountered I needed to inquire into the social organization of that textually mediated knowledge.

To start with, I had read reports by BRAC of its NFPE program published for donors, potential donors and other countries interested in setting up similar programs. My experience of the classrooms and teacher training sessions brought me into contact with another body of texts--manuals, teaching scripts, weekly report forms, refresher modules, etc. In my search to understand how those two bodies of documents are involved in a set of social relations, I began also to read the texts published by donor organizations. What I came to see then, is that I was working with three levels of social relations that were largely mediated through texts.

A first level of textual mediation of literacy for development is the research reports and policy statements produced by academics and by policy officers in the influential aid organizations. Extending throughout these reports and documents are themes and recurrent terms that play a co-ordinating role between organizations within the international assistance industry. The current foci of financial allocations are identifiable in these themes. "You have to know the jargon and all the buzzwords," as I was told by a development worker friend in Mexico who submits project proposals for funding. This textual mediation was confirmed to me by a CIDA bureaucrat who explained that project proposals must "genuflect" to the Development doctrine of the day by parroting "the language." Otherwise, the project and its purposes would be judged "unprofessional."⁹

⁹ Personal correspondence, September, 1993.

A second level of textual mediation at work is apparent in the accounts which are designed to display to donors and potential donors that BRAC operates a program which conforms to the terms under which their funding is mandated. They may appear as annual reports, project proposals, statistical reports on program outcomes, media releases, and consultants' evaluations. It is picked up and carried along by people like the mid-level managers who guide foreigners like myself through visits and meetings with field staff. This was the level at which I began to know BRAC.

I observed the activities of a third level of textual co-ordination in the teacher training sessions and in the classrooms. It consisted of strict adherence to course outlines, teaching scripts, and models of lesson plans and modules for monthly refreshers.

At all these levels, textual mediation serves to construct and to link what could be thought of as a "professional culture" or as "cultures" of Development policy-making, project evaluation, women in development, non-formal teacher-training.

Two Ways of Knowing

The remainder of this thesis is therefore more than a conventional record of research methods, results and conclusions; it might be thought of as an account of the journeys of two travellers. The first is a 'foreign consultant' who seeks a 'dependable, successful, innovative, national, non-governmental'

organization to serve as recipient of significant funds designated for improving the socio-economic development of Bangladesh through education. The second is a 'researcher' who spends a period of time in the hub of just such an organization's education program. She is persuaded that liberatory education is founded on the collective actions of people who through a conscious reading of the world have come to understand also the implications of reading and writing words (Freire, 1970, 1985; Freire & Macedo 1987).

The 'two travellers' theme, which I continue to use in this thesis, is not entirely metaphorical. The consultant is a composite of those many people who participate in producing and using the textual body of knowledge about women and girls and literacy for development. She comes to know the 'dependable' organization through that objectified knowledge which stands as a textual reality available to consultants, researchers, and donor agencies interested in the organization. This knowledge has also become, to some extent, the reality known by managers in the program. Many of these people have participated in the organization of knowledge about literacy for development and in the deployment of its practices through this program in particular.

The researcher is a graduate student and adult educator who departed on a voyage of learning and discovery, that is me, the writer. The record is an account of my journey to the village schools, rural training centres and urban offices of Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee's Nonformal Primary

Education Program. That part of the journey precipitated my subsequent expedition of inquiry into the organizing practices of this renowned educational program in relation to donor agencies that fund literacy for development and into the ideological discourse that co-ordinates their activities. Writing of my field work as that of a third person, a researcher, is a rhetorical device which I use to make more explicit that my research, my way of coming to know the textually mediated social organization of knowledge, is itself an object of inquiry.

The ‘consultant’ and ‘researcher’ make visible to the reader two ways of knowing the NFPE and two ways of knowing literacy for girls and women in development generally.

Guide to the Remainder of the Research Journey

Chapter Two recounts the ‘consultant’s’ knowledge of BRAC. It relates an understanding she develops of the NFPE through a reading of various documents and reports. She approaches her mission with a focus on various factors important to her contracting agency. With its attention on a poor, landless target group, women, girls, and basic education, she is keen to see BRAC at work and see how the program could be duplicated elsewhere.

Chapter Three, through the ‘travel journals’ of the ‘researcher’ explores her accounts of various training sessions, classroom events and other experiences. It reveals her disappointment that ‘participation’ looks like choral

recitations of points from the manual and that 'learner-centred teaching' allows teachers in training to take turns being the class drill master. It shows that teachers are judged to be "weak" or "strong" on the basis of how well they execute the steps set out in the teaching script. It finds that problems to be solved in "problem-solving sessions" have essentially been predetermined, as have their solutions. It questions the extent of BRAC's accomplishment of 'bringing women out' because women are still a small minority among BRAC paid field staff and managers, and teachers have no opportunity to advance in the organization. The researcher reflects briefly on her observations of literacy events in and around her research context.

Chapter Four analyzes how the two different accounts got produced and suggests that the difference lies in the consultant's use of the discourse of Development to arrange and display her findings in a way that meets the requirements of Development's managing practices, as opposed to the researcher's use of concepts such as literacy and participation as a starting point for observing what was actually going on in the program, and its liberatory potential.

In the final chapter, I summarize what we have come to know about the social construction of literacy for Development texts and the social organization of reading and interpreting them. I review how the objectifying discourse of Development, reflected in the knowledge I held of BRAC before the field work, impacted my own experience of the NFPE program, threatening

to silence the telling of that story. Instead, the research investigated the disjuncture between expectations and observations, and in the last chapter I suggest various alternative questions and possibilities which that investigation opens up.

CHAPTER TWO

BRAC's NFPE: THE OFFICIAL STORY

Introduction

Given that this thesis is concerned with a disjuncture between two ways of knowing, a literature review, which might conventionally be taken as a review of relevant accounts of the same phenomena, assumes a different significance. In this work the documents themselves are seen as elements of the phenomena to be known. The purpose of this chapter is to present the story of BRAC as it might be known by a visiting consultant, a 'foreign expert' in Bangladesh on a brief mission of project identification for her bilateral or multilateral assistance organization.

The Consultant

Among those visitors who come into direct contact with BRAC are a variety of expatriate consultants. For example, many accompanying spouses¹ of the diplomatic or development worker communities seek 'foreign expert' contracts with BRAC in one of its many development programs. Other consultants might have been sent to Bangladesh by a large donor agency such

¹ "Accompanying spouse" is a common term for an expatriate who has come to Bangladesh because his or her spouse has been hired or transferred there for a specific job. Many accompanying spouses seek contract work with international organizations in the country.

as United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), or Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) on missions of project identification or evaluation, usually for a short period of one to three weeks. Researchers whose grants come under the auspices of a development agency or whose grants are not tied to a specific project directly funded by the same agency, as it was in my case, also come to this perhaps most-studied developing country.²

The Assignment

The consultant's assignment focuses on the Non-formal Primary Education program. During her week in Bangladesh she is to assess the capacity of BRAC's NFPE to expand the number of its schools, evaluate BRAC's recent proposal for expansion and identify an aspect of the program that her employing donor agency can finance.

Before arriving in Bangladesh, the consultant has perused a number of background documents. A prime example is Catherine Lovell's (1992) book *Breaking the cycle of poverty*.³ Another is Martha Chen's (1983) *A quiet revolution*. She also has read available BRAC Annual Reports, a few

² Mueller (1987) writes that "links between the academic knowledge industry and ruling institutions have become increasingly explicit and entangled....The quantity of paper documenting every project and program suggests that complex information systems incorporating academic research are at the heart of practices of Development" (p. 2).

³ Catherine Lovell worked in a consulting capacity for BRAC from 1984 -1986 while on leave from her work as Professor in the Graduate School of Management, University of California, Riverside.

newspaper articles from The Globe and Mail and The New Nation, and has spoken with colleagues in the development business who have been in contact with BRAC programs. These documents provide an account of BRAC which is taken as factual. They constitute a body of knowledge which informs donor agencies, consultants, foreign experts and researchers about BRAC's origins, programs, activities and financial viability.

Paramount to the consultant's success is that she be attuned to the key concerns of her contracting organization. These are issues that have been featured in the writings, speeches and conferences of multilateral and bilateral funding agencies, issues such as: targeting the rural landless through non-governmental 'partner' implementing agencies, promoting the integration of women into the 'productive' labour force to help combat their poverty, injecting new resources into primary education and improving its accessibility for girls, encouraging measures that reduce population growth, and replicating good programs in other areas and countries. Through the reading of these documents, the consultant is instructed in what she is to look for during her mission.

Her first contact upon arrival in Dhaka is the Donor Liaison Officer (DLO), who has been jointly employed by a number of multilateral and bilateral agencies who support BRAC's programs to co-ordinate their interactions with BRAC. The DLO is able to supplement the material that the consultant already has with recent reports and project submissions. It is

striking that virtually all reports generated within BRAC and about BRAC are available in the language of Development, English,⁴ thus she has no difficulty reading them. A meeting with the NFPE program co-ordinator at the head office in Dhaka has been arranged. In addition, a day trip to a field office to meet front-line staff and visit three schools has been planned.

Most of the remainder of this chapter essentially relates what the consultant comes to know of BRAC. One might consider it as a background section on BRAC and the NFPE for her subsequent "project-identification" mission report.

A Brief History of BRAC

Beginnings

Early in 1972, after the ravages of a bloody liberation war, a Bangladeshi executive of a British corporation and a few like-minded compatriots combined their talents, and resources they could raise, to commence refugee resettlement work in a remote northeast corner of the newly independent nation (Lovell, 1992). Within a year, many young, nationalistic youth had joined F.H. Abed and his founding partners, and had begun to orient their reconstruction activities to longer term integrated rural development action.

⁴ White (1992, p. 17) says this is true generally of studies done about Bangladesh. See also Alam and Matin, 1984.

Changing Approaches

The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee has been characterized as a "learning organization" (Lovell, 1992, pp. 1, 4-5, 126), whose participants "from villagers to top management, base their strategic planning, program planning, implementation strategies, and day-to-day activities on a shared vision arrived at through extensive dialogue grounded in learning from past and current field activities" (p. 5).

From 1972 to 1977 (Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh [ADAB], 1990, p. 49; Chen, 1983, pp. 10-13), BRAC followed an integrated, community-wide development approach. However collective field experience and input from a group of BRAC researchers concluded that programs designed for the whole community delivered most of their benefits to those already 'advantaged' and tended to by-pass the very poor (Chen, 1983). "[Their] studies revealed the cultural complex of attitudes, beliefs, modes of interpersonal relationships, and behavioral norms that play a part in determining the nature of economic transactions in rural areas" (Lovell, 1992, p. 29). In order to address the rural power structure BRAC realized that the capacities of and institutions for the poor (and powerless) would need to be developed, and saw its role as one of "intermediary between the poor and national strategies and programs; other private voluntary agencies; and resource institutions...to act as a buffer between the poor and the village power structure" (Chen, 1983, pp. 11-12).

Another aspect of institutional "learning" is BRAC's introduction of the 'target group' approach, which underpins its current development philosophy.⁵ Over the years it wrestled with how to delimit who belonged in the target group. After several working definitions were tried, BRAC today defines their target group as

those households that own less than 0.50 decimals of land, own no implements of production, and in which the principal worker has had to sell at least 100 days of labour over the past year in order to subsist. Additionally, at least 50 percent of each village organization must be comprised of people who own *no* land. (Lovell, p. 33)

How BRAC defines its target group is important to our expert because it determines in effect, whether BRAC is meeting the criteria of donor agencies.

Target group definition in hand, BRAC field staff go into a village to conduct a survey to identify potential target group members. These field staff for the last several years have been professional "Program Organizers" and not facilitators and volunteers as in BRAC's early years.⁶ They are mandated to divide men and women into separate village organizations. A village organization, the structure which organizes nearly all of BRAC's activities, is composed of those adults in a village who fall within target group specifications.

⁵ Now a widely used abstraction in Development circles, the concept of "target groups", has however, been censured as a device of the ruling practices of Development. See McCarthy, 1984; Mueller, 1987; White, 1992; and Wood, 1985.

⁶ This movement towards professionalization may have the advantage of increased approximation of international standards (Lovell, 1992, especially Chap. 6) but may contribute to removing the creation of knowledge to an objectified and textually mediated level. See the discussion in Chapter Four.

Scope of the Organization

The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee continues to be active today in four main program areas: (1) the Rural Development Program (RDP); (2) the Rural Credit Project (RCP); (3) health programs, including the Women's Health and Development Program (WHDP); and, (4) the Non-formal Primary Education program (NFPE). By the end of 1992 BRAC had approximately 5000 full-time employees and close to 10,000 teachers on contract. Recent funds have made the NFPE BRAC's most rapidly expanding sector (Lovell, 1992).

Every visitor to Bangladesh who is at all interested in the activities of Development organizations will encounter BRAC, if not directly then through its methods which are being emulated by many smaller rural development organizations. Any other visitor to Bangladesh will most likely buy souvenirs from one of BRAC's retail outlets in the cities, operated by the resource-generating subsidiary, Aarong Handicrafts. BRAC is the largest indigenous non-governmental organization (NGO) in Bangladesh and has a reputation for being professional, dependable, and honest.

The Non-formal Primary Education Program

Overview

Managers and field officers begin telling the NFPE story like this: "Parents in village groups who had attended the required adult functional

education classes kept asking, 'Why can't you do something about literacy for our children? The government schools do not meet our children's needs.'" (Lovell, 1992, p. 173).

In 1984, BRAC began to examine why the poorest rural children were not being reached by the public primary schools. In the first, widely distributed UNICEF document about BRAC's NFPE program, Lovell and Fatema (1989) report that:

The reasons appear[ed] to be unmotivated or absent teachers, large classes (on average 59 students to one teacher in the primary grades), irrelevant curricula, lack of books and other materials, unequal treatment of poor children, fear of failure and unauthorized fees. (p. 7)

As BRAC reports in 1992, most of the left-outs and drop-outs are girls. Some of the reasons for nonattendance, pertaining especially to girls, include (BRAC, 1992a; Begum, 1992; Fyzennessa, 1992; Sattar, 1982):

- the school's distance from the girls' homes;
- a majority of male teachers;
- inadequate toilet facilities for girls;
- lack of commitment from the parents to educate daughters who will soon leave their home to join a husband's family.⁷

BRAC decided to develop an alternative primary education program and by 1985, BRAC was ready to test the materials, teacher recruitment and training methods which its staff had developed in consultation with an

⁷ See also Birdsall & McGreevey, 1983; Herz et al., 1991, Chap. 3; Lockheed et al., 1991, Chap. 6).

educationist from Dhaka University School of Education (Lovell & Fatema, 1989; Lovell, 1992). It opened twenty-two experimental village schools. The NFPE program's goal was to enrol 70% girls in order to address the significant gender disparity in primary school enrolment (Duza, Huq, Salahuddin, & Qadir, 1992), and to hire a majority of women teachers.

Early success with the three-year program for children 8 to 10 years old encouraged BRAC to initiate another program in 1988 for older children, 11 to 14 years old, who had never been to school or had dropped out within the first year. These adolescents covered the same material as the younger children in much less time, thus their program, Primary Education for Older Children (PEOC), lasted only two years.⁸ BRAC schools boast an impressive 98% completion rate over the three year period (BRAC, 1992a). Ninety per cent of those who enter the NFPE continue with class four in the government schools, in contrast to the formal primary schools where fewer than fifty per cent of the children who start class one enter class four (Chowdhury, 1988, Table 7; Gustavsson, 1990, Table 8; Khan and Chowdhury, 1991; Rahman Rahman Huq, 1992, Table V, as cited in Chabot & Ahmed, 1992). The average cost of educating a child in a BRAC school per year is US\$ 18, whereas in the public school it is US\$ 17, but with dropout and repetition records such as those just cited, public school costs come out to US\$ 51 per year per child (BRAC,

⁸ While I was with BRAC in the fall of 1992, BRAC was experimenting with extending the PEOC to a three-year program. This has obliged BRAC to a) adopt some of the government curriculum and, b) develop new materials.

1992a). BRAC definitely comes out as a better investment.

"The objective of the [NFPE] programme at its inception was to develop a *replicable* [italics added] primary education model which could provide, in a three-year period, basic literacy and numeracy to the poorest rural children who as yet had remained unreached by the formal school system" (Lovell & Fatema, 1989, p. 5). The NFPE and PEOC programs have indeed been replicated, and have been expanding rapidly since their inception in 1986 and 1988 respectively. In September of 1992, when I entered BRAC, both programs were going through a period of transition, with curriculum revisions in all three main subject areas and tremendous scaling up from 11,000 schools to 18,000 by the end of 1993 and 50,000 by the end of 1995. BRAC's model is being replicated by other NGOs within Bangladesh (e.g. Association for the Rehabilitation of Basic Needs [ARBAN], Unity Service Committee Canada-Bangladesh [USCC-B], Village Education Resource Centre [VERC]) and closely observed by delegations from other Third World nations and donor agencies.⁹

Various components of the NFPE program will be described in more detail in the following section: its teacher recruitment and training, curriculum, parental involvement, and its schools. These descriptions derive from official BRAC reports and manuals.

⁹ While with BRAC, I learned of delegations from Morocco, Pakistan, Japan and the World Bank which had visited the NFPE program in recent months.

NFPE Teacher Recruitment and Training

Teachers are recruited from among educated people in the village or cluster of villages which has requested the BRAC school. Potential teachers must have a minimum of nine years of schooling, that is, the Secondary School Certificate.¹⁰ Preference is given to married women although a small percentage may be unmarried. At the end of 1991 82% of the teachers were women (BRAC, 1992a). Each candidate is interviewed by a committee of the region's Field Officer, one to three Program Organizers and sometimes an Area Educational Manager. Those selected receive 15 days of basic teacher training in one of BRAC's residential training centres or area offices.¹¹

Teachers are contracted to stay with a group of children throughout the three year program and are paid a monthly stipend of 425-475 Taka (Cdn\$13-15) as compared to a monthly average pay of 1,800 Taka for female teachers in the state schools (Akhter & Jupenlatz, 1990). Less than 2% of the teachers resign, usually to follow their husbands who must move elsewhere because of work or family responsibilities (Lovell & Fatema, 1989). Absenteeism is very low and only 2% of the teachers have taken a maternity leave (without pay) (ibid.).

¹⁰ Because the NFPE program was undergoing considerable transition during the last quarter of 1992 and also preparing for phenomenal expansion in 1993, certain changes in practice were still being discussed. I was told that the minimum education requirement had been increased to 10 years, but it had not yet been written into policy.

¹¹ This was another recent change from the 12 day basic teacher training mentioned in Lovell & Fatema (1989) and Lovell (1992).

The basic teacher training is carefully organized (Sarker & Howladar, 1988). The first five to seven days are dedicated to basic concepts of education and the last half of the course to the development of lesson plans and demonstration or role plays of lesson implementation. Each day begins with a review of the previous day's course content, with each individual required to perform his or her utmost.

The BRAC Training and Resource Centre (TARC) facilitator begins the course with a brief orientation to BRAC's philosophy and the training course's objectives. He conducts the first part of the course and is later joined by one of the NFPE's Program Organizers (BRAC's first level full-time field staff), who works as a 'co-trainer' for the pedagogical aspects of the training, that is, the lesson plans and demonstrations.

In the first part of the course, formal, informal and non-formal education are defined, literacy rates in Bangladesh presented, and the importance of primary education highlighted. Then, simple principles of child psychology are presented and discussed in relation to the obligations of the teacher.

A number of pupil-centred and teacher-centred methods are suggested. differentiated as those "in which the students mostly take part" and those "in which the teachers have to do most of the works [sic]" (ibid., pp. 35-36). Teachers are encouraged to use the pupil-centred methods and are taught teaching "techniques" such as "from known to unknown," "from concrete to

abstract," "from whole to parts," and "from parts to whole" (ibid., pp. 39-40).

Student teachers are introduced to the use of teaching aids and spend some time during the course or during breaks making their own aids from local materials. Co-curricular activities--singing, poetry recitations, story-telling and dancing--are an integral part of the NFPE curriculum and a daily part of the teacher training.

Student teachers learn about BRAC's method of ongoing student evaluation as opposed to end-of-year examinations, and about the vital role the village community and parents play (see Parental involvement below) in making an NFPE school successful (Corey, 1991).

Finally, teachers receive copies of the textbooks for the preparatory stage of Class 1 and begin to prepare sample lesson plans which they demonstrate in class over a period of days. The course concludes with a post-test of general knowledge of education and teaching. It is identical to the test they performed on the first day and student teachers are expected to show some improvement on their scores.

Teachers return to their village with a trunk full of start-up materials and, with the help of their supervising Program Organizer, make final preparations with the community for the new school. A two-day refresher course for new teachers is held in the local area just prior to opening. Teachers continue their training throughout their three-year contract once a month, coming together in groups according to the class and age group they

are teaching (Class 1, 2 or 3 and NFPE or PEOC). Their Program Organizer conducts these Monthly Refresher courses which generally include discussion of problems encountered in the previous month and practice teaching of the next month's lessons.

Before commencing the second and third years of class, teachers receive four days of refresher training which focuses on "deepening the teacher's understanding of learning concepts and on improvements in teaching methods" (Lovell & Fatema, 1989, p. 16).

NFPE Curriculum and Teaching Materials

The overall goal of the curriculum is to help the children to achieve basic literacy, numeracy and social awareness (Lovell & Fatema, 1989; Lovell, 1992). Three subject areas comprise the curriculum--Bangla (the official national language), arithmetic and social studies--and are augmented by co-curricular activities. Bangla includes spelling, handwriting, and reading. Arithmetic is similar to the formal school curriculum in the first two years but the third year "emphasizes the uses of mathematics for simple accounting, measurement, and handling of money" (Lovell & Fatema, 1989, p. 19). The social studies syllabus includes health (nutrition, hygiene, sanitation, safety, and first aid), ecosystems, community, country, the world and basic science (ibid.). Some English is introduced in the second year so that those students who do go on to the formal education system where English is a required subject will

not be too far behind. The curriculum is designed to cover the essential content of primary education and to enable those children whose parents can afford to send them, to continue in the formal primary schools in Classes 4 or 5 (BRAC, 1992a).¹²

Classes are held for two and a half hours, six days a week during the first two years and three hours per day in the third year. Parents set the daytime schedule of classes according to what they require of their children to meet household and labour demands. Parents are also consulted about the timing of short school vacations to suit seasonal work or religious festivals (Lovell & Fatema, 1989). Schools function an average of 268 days per year.

Books and other school supplies are provided free and children are not required to purchase a school uniform although strict rules of cleanliness are enforced. Recent initiatives by the NFPE materials development team are expanding children's reading resources: it publishes a children's magazine, circulates a small library of story books, promotes 'wall journals' in the classroom, and is experimenting with 'story telling' as part of the language curriculum.

Parental Involvement

Originally, BRAC schools were opened only where a BRAC village

¹² Lovell (1992) records a remarkable finding that 74.85% of the younger children qualified for Class Four and 25.03% qualified for Class Five after BRAC's three year program, 1987-1990. Among the older children who at that time followed a two-year program (1988-1990), 32.59% qualified for Class Four, 65.80% for Class Five and 1.61% for Class Six (p. 54).

organization existed and its members requested a school for their children. As the NFPE program 'goes to scale' however, expanding its sphere of activities to areas where there are no BRAC village organizations, the NFPE model is being tested and found to work well in many 'non-BRAC' areas also (Lovell, 1992).

Parents who want BRAC to open a school must first of all locate or build a one-room structure with a minimum of 240 square feet (BRAC, 1992a; Lovell, 1992) which BRAC will rent from them to help cover maintenance costs. A committee composed of two parents, the teacher and the PO is formed to take care of administrative business. They are responsible for ensuring regular class attendance, making necessary repairs to the school building and maintaining close relations with the larger community (BRAC, 1992a). As mentioned above, parents are involved in deciding their children's school schedule. They meet monthly with the teacher to discuss any issues arising from their children's participation in school. An average 80% attendance among the students' parents demonstrates how very involved these parents are. It is considered one of the keys to the success of the program (Lovell, 1992).

NFPE Students and their Schools

BRAC schools are usually built of simple bamboo walls with a thatch or corrugated tin roof and earthen floors. Children sit on woven bamboo mats in

a "U" around the perimeter of the room. The teacher has a stool and a trunk which contains supplies and serves as a table, too. She uses a blackboard, flipcharts for mathematics tables and Bangla lessons, and other materials provided by the head office or which she has made herself.

The children, as already noted, come from among the poorest families in the village. Their presence in school represents a significant opportunity cost on the part of their families for as Sattar (1982) notes "it is estimated that in the rural economy children, by age 13, are as active in their various spheres of work as an adult" (p. 8). For children from homes where there is unlikely to be a parent who can help them with school work, it is a tremendous challenge. Overall, the literacy rate in Bangladesh is 33%, for women it is 22% and for rural women only 15% (BRAC, 1990; BRAC 1992a).

In BRAC NFPE classes, virtually 70% of the younger children and more than 70% of the adolescents, are girls (Lovell & Fatema, 1989). Parents have demonstrated a willingness to stretch traditional norms in regards to educating girls and have come to value education (Lovell, 1992).

In contrast to formal (public) school children, BRAC students have outstanding attendance and school performance. In public primary schools enrolment is approximately 50% of eligible 5-7 year-olds, but successful completion of Class 5 is as low as 15% of the boys (Qadir, cited in BRAC, 1992b, p. 5) and 2-3% of the girls (Gustavsson, cited in BRAC, 1992b, p. , who enrolled in Class 1. BRAC, on the other hand records 98% completion rate,

with many of the children continuing in government schools after graduation from the NFPE program. Their success is also portrayed in local scholastic competitions, for example, in late 1992, BRAC school children captured the first three spots in one *upazila*¹³ wide writing competition.

Observations on the Perspective of the Foreign Consultant

Reading the official accounts, the researcher sees some shadows around the sparkling image of success. Teacher training and classrooms are described as "participatory, but structured" (BRAC, 1990, 1992a; Sarker & Howladar, 1988). The monthly in-service courses for NFPE teachers are named "refreshers" hinting that teachers might be viewed as deficient and in need of a renewed grasp of the curricular content, rather than as knowing and capable subjects who have, all month, been solving problems and finding ways to relate the content to the children's level of learning. Furthermore, one has to ask whether the girls are destined to remain in a non-formal ghetto and whether women teachers will continue to work for a pittance when they seem to be doing a better job than the salaried teachers in the formal system who are still mostly men. Finally, the emphasis on striving for a replicable model throws into question the NFPE's liberatory even empowering potential, since it seems to implicate BRAC in a project of controlling education of the rural poor.

¹³ Bangladesh is divided into 460 *upazilas*, each covering a population of 200,000 to 300,000 people and composed of about ten local *unions*, the unit of government closest to the people (Lovell, 1992, p. 17).

Summary

In this chapter we have come to know BRAC's NFPE in a way resembling how a foreign consultant might conceive BRAC. We might say this chapter recounts the knowledge which the foreign expert would have prior to her visit, and which would frame her subsequent observations of the BRAC NFPE program. It is a knowing mediated by texts and by people who are managers in the program. That is to say that her knowledge of BRAC's objectives, its 'target group,' its conception of basic literacy, the employment opportunity it offers village women, is ideologically conveyed through the writing and reading practices of Development. Chapter Four will elaborate how this textually mediated knowledge of BRAC is a constituent of social relations and processes.

We have also been introduced to some of the cracks in the image of success that point towards alternative ways of reading the documentary accounts of consultants, Development institutions and BRAC.

In the following chapter I will relate another traveller's account of the NFPE program. Her journey could be described as less felicitous in that the 'maps' she read before setting out did not seem to accurately portray her subsequent voyage. However it propelled her, powerfully, on to further inquiries into literacy for development.

CHAPTER THREE

THE RESEARCHER'S JOURNEY

Introduction

We can also come to know BRAC and, in particular, its NFPE program from perspectives other than those mediated by its own documents and by official reports. One such perspective is that of a researcher, who, not constrained by the requirements of a contract and a Development agency, sets out to learn what she can from the actual activities of the program. I write this chapter in the first person, for I am the one who carried out the research, but in the summary and in the following chapter, I reflect back on this account in the third person because the "researcher's journey" has become an object of my inquiry.

This chapter begins by describing the research process and methods used in my fieldwork, followed by a description of my findings regarding BRAC's training practices. As will become evident, these findings were largely framed by the disjuncture I found between the participatory, dialogic, and liberatory training activities I expected to witness, and the tightly controlled practices that I found. I recount in detail aspects of the Basic Teacher Training (BTT) course, and the Monthly Refreshers which I had understood were so crucial to the program's success. I also note observations about the teachers'

involvement and the way spoken classroom discourse is structured by the written curriculum and texts. Then I look at what makes "strong" and "weak" teachers. In addition, I relate a number of instances where I felt that social distance reinforced the hierarchy already in place, keeping teachers and women in a place of limited 'liberty' and influence. To complete the chapter, I reflect on my observations of practices of reading and writing in the schools, BRAC, and in society.

The Research Process

Background

I entered the BRAC context with rudimentary Bangla, and limited geographical, cultural, and political understanding of the country--like dozens of other Western researchers, consultants and evaluators whose writings cover many aspects of BRAC's various programs. Unlike many however, I had substantial experience of grassroots development activities, having lived for five years in Chad as a volunteer worker. Chad also had a Muslim majority population so I was prepared for many of the religious customs and the 'veiled' dress of the women. Although I didn't learn to wear the *sari*, appropriate attire for a married woman, the *salwar kameez*¹ was a comfortable concession

¹ A *sari* is the long wide length of often brightly coloured cloth wrapped about the body in a such a way that one end may be worn over the head as a 'veil.' The *salwar kameez* is an outfit of loose trousers, tied at the waist, accompanied by a long tunic and an *orna* (scarf) worn over the chest and sometimes over the head. This *salwar kameez* is worn by unmarried women especially.

to local customs. I made a concerted effort to continue learning Bangla throughout my stay. Perhaps most importantly, I had minimal vested interests, that is, I was not under a contractual commitment to do the fieldwork and no donor organization was depending on my report to make financial decisions.

Within BRAC, I spent a longer period than almost any foreign consultant (excluding those who are directly hired by BRAC), enabling me to observe training processes in depth. When asked how long I was staying in Bangladesh I tended to reply "a very short time, only three months," but several people commented that it was a long time for such a task.² I was even told by three BRAC staff in Dhaka that if the teacher training got too boring after a day or two I could come back (Reflections Journal [RJ], p. 5).

Planning the Itinerary

The day after I arrived in Dhaka, I discovered that my main contact person in BRAC, the NFPE Program Coordinator, would be away for my first two weeks in Bangladesh. She nonetheless wanted to meet just before catching her plane the next morning, to make some introductions. When I got to the office, I was reminded of what a task it is to remember people's names and faces in a foreign country and how important it is to build rapport from the beginning. Although usually excited and enthusiastic about such a challenge,

² Salmen (1987, p.6) says that a participant-observer need not spend more than three months in the community being studied, although I suggest that this is really a minimum even for an observation study like mine.

the sombre faces of the several men I met made me ill at ease. On the other hand, I sensed a candid warmth from the Program Coordinator, despite her obvious preoccupations with an extremely large program. We agreed that two weeks of language study while she was away would be a good use of time. I knew that it would add a lot to the introductory language study I had done in Canada.

We sketched out the itinerary I would follow, that is, the main aspects of the program I hoped to observe in keeping with my original research interest in teacher training models. I would begin with a complete thirteen day Basic Teacher Training session to take place in Chittagong during the first two weeks in October. This would be followed by observing five Monthly Refresher courses at the end of the month, as well as visiting a number of schools during class time. In November I would take in a Training of Trainers (TOT) course for NFPE Program Organizers and return to the same groups of teachers I had observed earlier for their November refresher courses. The Program Coordinator encouraged me to talk with members of the Materials Development Unit at the head office, in between the field visits, about new initiatives they were testing in the language curriculum.

Research Methods

A substantial portion of my data consists of extensive field notes taken during sessions in the BRAC NFPE program. I kept these observations in

notebooks I carried with me to all meetings, classes and interviews. I also kept a journal of reflective writing to record ideas, insights and questions arising from my observations. Finally, I continued to write in my personal journal during my sojourn in Bangladesh.

I participated as much as possible, but the research stance I took was as "observer" more than "participant" in that I did not contribute to any decisions that might have been taken about the content or direction of the course. During teacher training sessions, I observed from my place among the teachers who were seated in a "U" around the periphery of the training room. I changed seats at least everyday and sometimes at each break. I joined the songs and poetry during co-curricular activities and often taught an English song when asked to. When I was with a number of women Program Organizers one evening, I was asked to sing one of their Bangla songs to demonstrate how well I had learned it! (I didn't get much beyond the first verse, but was heartily congratulated.) Along with the other teachers playing the student's role, I carefully copied letters and words into my notebook or did a mathematical sum during lesson demonstrations.

Interviews with the women and men of the Basic Teacher Training session were tape recorded. I also interviewed two trainers, two education specialists, and the program coordinator, and wrote notes during the interviews. Many other conversations with BRAC field staff were informal encounters where I had not specifically requested the person(s) to meet with

me. Snatches of communication on a motorbike, short exchanges over *cha* (tea), long far-ranging talks--a mixture of English and Bangla--contributed significantly to my understanding of BRAC and of people's lives in Bangladesh.

Throughout my sojourn in Bangladesh I frequently reviewed my notes to help me formulate new questions or topics to observe. At times I would notice a gap in my notes, remembering something which I had failed to jot down and was thus usually able to confirm something with a person or to check a situation. For example, when one of the trainers described the difference between BRAC schools and government schools, I was able to reconfirm with him the following day that it is based on how he defined participatory (Ntbk II, p. 48). In another case, I realized that my question had restricted how my conversation partners could answer: "In your culture, is it mostly men who tell stories?" The answer was a simple "yes" (Ntbk I, p. 63). Some time later I had an opportunity to pose a similar question to members of the materials development unit in the context of our discussion about a new story-telling module they were testing (Ntbk I, pp. 102-3).

I asked: "When your families and friends get together, do you tell stories? Or, when you were children did someone tell you stories?"

They answered, "Yes, our grandparents."

I checked, "Both your grandmother and grandfather?"

"Yes."

"So in your culture it is usually the grandparents who tell stories to children?"

"There are also traditional story tellers like minstrels, called *boyati* who do what they call *puti pore*. These stories are cultural or religious and are sung or chanted. Nowadays we can hear them on the television. The *boyati* are generally men."³

In other cases, my impressions were confirmed by third parties. When I sensed that I had encountered a strong defensiveness to a critique I made of the BTT program (and this was in response to a request to give two positive and two negative critiques of that program), a new senior level BRAC employee related how he was working on a way to deal with a similar reaction he had received in his sector:

As a new person I am finding that I can't always say what my observations are....For example, I have seen that BRAC POs are conducting the *gram* [village] committees but I can not write in my report 'the POs should not be conducting the parents' committees'....When asked for negative criticism or told 'we don't want your claps' [applause], in fact they want my claps. (RJ, pp. 35-6)

Limitations of the Data

The opportunities to confirm data do not mean that they are free of bias or that there are not limitations in the data. On the contrary. Social factors for example, both imposed certain limitations on what data I could gather and created certain opportunities. As a woman I was restricted by travel and accommodation conventions. On the other hand, as a foreign woman I had

³ Women who are hired to do household tasks for other families in exchange for food or perhaps payment, will also tell stories or pass on news to the women of the household as they go from *bari* to *bari* (Note the role of Banessa in Gardner, 1992). These women were not mentioned during this conversation.

more liberties than Bangladeshi women. And as a woman I gained rapport easily with teachers (perhaps more easily than their male POs did), especially once they knew I could ask and answer simple questions in Bangla and *when I was able to be with them unaccompanied by male BRAC staff.*

The language barrier was a frustrating limitation for me. I had been assured that the POs and the teachers' level of English would enable us to communicate easily. For most POs and all teachers that I met, this was not the case. Thus my interviews with the teachers in Chittagong were done through translation by the Training and Resource Centre (TARC) trainer.

Nonetheless, as mentioned in a discussion of a study by Betty-Ann Lloyd (1991), 'the justification is in the discovery and in recreating the discovery through writing'.⁴ As 'knower' and 'discoverer' in the research process I write from my standpoint as a woman, beginning with the actuality of my experience in the everyday practices of BRAC.

Conflicting Images

At the outset, as suggested in Chapter One, my experience of the NFPE program left me with a sense of disjuncture between image and reality. A number of things stand out. Previous to the fieldwork, I had read a story of success. First of all, teachers and students were, ostensibly, active participants in this non-formal education program. Secondly, the employment created for

⁴ This discussion took place in an Inquiry Strategies course in the Winter of 1992 at Carleton University.

the women teachers signalled, apparently, a dramatic opportunity for bringing women out into the labour force. Thirdly, I had read the statistical results of the schools without questioning their implications, or their meaning in people's daily lives. That is, I had not questioned closely the definition of literacy or its importance for the students in the schools. I had indeed read the texts as factual. During the fieldwork, however, I wrote about a number of occasions where I felt disquieted by the discrepancy between the objectified knowledge I held of BRAC as an organization that listened to and dialogued with people of the grassroots, and my actual lived experience of that milieu. Here are some examples:

- "S.M.[the trainer] is presenting the objectives. [It] doesn't seem that these are being arrived at by mutual discussion." (Ntbk I, p. 31)
- "[The trainer] still uses quite a few alternative questions--Pori, ba pori na? and Hobe, ba hobe na?; [that is to say] 'Can we or can't we? and 'Is it correct or not?' And calls for repetition by chorus of key phrases. Is this really participatory?" (Ntbk I, p. 56)
- "My worry is not what happens in the [children's] classroom, but what education/training these teachers are experiencing/learning. Is this any different than the traditional classes they went through?" (Ntbk I, p. 60)
- "Again many minutes (10-15) spent repeating the same two words...to use this with adults is an insult to their intelligence. As it would be to children I suspect." (Ntbk I, p. 61)
- "Today I have lost patience with the process. The PO [pedagogical co-trainer at the Basic Teacher Training session] thinks he knows everything." (RJ, p. 16)
- "With such a small ratio of female POs to male, I am really concerned about whether there will be real representation of women at middle and higher management levels." (Ntbk II, p. 70)

Also striking, as I later studied my notes and reflected on my time there, is the struggle to let my experience speak for itself and to not shape it to fit the dictates of previous researchers and consultants or the "official" story. Furthermore, I was never satisfied that literate practices were an integral aspect of people's everyday lives.

In the remaining parts of this chapter I present the story of my fieldwork, of the way I came to know BRAC—within a context of disquiet about my place as a woman, foreigner and researcher; and holding in tension (a) the recognition that there was some good resulting from this program for most, if not all, beneficiaries, and (b) the undercurrent of questioning whether literacy work was being promoted here for popular political participation in the life and development of people's communities and nation or as a means of channelling and restricting popular political participation (Darville, 1992b).

The Findings

Training in BRAC: The Basic Teacher Training Session

My point of departure that third day of October was the Dhaka train station, my destination Chittagong, Bangladesh's principal ocean port. I was to join a group of first-time BRAC teachers from an island in the Bay of Bengal for a basic teacher training session. BRAC had only been conducting activities on Kutubdia Island since a terrible cyclone had killed approximately 20,000 people and devastated large areas of the island in April 1991, 19 months

previously. Kutubdia was thus a relatively new 'BRAC area' and one that had been 'targeted' for aid assistance by the foreign donor community.

With training facilities not yet established on the island, a building had been rented in Chittagong to serve as regional offices and training centre for the Rural Development and NFPE program sectors. A trainer was appointed from the nearest BRAC Training and Resource Centre (TARC) in Comilla to conduct the general session for the first half of the course. An NFPE Program Organizer, who had been working on the island for one year, arrived mid-course to conduct the pedagogical session as co-trainer.

The TARC trainer was experienced in BRAC training for all sectors: Rural Development Program, Women's Health Development Program, Rural Credit Program, etc. He had conducted the initial phase of the NFPE basic training several times before and said he had enjoyed affectionate and enthusiastic rapport with most of the trainees. And soon it was easy to see why this was so. He seemed to achieve a balance of giving individual attention and fostering group cohesion. He used his sense of humour generously and yet insisted on a solemn appreciation of the task in which they were all engaging.

The first morning was dedicated to the trainers and trainees getting to know one another. The trainer and then each teacher introduced himself/herself by giving basic autobiographical information followed by the presentation of a song, poem or story. They included me in this activity, tolerating my halting Bangla and applauding the English children's song I

performed with actions. It seemed an enthusiastic, warm, participatory way to begin the course. Most of the teachers participated whole-heartedly, although the women and a few men were timid about performing in front of the group. I soon learned that these songs, poems and stories--called co-curricular activities--punctuated the day's schedule in much the same way as the ritual tea breaks.

I noted that this particular group did not meet BRAC's goal of hiring at least 70% married women. In fact, only 10 out of 22 were women, two of whom were married. Apparently this was due first of all to BRAC still not being very well known on Kutubdia Island. The islanders, known as among the most conservative Muslims in the country, were not sure they could trust this new influence on their way of life.⁵ For example, the trainer was questioned by some of the male students about why BRAC did not teach the Qu'ran in the school. He responded that since they might have Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Christian students they couldn't have a teacher for each religion. "The BRAC school is to make them aware. When they go out of this place they may choose whichever way they will take [i.e. religion]. The school is the necessary crossroads" (Ntbk I, p. 50). The TARC trainer and the NFPE co-trainer, suggested to me that married men on the island are reluctant to expose their wives to the new ways that BRAC has brought into their villages. The

⁵ From a discussion with the Assistant to the Education Specialist in Dhaka. November 14, 1992. He also mentioned that only 60% of the people from Kutubdia have been to the mainland, 80% of whom would be men. "For [people from the island] Kutubdia is the Bangladesh."

unmarried young women's families on the other hand were largely in desperate need of income and these women were often the last resort income earner.⁶

The first day seemed to bode well for my research into participatory teacher training practices. Student teachers were participating, the trainer asked many questions of the teachers and seemed to draw them into the BRAC mission of educating the illiterate of Bangladesh. The only thing that hinted at a more didactic training style to come was the predominant pattern of exchange: the trainer initiated with a question, the teachers responded in chorus, and the trainer affirmed the answer, summarized it and elicited a repetition of that summary from the teachers.⁷

The definition of education which guided the whole course was stated by the trainer in this way: "Education is that experience of learning or education which changes a man's [*sic*] behaviour for the betterment of self and society" (Ntbk I, p. 31). This definition was expanded later, however, to say that "education explores the attributes which are in a person, like a flower opening" (Ntbk I, p. 33).

During the discussion of three types of education (informal, formal and nonformal) it was emphasized that BRAC holds that no one is devoid of education. Everyone receives an informal education, that is a basic understanding of one's immediate world. The lesson went on to describe this

⁶ Interviews with the women teachers in training, October 14, 1992.

⁷ Cf. Cazden (1988) and Mehan (1979) who describe the classic Initiation Response Evaluation (IRE) sequence of classroom discourse.

'informal education' as learning by experience that, for example, one can burn one's hand in the flame of a *kupl*⁸. Formal education was defined as that education received in the public and private schools which demand fees and issue certificates and diplomas. It included the entire administrative system of those schools. BRAC schools were held up as a model of nonformal education. There, children paid no fees for tuition and materials. They were allowed to call out their answers and to help each other as they sat around the periphery of the classroom. Teachers were diligent, responsible, and caring, and did not supplement their income by tutoring their students after hours.

Links Between Spoken and Written Training Discourse

After the first day's classes I reviewed the Basic Teacher Training Manual (BTTM) and noted that its contents had been carefully followed by the trainer. IRE was only one of several methods used to shape the spoken discourse of teacher training to the manual. Comments and answers from the trainees that had been affirmed, could be found in the manual. A second method the trainer used was to write all of the main points of a section of the BTTM on bright poster paper and fasten it to the wall. To cover much of the content during class time, large portions of the BTTM were read aloud, different teachers taking a turn at reading a section.

A third method divided the teachers into their working teams to read,

⁸ Small kerosene lamp.

discuss, and summarize a section. To observe these discussions, I joined a different group each time. In one group, men, who had already exhibited frequent, rapid responses to the trainer's questions during class time, 'organized' the discussion. In another, the men did not take a predominant role. In a third group, each member worked at memorizing the main points of the section. In all groups the teachers did not discuss the material in the manual as much as they decided together what the answer to the question was, or what the main points of the section were. Then in the open forum of the classroom, each group would present their findings (Ntbk I, pp. 37-45). It seemed that these methods established that everyone would acknowledge a common body of knowledge (Ntbk I, p. 40). As the course unfolded I continued to observe this adherence to the manual.

The daily review sessions demonstrate a fourth incidence of the link between oral and written discourse. Each night teachers studied the day's content in the BTTM and prepared questions to quiz their colleagues the next morning. Even though I did not understand all of the words that were spoken, the manner in which an answer was intoned and, when there was a pause, the last few words repeated until the person could retrieve the rest of the phrase from memory, told me that the answer had been premeditated and was not spontaneous. I asked the trainer about this:

"[S.M.], it seems to me that the students have memorized the passages from the book. I don't understand all of the Bangla but when they pause and then repeat some words..."

S.M.: "It appears to me also that they are trying to memorize. This is their practice in their other schools." (Ntbk I, p. 41)

Memorization did not appear to trouble the TARC trainer.⁹ He seemed more concerned with modelling other principles of teaching like building rapport with students, not punishing them, and encouraging each one to contribute by calling out the answers that she or he had discovered in the material.

The format for the review seemed participatory in that all questions were prepared and answered by the teachers. However, answers were directed at the trainer for confirmation, not towards the teacher who posed the question.¹⁰ Once again, what could have been a dialogic, and collaborative creation of knowledge was controlled by the person who knew the manual best.

Throughout the six days that the trainer from Comilla TARC conducted the classes, I wrestled with how my definition of participatory training differed from his. He engaged the learners in the daily task of covering large chunks of material. He maintained a personal rapport, persuading the teachers that they could call him *bhai*¹¹ rather than *Sir* which is the term used in formal schools. Teachers spoke out freely. Yet the whole process was directed by the trainer and indeed dictated by the content set out in the curriculum designed by the

⁹ Cf. Freire's (1985) assertion that reading is an act of knowing, not a matter of memorizing and repeating given syllables, words and phrases.

¹⁰ Cf. Cazden (1988) relates that "cross-discussion," i.e. discussion where students address each other in the second person and where "eye-gaze" is not directed to the teacher, is rare. Most often the teacher is still the addressee and students refer to each other in the third person (pp. 54-58).

¹¹ This means brother and is used as an affectionate term of respect.

specialists in the head office. It did not seem to facilitate or display creative 'acts of knowing' on the parts of the teachers and trainer (Freire 1985; Hall, Gillette, & Tandon, 1982).

Teachers' Involvement, Trainers' Approaches

I had expected participatory education to draw on teachers' knowledge of their specific context, the life of their village, and the experience and knowledge they believed they could bring to the teaching situation. I also thought teachers might be consulted about reading, writing, and arithmetic practices in their villages, and about access to newspapers, journals, and books.

One lunch-time discussion among The TARC trainer, NFPE co-trainer, and I revolved around the teachers' initiative in setting lesson plans and goals in his/her school (Ntbk I, pp. 71-7). The TARC trainer said, "Flexibility is the bottom line principle of BRAC." I replied, "The appearance of the NFPE is, however, very rigid." The TARC trainer seemed a bit taken aback but responded, "In order to have some uniformity we must follow the steps closely....If we have too much flexibility then everyone will do it in every way." The co-trainer added, "It will have hodge podge."

I continued by asking at what point creativity and flexibility were allowed. They replied that if the teacher wanted to make any major changes to the way a lesson was presented or in what order to present material, she

should check with the PO and the PO with the Field Officer (FO) and the FO with the Area Educational Manager (AEM) who would bring it to the head office. For small changes or innovations, only the PO had to be consulted. For instance, a teacher could suggest a new teaching aid for mathematics (using seeds instead of sticks as objects to count), or a new way to avoid the problem of students copying each other's work at the monthly refresher. One group of teachers had adopted a new technique of checking students' work with an 'X' for correct and a check mark for incorrect because students had been copying the work of those with check marks (Ntbk I, p. 138). The main script of "chart-book-board-slate," however, must not be violated.

Although different than the learner-centred approach I had in mind, the trainers assured me that this approach was much more participatory than the approach used in the formal schools. Although the teachers in training did not contribute in a substantial way to defining the educational needs of their communities nor to setting the objectives and methods of the course, they felt very positive about the training.

In a group interview situation I started by asking the following:

"I'd like you to think about how the teacher training you received here is similar to or different from what you have had in your previous schools. Please tell me about that."¹²

A: "I never received training like here with affection and love.

¹² Since the TARC trainer had to translate for me, it is possible that the answers are favourably biased but he stressed to the teachers in training that they must not think about him being there. He in fact showed some embarrassment at the positive comments the student teachers were making and looked away from the circle to decrease the sense that they were saying this for him.

[The TARC trainer] *bhai* is careful looking at each person's work and progress...after this training I have courage to go teach. My courage increased, and knowledge increased and desire to read and write increased."

N: "I acquired more skill here than the other schools. BRAC has given me a bright shining looking [possibly, outlook]...I have that comprehension that I will not treat the children in ill manner. I always will respect elder and love younger."

R: "I had no idea how to build up a young child before but now I have an idea....This training is attractive because if it hadn't been we would have left."

F: "This teaching is a nice one to me. With materials and group discussion and the question/answer method...it is more retainable, easier to absorb. I will remember it for a long time." (Ntbk I, pp. 85-89)

During the interview the teachers all stated that in their consideration the TARC trainer was a more understanding trainer than the NFPE co-trainer. They felt they could learn from the TARC trainer and that he cared for them. This is a difference of training approach which they identified (Ntbk I, p. 89) and it may indicate how "participatory training" is experienced in the actuality of their lives.

A month later, during the Training of Trainers, I was to again observe two distinct styles of training in two other trainers. In both cases the trainer from the TARC spent much time on building rapport with the course participants, displayed a caring concern for them, and gained their confidence. In both cases it was the NFPE co-trainer who stressed the necessity of closely following the teaching script.

This raised for me a number of questions. What does the contrast say

about the kind of training available to the NFPE program? What does it say about the organization's portrayal of NFPE training and what can it learn from its own non-NFPE personnel? Does "participatory" mean one thing in the capacities for community organizing developed in other BRAC programs and a different, lesser thing in education? What could the NFPE learn from my observations?

The Training of Trainers course also resembled the Basic Teacher Training course in schedule and attention to inculcation of the teaching script. The nature of the participation differed somewhat though. At the TOT, Program Organizers (the trainees in this case) animatedly argued the correctness (or incorrectness) of a lesson demonstration, course objective, or performance objective in relation to the BTTM as presented by themselves or their PO colleagues, whereas the teachers in training at the Basic Teacher Training course only disputed each others' answers or the fairness of a question during the review periods. This may suggest that the POs (trainers) have bought into the textual representation of a teaching method and are engaged in replicating this method by adhering to its textual form, or indeed, that they see themselves as creators of the objectified forms of teaching.

Training in BRAC: Monthly Refresher Courses

Due to the long distance from Dhaka to Kutubdia and the extra complication of travel arrangements because I was a woman, I was unable to

track the teachers of that Basic Teacher Training course in Chittagong to the commencement of their schools and their first Monthly Refresher course on the island. Instead, I observed refreshers in different villages in and around Manikganj, a town west of Dhaka, where I had requested to visit groups of teachers in each year of the program and from both NFPE and PEOC sections. During the last week in October I attended Monthly Refreshers for NFPE teachers in their first and second years and PEOC teachers in their first and third years. In November I returned to a NFPE second year group and to refreshers for PEOC teachers in their first and third years.¹³ These monthly refresher courses are considered the mainstay of the teachers' training.

The general procedure followed in every refresher I observed was this:

9:00am	National anthem and one or two other songs
9:15am	Problems reported from the last month
9:30/45	Reports of progress
10:30	PO assigns pages to be covered in the next month of classes
11:00	Tea break
11:20	Co-curricular activity such as learning a new song.
11:30	The PO is the first to demonstrate a lesson.
12:00 noon	Strong teachers demonstrate lessons, followed by weaker teachers.
2:00	Lunch break

¹³ Oct.25: NFPE 1st year, Manikganj; Oct.26: PEOC 1st year, Baniajuri; Oct.27: NFPE 2nd year, Betila; Oct.28: PEOC 3rd year, Baniajuri; Oct.29: PEOC 3rd year, Class 4, Manikganj. Nov.28: PEOC 1st year, Baniajuri; Nov.29: NFPE 2nd year, Betila; Nov.30: PEOC 3rd year, Class 4, Manikganj.

- 3:00 Lesson demonstrations until all subject areas are covered.
- 4:30/5:00 Co-curricular activity
- 5:00 PO and teachers dealt with administrative things - the teachers' pay, distribution of pens and notebooks where necessary, scheduling of the next Monthly Refresher.

I found the term "refresher" dubious--rather like something applied to someone rather than participated in actively. It turned out that the refreshers served to introduce the curriculum to the teachers from month to month. As I sat through day after day of training, I worried that I wasn't seeing anything different from group to group. Every lesson pattern seemed the same regardless which year of the curriculum the teachers were using, regardless which subject was being addressed (Ntbk I, p. 112).

Problem Solving According to Script

I was especially interested in the problem-solving sessions, anticipating something akin to those described in popular education literature (cited in Chapter One). Would the NFPE Refreshers demonstrate the way teachers can learn from each other and their PO? Would they facilitate the generation of new knowledge based on the teachers' life experiences, empowering them to act in their society? The basic teacher training course that I had observed in Chittagong had not indicated that the answers to these questions would be positive.

The great majority of problems mentioned during the time allotted for "problem-solving" were related to children who had been absent, buildings which needed repair, and parents' group participation. A number of examples from my field notes illustrate the close correspondence between those incidents in the past month's experience which the teacher identifies as problems and those issues the manual presents as problems.¹⁴

One problem discussed was children arriving late. I noted: "the intonation and direction of discussion is front [i.e. PO trainer] to teachers and back it is rarely teacher to teacher" (Ntbk I, p. 135). The trainer concluded this discussion with "No school [will begin late] and no child will not be able to come on time" (ibid.). This rule as spoken can be traced to the responsibilities of the teacher as listed in the Basic Teacher Training Manual (1988, pp. 11-12).

Another problem faced by one teacher was that children were not neat and clean:

I asked, "How will the teacher deal with this problem?"

The PO trainer answered: "The teacher will discuss the merits and demerits [of keeping clean]."

Justine: "And if this does not change the behaviour?"

PO: "It will change."

Justine: "Sure? Are you sure it will always change?"

¹⁴ Cf. the case study which Kidd and Kumar (1981) present, showing a predetermined, technical, narrowly defined process of problem-solving in contrast to Freire's concept of problematisation.

PO: "Surc." (Ntbk I, pp. 133-34)

"Discussion" of the merits and demerits of an issue is suggested in the manual as a technique to resolve a problem.

A relatively longer time was spent on problems teachers had with the curricular content. If a class had not been able to cover the assigned pages, the teacher had to give an explanation for it. If some children had had difficulty with a certain letter of the alphabet or a mathematical function, other teachers volunteered to demonstrate how they had taught that particular item. The teacher who had experienced the problem would point out in the course of the demonstration at what juncture in the lesson her students had experienced difficulty. If there was still some confusion the PO would often call on a "strong" teacher to demonstrate the lesson again. Then, the teacher who had mentioned the problem was instructed to imitate what the "strong" teacher had done. The other teachers frequently called out criticisms and instructions while she was now trying to follow the example.

One day a new teacher posed a problem she had had: how to make or write words with the akar symbol which follows certain letters. A number of ideas were suggested but it was all summarized and brought to a conclusion with the five steps in the manual which most of the teachers could, in any case, recite (Ntbk I, p. 109). One teacher during basic training asked, "If I teach them according to my lesson plan and the next day I find that nobody learned, what can I do?" The trainer replied, "No such question can arise because in

the BRAC school you have to evaluate them ongoing" (Nthk I, p. 57). These and further examples I have not cited, illustrate how "solutions" and "problems" are found in the texts which are the currency of the BRAC teacher training program: its Basic Teacher Training Manual, its lesson plans, its refresher modules. Indeed, it seems that a problem is not even acknowledged if it is not represented in textual form in the manuals.

"Strong" Teachers, "Weak" Teachers

When assigning pages to be covered in the next month, the PO would allow some discussion and listen to what the teachers recommended as feasible. Then pedagogic practice began: sometimes a few minutes spent on preparing a sample lesson plan and then lesson demonstrations in each subject area.

The program organizer generally began the demonstrations after which two or three teachers followed suit. If one teacher was "weak," she was told to sit down and watch the "stronger" teacher do it or the PO repeat it. These demonstrations closely resembled the procedure that was followed at the BTT course.

In the Monthly Refreshers my experience again did not correspond with the image of participatory learning I held in my mind from reading the literature. First of all, substantive participation was not a salient feature of the teachers' involvement. The PO demonstrated the teaching method. Then,

evaluating the teachers' performance, he/she corrected everything from clapping rhythm, to length of straight line in a letter of the alphabet, to position of the finger when pointing to a word on the chart. Much attention was paid to the form and execution of the activity, not its meaning for the teachers, much less the children. Secondly, the refreshers seemed to confirm that a "strong" teacher and a successful refresher depended on how accurately *the prescribed methods had been followed*. These methods may be compared to forms such as those described by Dorothy Smith (1984) in the following:

They are forms that externalize social consciousness in social practices, objectifying reasoning, knowledge, memory, decision-making, judgement, evaluation, etc., as the properties of formal organization or discourse rather than as properties of individuals. They are, of course, accomplished by persons in everyday local settings, who thereby enter into and participate in objectified forms constituting organizational and discursive relations beyond themselves. Such objectified and objectifying forms of relations are essentially textual. (pp. 60-61)

In the Basic Training and the Monthly Refreshers we have seen the way that documents structure the teacher training process. We have also seen a number of ways that the Program Organizers and the teachers enter into and participate in the textually mediated social practices which constitute BRAC's teacher training program. Their participation in these practices however, is not valued as that of a 'knowing subject' because little place has been given for individual or collective creation of new knowledge. Teachers have effectively been silenced by the subordination of the training discourse to the highly structured documents followed so carefully by their trainers. The 'silencing' of

the teachers was reinforced by hierarchical divisions within BRAC and within Bangladesh society in general.

Social Distance Between the Teachers and Permanent BRAC Staff

As a foreigner and one who was in Bangladesh only briefly, it may be presumptuous to describe as social or class divisions the subtle and less subtle interactions between teachers and their trainers, among "strong" and "weak" teachers, POs and the cook, Field Officers and Program Organizers, men and women. To get a sense of how my perceptions compared with others, I did discuss my experiences with several people who had spent many years in Bangladesh. They confirmed that, in their experience, social, linguistic, and class hierarchies were influential in structuring social relations. This is further confirmed by writers such as Naila Kabeer (1985) who writes of female status in "a complex and highly-stratified social system" (p. 86), and Alam and Matin (1984) who suggest that most Bangladeshi contributors to the literature on women "are separated by class and culture from poor rural women....[taking] their privileges over rural women for granted" (p. 6).

To begin with, education levels divide the teachers from permanent BRAC staff. A university degree is a prerequisite for all entry level BRAC staff, that is, Program Organizers. Indeed, most have a Bangladeshi Master's level degree which is comparable to a Canadian Bachelor of Arts, Honours.

During the three months I spent with the NFPE program, I met Program Organizers who had degrees in areas ranging from Bangla (language and literature) to Chemistry, to Business Administration. Only one Field Officer and the Education Specialist at head office had been involved in education before working for UNAC. Although not necessarily a negative thing, it does mean that the POs who impart the most training time (quantitatively) to the teachers have no more experience in curriculum development and implementation than the teachers. Rather, the teachers' daily contact with their students means the opposite holds true. Yet their experience is not drawn upon to change, adjust, or rewrite the training or the educational content of the schools. This gap, that is, leaving the teachers out of the program and curriculum development process, is formally structured. The illustration in Figure 2 shows us that each PO is in charge of approximately twenty schools, but teachers do not even appear on the organogram of the NFPE.

The required university degree forecloses the possibility of village teachers' receiving promotion to supervisory or management level positions. Although this may help ensure that management standards are at an "international level" (Lovell, 1992, p. 117), it doesn't ensure that the poorest rural people are 'empowered.' In contrast, it would seem to reproduce the current structures of dominance by the privileged classes because only the wealthy families have been able to afford to send their children to university.

Figure 2 Organogram of the NFPE Program (Lovell, 1992, p. 52)

Moreover, the accepted cultural norm is to provide the males of the family with higher education before the females.

As a result, a small minority of women Program Organizers and only ten to twenty percent women in positions of management, is not surprising. Most of these female managers work in Dhaka where transportation for women is more accessible and where it is more common for women to commute to work. When I asked why there were only three women Program Organizers in a

group of twenty-four at the TOT, I was told that many women drop out in the first six months because of social pressures--the job requires a lot of short distance travel, alone, on bicycle or motorbike, which at times subjects them to verbal harassment, at least, such as a female PO and I experienced when we were travelling together on a motorbike. In addition, the hours are demanding. This makes it difficult for women to maintain their dual responsibilities of home management and paid BRAC employment. Several women POs whom I met both in the NFPE program and other BRAC sectors were living apart from their spouses in BRAC living quarters at Manikganj as long as they did not have any children. Currently there are only two women at the Field Officer (FO) level, which is less than 5% of the FOs. Substantial advances in gender equality in the work place are not yet evident.¹⁵

Is the non-formal system providing a way to educate girls minimally but keep them segregated so that they are still denied equal access to higher levels of education and consequently positions in the waged and professional work force? At an informal meeting of international women in Dhaka, I asked, "What does it mean that an important NGO is receiving so much acclaim for girls' education, but that education is restricted to the non-formal sector?" A western woman quickly answered, "It means they're learning to read and write, that's what it means." But a Bangladeshi woman's response was, "That is a

¹⁵ Late in my research I was to meet the director of a women's literacy program who vehemently disputed BRAC's claim to fostering women's opportunities for employment.

valid point you are raising. Right now it is an important step, but as the number of girls who have some education and demand admission to government schools increases, there will have to come a bridging from the non-formal to the formal system for those girls" (RJ, p. 60).

On a social level, I also sensed division. Take as an example, the common lunch at the regional office where the monthly refreshers took place. Usually men and women Program Organizers from various sectors (the Women's Health Development Program, the Rural Development Program, the Rural Credit Program, and the NFPE program) ate together and I with them. Teachers however did not eat with the various POs and permanent BRAC staff.

Entering and leaving the class marked the position of authority the Program Organizer held and respect accorded to me, a visitor. Each time we came into a classroom, teachers and students stood and greeted us. I was generally accompanied into a classroom by the trainer and was directed to leave when he did for tea or lunch. I was disappointed for the lost opportunity to chat with the teachers and for the way this set me apart from them socially.¹⁶

There were some ways I managed to cross this hierarchical hurdle. If

¹⁶ Cf. Marshall (1990) who discusses a similar dilemma she faced about how to situate herself. She also encountered a "daily entry ritual into the classroom" which she felt was one form (among others) which was not merely a cultural difference between Mozambique and Canada but an "important [tool] for reproducing the hierarchy of power between teachers and students" (p. 68). She began to arrive before the teacher and to chat informally with the students which eventually led to more substance in the preclass chats and comments that referred to her as a "friend."

tea was taken in the same room as the class or if the PO had to attend to other matters during this time I approached the teachers and soon we were talking about as many things as my limited Bangla would allow. During the Basic Teacher Training in Chittagong I arrived early and thus had some conversations with student teachers who were also waiting for the trainer to arrive. The room in the training centre assigned to me for resting during the day had direct access to the women teachers' common sleeping room. I took the opportunity to initiate more informal exchanges and learn songs or dances. The linguistic barrier was too great however to afford in depth conversations.

In Chittagong one afternoon I caught a glimpse of socio-linguistic markers of division among the Bangladeshis. There had been much laughter and certainly some derision of the Kutubdia accent originating with the trainers.¹⁷ These were followed by forceful admonition to teach a standard Bangla. Added to this were remarks about the laziness of the islanders in general and their ignorance about gardening to improve their nutritional intake. (The islanders live on seasonal fishing labour.) The afternoon raised questions for me about the treatment of cross-cultural divisions within BRAC's teacher training model.

One question arising from these experiences of social division and from sensing that POs and FOs were suggesting that the teachers would not have anything interesting to say to me was this: Do the hierarchical arrangements

¹⁷ Cf. Graff's work as discussed in Street (1984, pp. 105-109).

deny or disallow the individual actions of teachers thereby suppressing them as subjects in the non-formal education enterprise? Teachers, the group I was most interested in, had little opportunity to discuss among themselves ways of transforming the system. Their only opportunity for professional improvement was the monthly routines. Could there be a place for conscientization of the teachers? As I watched the experienced teachers yawn during the predictable courses, I wanted to know their thoughts on what impact their teaching job with BRAC had had on their emancipation.

Practices of Reading and Writing

By this point in my research, I had spent several weeks observing the teachers, POs and their trainers in BTT, Refresher and TOT training. I recognized the methods, could read and write many of the letters and a number of words. I sang songs with them during the co-curricular activities and had taught a few English songs at their request. It seemed to work well as an integrated system but it also appeared a closed system. My encounters with social practices of literacy were elusive.

In the schools I had carefully observed "reading." Teachers at the refreshers, "read" in the same manner as the children and youth in the schools. "Reading of the sentences is word by word without intonation...Makes me think that reading is not for understanding or pleasure" (Ntbk I, p. 112).

While living with the women Program Organizers from all the BRAC sectors in Manikganj (a 24-hours-a-day experience) I watched for how literate practices might shape their lives. As I walked, rode a motorbike, or took a rickshaw in the villages, towns and in Dhaka, other literacy events (Heath, 1983) were evident.

Reading and Writing in School

Reading from the Bangla lesson book tended to be a monotone recitation that children could say without looking at their books. The student who was asked to read aloud looked at her book and followed each line with her finger but other children mouthed the words and slid their fingers along the page while watching me and looking around the room.

In a school in Pouli, as was the custom with foreign visitors, I was requested to ask the students a question, this time during their English class. I asked the students to show me the lesson they were currently working on so that I could ask an appropriate question. They opened their books to a dialogue between two girls who were walking to school. Since I had seen children play roles for their *poribeS* (social studies and environment) class, I asked two girls to role-play the dialogue. Neither they nor the teacher could understand my request, but the Area Educational Manager (AEM) who was accompanying me that day asked me to explain to him in English what I wanted. He said that they had never done this kind of exercise in English class

before and they couldn't understand how to do the dialogue. Then, after two explanations in Bangla from the AEM, they read the conversation--in the same monotone that the class had used before to read it in unison (Ntbk I, p. 109). There was no indication that meaning had been attached to the words they were reading.

The practice of memorized recitation in the classrooms had already been observed by BRAC head office staff. Members of the Materials Development Unit confided that they had observed the same rote learning style and monotonic reading of stories that I had. The Program Coordinator was very concerned that "We have to wipe out this verbatim from the schools" (Ntbk I, p. 152). One new method, which was being tested in seven schools, is called "Story-telling." Over a span of five days students work in groups; each group reads and works with a different story. The first day's period is dedicated to reading the story out loud, each child reading a paragraph or so. On the second day, the group decides on which words are difficult for them in the story and uses those words in a spelling list and in sentences they make up. On the third day one member of the group "tells" the story to the rest of the class. This student does not read the story but retells it in her own words. Then a member of another group tells their story, and so on, around the circle. Each story is told two or three times by different members each time. On the fourth day, each child takes a character or event from the story and writes a paragraph about it which is different from the story. On the fifth day, the

teacher evaluates comprehension and proficiency (Ntbk I, pp. 102, 120-21, 144).

I was struck by the evident pleasure in the children's and youth's faces as they told their stories. The monotone was gone, sequencing connectors were used, children elaborated different parts of the story or even explained them. The other children listened with interested expressions on their faces. Not surprisingly, this animation diminished by the third time a story was retold. A meaningful practice of reading and communication was being supplanted by an experience of literacy as technology.

Writing was not a predominant task in the curriculum. For example, lessons on 'receiving a letter from an uncle' were not followed with the students being asked to write a real letter to a relative as they might have been. Writing which I observed included spelling, writing new words in a sentence and hand-writing exercises. I was unable to visit the few schools where a "wall journal" was being field-tested.

In addition to witnessing practices of reading and writing in BRAC schools, I was also concerned to observe in what ways literacy constituted an aspect of social relations outside of the schools.

Literacy as Social Practices

The natural place for me to begin noting the circumstances in which people practice reading and writing was among BRAC staff with whom I lived

in Manikganj. I also looked for other occurrences of literate practice in the towns and villages I passed through in the course of my field work. Obviously an informal survey of literate practices, it does nonetheless afford an indication of the extent to which the 'word' is part of people's 'world.'

A number of literacy events were observable in people's workplaces. Each evening, working POs (i.e. not those in the TOT course) were busy in their offices, filling in weekly and monthly report forms as well as weekly work plans. These reports do not include anecdotal writing but involve recording the schools visited, parents' meetings conducted, number of parents present, number of students in attendance, any problems encountered. Some of the POs were preparing the module for the Monthly Refresher course that they would be responsible to conduct the following week. Again this is done on a form on which POs fill in needs assessment, course objectives, performance objectives, time allotment for activity, and method (Ntbk II, p. 66).

Course participants also spent hours preparing Refresher modules as part of their homework assignments. They took notes, and in leisure time copied words of songs into their notebooks.

A senior staff person in training, said that 80% of communication in BRAC is oral. In an organization of more than 4000 full-time staff and over 10,000 contracted staff on stipend pay, this extent of oral communication is astounding (Ntbk II, p. 36).

Other kinds of literacy events which I was able to observe among BRAC

staff included more personal and recreational practices of literacy. One woman told me that she was writing a letter to her secret boyfriend (Ntbk II, p. 58). A Field Officer spoke of having received a letter from his wife and I saw two POs reading letters they had received (Ntbk II, p. 58). One evening a woman in the NFPE office received a letter from her son and started reading it there. Two days I observed a few of the fellows from the group of POs in the TOT course read a newspaper during the tea breaks. Another time, one of the young women in the dormitory pulled out a book to read. I asked, "What are you reading, a storybook?" "No," she replied, "a political science book!" It was a textbook from her last university year. She read about three lines aloud to herself--it seemed like a definition with the English word 'philosophy' introduced. However, another woman came in and that was the end of the reading. She took this up again several days later and sustained reading aloud for about twenty minutes. She said it was so that her brain would not become lazy (Ntbk II, p. 100).

One Friday which is supposed to be BRAC staff's "day off" I found a number of people catching up on office work or visiting with friends. I was the only one reading or writing from among 18 -20 women in the same dormitory as I. There was one radio that I was aware of. Ten or eleven of the women did however go to the home of a BRAC staff person in the town to watch a television drama which lasted three and a quarter hours including a break for prayers and Qu'ranic reading on television. A few stanzas of these prayers

were displayed in print (Ntbk II, p. 83).

Outside of BRAC I also noted various social practices of literacy. A young man in a video shop was reading a newspaper (Ntbk II, p. 74). On my way to the village of Baniajuri, I saw two men reading a newspaper that had been pasted to a wall on a busy street. I passed a bookshop on my way to this course everyday and on three occasions saw the shopkeeper reading a book behind his counter (Ntbk I, pp. 58, 70).

In the capital city, I saw a man reading a newspaper on the rickshaw he had hired (no small feat in the midst of Dhaka's traffic!). But in people's homes in the rural areas or in the city, the leisure activity of choice, and perhaps not only leisure activity, is watching television and videos. For example, in the home of a Bangladesh NGO employee we watched Hindu videos. In another home and in the Guest House where I stayed, I was able to view university lectures being offered on national television. A video promoting treadle irrigation pumps for increasing crop yields combined adventure, intrigue, and romance to champion the improved lifestyle that this development 'product' offered its viewers. This video, shown in town after town, was projected on a large screen in a sports field and drew a crowd of 4000 plus in a northern village.¹⁸

A Bangladeshi development worker spoke with me at length about his

¹⁸ Personal correspondence with a CIDA employee who visited the sites of International Development Enterprises in November 1992 and viewed the promotion of Krishak Bandhu (The Farmer's Friend), a treadle pump being sold by dealers in villages across Bangladesh.

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MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS
STANDARD REFERENCE MATERIAL 1010a
(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)

involvement in literacy work. He said that in the villages being able to write one's signature is not a very useful skill in itself, but having at least one group member who can keep accounts and practice some reading and writing is necessary to inform the other group members of the implications of a signature, agreement or account. Printed material that is available to the average villager includes children's school books, land record papers, and some posters and political leaflets during election campaigns. Letter-writing is common but is not viewed as a necessity because one can always ask someone else to read or write a letter.¹⁹

The foregoing sampling of literacy events, in which all of the readers and writers were adults, draws a rough sketch of how three years of basic education in a BRAC school might eventually be applied in people's lives. Adolescents might very soon apply their reading and writing skills in various social practices of literacy, such as keeping accounts or writing letters for their parents. Most of the adolescent graduates are girls, however, and many of them, will soon be married--73% before age 15 (UN Division for the Advancement of Women, cited in Stromquist 1990, p. 100). At that age and in the home of her parents-in-law, the young woman is not likely to be given an opportunity to use her acquired literacy in case it accords her a certain power or influence. About 90% of the children succeed the entrance examinations to continue schooling in the formal school system. Unfortunately, many of them

¹⁹ Interview with Mr. Zaman of USCC-B, Ntbk II, pp. 28-31.

have to drop out within a year and the reason most frequently given by the parents is their inability to cover the costs of education.²⁰

Once again, my observations seemed to open up questions as certainly as they provided insights into people's everyday lives. Has the 'basic literacy' supplied by the BRAC system empowered the children and youth to participate in their broader world? What benefits will they continue to reap five and ten years from now if their environment continues to be print poor? And, although their environment may appear print poor, how have they been enabled to negotiate the textually mediated social organization of Development which pervades village life through groups formed by many Development organizations?

Summary

In this chapter I have written the account of the researcher in the first person as I was that person. As the writer of this thesis, however, I step back to review what the researcher's account reveals. The researcher observed two weeks of a Basic Teacher Training session, and eight Monthly Refresher days in the months of October and November. A six day Training of Trainers course and visits to several schools broadened the context in which she placed her other observations. Led by her understanding of concepts of participatory,

²⁰ The studies which report these findings were still in draft form at the end of 1992 and the writer did not wish to be quoted.

grassroots, woman-positive literacy education, the researcher examined the actual, everyday practices of teachers and trainers in the BRAC program. She did not see people engaged with their worlds and coming to understand the social and political forces underlying the literacy project. But she did see highly restricted practices of training, an opportunity for women to earn a stipend but not follow an open career path, and little space for women to insert their own knowledge into the teacher training process. Her observations raised questions about how useful basic literacy would be, given the occurrence of literacy mediated events in society.

The researcher's work has shown that the spoken discourse of training sessions was structured by the written texts of training manuals. Links were evident in the IRE discourse pattern, in discussion groups, in review quizzes, and in the trainer's reference to the teacher training curriculum for points highlighted on posters. The flexibility allowed the teachers was limited to those changes that did not modify the curriculum. In this way "hodge podge" was avoided--uniformity in all BRAC schools was preserved.

Differing training styles displayed by the Training and Resource Centre trainers and the NFPE trainers raised questions about how "participatory" training might be practised in other sectors of BRAC. The teachers' experience of a caring, attentive TARC trainer who encouraged them to contribute their readings of the Teacher's Manual was for them a participatory experience. They were less satisfied with the NFPE trainer's approach.

The Training of Trainers course was found to closely resemble the Basic Teacher Training course, although the POs in the TOT course participated vigorously in debating the correct procedures as presented in the Teacher's Manual. A substantial part of their training consisted in practising to fill in the Monthly Refresher module forms correctly.

From the researcher's viewpoint, hierarchical divisions within BRAC and in Bangladeshi society more generally have reinforced the silencing of teachers' voices and subordinated the creation of knowledge on the ground to the objectified knowledge of BRAC's system of training.

Finally, in order to gain a sense of how three years of non-formal education might connect with the social relations in which people were engaged outside of school, the researcher recounts her observations of reading and writing practices among BRAC personnel, villagers and townspeople. She also consulted a Bangladeshi development worker who had been involved in literacy programs for the past twelve years. It appeared that a mere signature, that is, a mechanical application of a literacy skill, would not be useful. What would be useful is knowing a person who could negotiate and interpret written texts and bookkeeping accounts and their significance for one's life, that is if one could not do that one's self. In other words, in order not to be exploited it was important for a villager to be in trusted contact with someone who could practice literacy as a social relation.

CHAPTER FOUR

TWO ACCOUNTS - TWO WAYS OF KNOWING

Introduction

Returning home from Bangladesh, the two travellers prepare to write up their findings. The consultant's work plan, as accepted in the terms of reference for her contract, delineates the format and content of her report. She will report her itinerary, the appointments with people that had been arranged, and her findings on the key issues identified by the contracting donor. She must receive approval for a preliminary report before submitting a final copy for the records of her contracting agency, and an invoice for her billable hours and expenses.

The researcher arrives home with more questions than when she left, her original research proposal looking beleaguered. Her commitment was to observe, learn, ask questions and record what she discovered. The final question is why she returned home with a different story than the other foreigner, the 'expert'. This chapter investigates that question by asking how the two accounts get constructed and suggests that the difference between the consultant's and the researcher's accounts can be attributed to the consultant's participation in the discourse of Development and the researcher's description of the everyday events as she observed them, not as they fit into

Development's concepts of literacy and participation.

Changing approaches in Development demonstrate efforts to make that discourse more inclusive of women, more truly representative of their interests, in order to more successfully incorporate them into Development (Moser, 1989; Mueller, n.d., 1987). Notwithstanding, my reading of the Development literature, as well as the documents produced by BRAC, suggested that the discourse did not mirror the lived reality of the women in the BRAC program.

It was in reflecting on the processes involved in the usage of Development discourse and the relations that were constructed through textual mediation that I came to see that the Development texts, BRAC documents, and the formulaic teacher training processes, appear to be linked in three levels of socially organized and textually mediated knowledge.

In the first part of the chapter, I argue that there is a way of reading the documents about BRAC in order to account for their incongruence with the practise in the NFPE program--a way that views them as constituents in a set of social relations which are textually mediated. I consider the consultant's account as a constituent of the Development discourse and these levels of textual mediation. Evolving Development approaches, the focus of integrating women in Development, and the theme of literacy for girls and women in Development are examined to show how these issues, at the level of Development texts, structure the consultant's account.

The second part of the chapter investigates how I, the researcher, constructed my account. There is a brief review of the research process that I went through and the conceptions of literacy, participatory education and liberatory options for women that I worked from. I show that these concepts worked not as schema to collect particulars, but as directives to observe how the program actually works.

The Construction of the Consultant's Account

The Discourse of Development

When I write of Development discourse, I am referring to the forms of communication used by the "literate or textually-mediated" (Darville, 1992b, pp. 16-17) community or institution of Development. People, often dispersed in space and time, come to share perspectives and knowledge that are achieved through texts and through certain procedures for reading and writing them (ibid.). In the social organization of the knowledge upon which the Development enterprise relies, knowledge has been separated from the knowing subjects and their material conditions. It is captured in the textual time and space of reports, documents and speeches that mediate what the consultant knows as the centre of her 'professional culture.' People, employed in various arenas of Development such as policy, education, and women and Development offices, create these documents. They relate to each other through these texts. They rely on texts to carry their meanings to people in

other departments, agencies and even countries.

Development discourse, as I use the term, incorporates the terms specific to Development, as well as the shared practices of talking about 'development' and reading and writing in the Development community. The consultant, of course, uses this discourse in keeping with the ruling practices of Development--its organized and organizing, administrative and managerial structures. And she communicates with other individuals who are also engaged in creating and maintaining those practices through textually mediated means. These individuals actively participate in the social organization of knowledge about, for instance, Third World women and girls, and literacy for development.

Explicating these textually-mediated social processes illuminates my sense of disjuncture on the ground. In the milieu of my research in Bangladesh I was encountering three different but linked levels of social organization mediated by texts. The first level operates in and among bilateral and multilateral donor organizations within the Development industry. Another level, through the reports and managers' accounts of BRAC's program, creates a nexus between donor agencies and funded NGOs like BRAC. At the third level, in the actual teacher training program of BRAC, texts and teaching scripts structure interaction in teacher training sessions and in classrooms.

In this thesis I am probing the texts themselves for what they can tell us about the way a foreign expert comes to know and report the NFPE. What part do the texts play in "the organizational processes that execute, control, regulate, inform and order in the various sites of governing, management, administration, discursive relations, [and] professional organization" (Smith, 1984, p. 61) of the Development enterprise?

The Social Organization of Literacy for Development Discourse

Level One: Texts of Development

Development and women.

As mentioned in Chapter One, today's international assistance industry originates with post-Second World War reconstruction programs. The relation of women's situation to societies' development has been a continuous theme in subsequent Development discourse and policy. In the development policies which emerged in the 1950s,

international economic aid which prioritized government support for capital-intensive industrial and agricultural production to accelerate growth focused on increasing the productive capacity of the male labour force. Welfare provision for the family was targeted at women, who, along with the disabled and the sick, were identified as "vulnerable groups," remaining the responsibility of the marginalized ministries of social welfare. (Moser, 1989, p. 1807)

In the four decades of Development that have followed there have been a number of thematic shifts in policy.

Briefly, these themes or approaches have been: (1) **welfare**, which

basically applied a modernization theory which combined accelerated growth strategies with aid for vulnerable groups; (2) **equity**, which emphasized integrating women into the labour force and the market through training and donors' 'legislation' of Women in Development¹ components;² (3) **anti-poverty**, which targeted certain identifiable groups, such as low-income women, to receive assistance in meeting their basic needs through increased employment and income-generating options; and, (4) **efficiency**, associated with the increased efficiency and productivity objectives of structural adjustment policies,³ basically shifted the emphasis of the two previous themes away from women to development.⁴

The anti-poverty and efficiency approaches continue to motivate much of Official Development Assistance (ODA) and are certainly evident in BRAC's programs. Its education and employment programs aim to, simultaneously, increase women's economic contribution and reduce fertility. These objectives are commonly linked with both approaches.

We can discover the thematic shifts in Development policy and

¹ Mueller (n.d.) attributes the formation of Women in Development offices to the passing of the Percy Amendment by the U.S. congress, which required the United States Agency for International Development to take women's issues into account in its Development plans.

² See Mbilinyi (1984) for a scathing assessment of this approach's impact on women in Africa.

³ Structural adjustment policies are the conditions that the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank place on countries receiving loans. These conditions generally include cuts to the percentage of the public budget allotted to social programs.

⁴ Caroline Moser (1989) treats the issue of changing approaches in Development in some depth, especially as those changes affect women.

discourse by reading research reports and policy statements such as *World Bank Discussion Papers*, the *Human Development Report*, or *Sharing our Future*. They are also evident in reports of studies for conferences such as the *World Conference on Education for All by the Year 2000* or the *International Women's Year Conference*, which are produced by the World Bank, United Nations Development Program (UNDP), UNESCO, and other influential multilateral and bilateral assistance organizations.

Integration of women in development.

The United Nations Decade for Women served to turn international attention to the place of women in the development process. There is a wide body of literature which deals with policies and programs issuing from that decade: their undergirding theories, methodologies, impacts, and so on.⁵ One of the earliest breakthroughs was the recognition of women as *producers* as well as *reproducers*.⁶

In more recent years, an important theme has been a call to frame the concerns of women as "gender and development" issues, in order to draw attention to the **social** relationship between men and women, "a relationship in which women have been systematically subordinated" (Moser, 1989, p. 1800).

⁵ See Antrobus, 1989; Buvinic, Lycette, & McGreevey, 1983; Goetz, 1991; Kandiyoti, 1990; Mbilinyi, 1984; Mohanty, 1988; Molyneux, 1991; Moser, 1989; and Mueller, 1987; for discussions of a range of relevant issues arising from and after the Decade for Women.

⁶ This has been attributed to Esther Boserup's (1970) work. Another, less frequently acknowledged, role which women perform is that of community managers (Moser, 1989).

In this view, both *practical* and *strategic* gender needs must be addressed.

Practical gender needs are those which arise from women's "*engendered* position within the sexual division of labour...[i.e.] childcare, family health and food provision...community managing of housing and basic services, along with the capacity to earn an income through productive work" (ibid., p. 1803).

Women have also pressed for changes in Development policy that will benefit them *strategically*, that is in ways that remove institutional forms of discrimination arising from women's subordination to men, such as restricted rights to own land or property (Molyneux, 1991; Moser, 1989).

Literacy for girls and women in developing countries.

Since 1980 the World Bank has placed a renewed emphasis on financing primary education (Coombs, 1985; Lockheed et al., 1991), and has made significant contributions to the government of Bangladesh (World Bank, 1990b). During this same decade, education for girls in particular has received important international attention (APPEAL, 1990; Herz et al., 1991; Winegard, 1987). Studies, such as Christopher Colclough's (1982) *The Impact of Primary Schooling on Economic Development: A Review of the Evidence*, have argued that primary schooling increases labour productivity, and that economic returns to investment in primary schooling are high. In addition, especially when girls are given primary schooling and women are given basic literacy education, there are said to be various desirable results. Family size decreases, child

mortality decreases,⁷ health and nutrition improve, and literacy rates increase.⁸

Unfortunately, unequal access for girls to education has been noted in many developing countries. In Bangladesh specifically, statistics tell us that fewer girls than boys enrol in school (in 1987, 35% of the total number of students in Class 1 and only 10% of the total by Class 5). At the secondary and higher secondary levels respectively, 32.7% and 21.2% of the total number of students enrolled are girls, but the dropout rate is higher for girls than boys, at 33% in 1990. As well, there are fewer women than men who teach in secondary and higher secondary schools--only 10% and 8.9% women teachers at the two levels, respectively.⁹ More segregated educational institutions are made available to boys than girls, and when there are institutions for girls they

⁷ A study of the impact of education on child mortality, conducted in Egypt, (Aly & Grahowski, 1990) concludes, however, that, in general, the number of pregnancies, the existence of a blood relationship between spouses, access to clean water, and adequate sanitation often were found to be more important factors than education, the first two factors increasing and the second two decreasing child mortality. "...attaining literacy for women is not necessarily going to have a significant impact on child mortality. Instead, staying in school a number of years beyond the time necessary to attain literacy would seem to be the key" (p. 741). If such findings are replicated we can anticipate corresponding shifts in the predominant themes of Development discourse.

⁸ The benefits of literacy that Colclough (1982) cites include the enhancement of satisfaction in leisure, greater access to a wide range of potential consumption benefits, and information communicated through the media which can "change people's perceptions...encourage adaptability and willingness to innovate" (p. 179). From a liberation education model, these can all be read as projects of the ruling, dominant sectors of society and the Development enterprise. Of course widespread media can also enhance popular participation in cultural and political life, as Colclough states, but, I would add, on the condition that those who control the media in fact desire greater popular political participation (cf. Kidd & Kumar, 1981).

⁹ Statistics are cited from Begum (1992, p.14) and Huq (1992, p. 45). Their sources are stated as BANBEIS, Bangladesh Primary Education Statistics, Dhaka (1986) and BANBEIS (1989).

do not offer the full range of subjects that are available in boys' schools.¹⁰

All this is true despite the fact that the principle of universal primary education (UPE) is written into the constitution, Article No.17 (Fyzennesa, 1992). The First Five Year Plan (1973-1978), the Two Year Plan (1978-1980), the Second Five Year Plan (1980-1985), and the Third Five Year Plan (1985-1990) all recommend increasing the percentage of enrolment of eligible children in primary school. But it was only in February, 1990 that a law was passed to start compulsory free primary education (ibid.). The most recent Five Year Plan (1990-1995) reflects this law and also gives priority to female education, and necessary funds have been received from the IDA, UNICEF, UNDP, UNESCO, and the Ford Foundation (ibid.).¹¹ The donation of these funds reflect the high priority multilateral and bilateral as well as international donor agencies are now placing on addressing these imbalances (Bagla-Gokalp, 1990; Herz et al., 1991; Lockheed et al., 1991).

Looking somewhat more critically at these developments, it must be added that educating girls and women is seen primarily as a means to address "practical" rather than "strategic" concerns about over-population or about improving a girl's home-making skills. In BRAC's case the curriculum has been kept "general," that is, it has not been modified to address possible strategic concerns for its majority female student population. The only

¹⁰ See especially Begum (1992); Fyzennesa (1992); Huq (1992); Khatun (1992); Khan (1992); and, Jabbar (1992).

¹¹ See also Hamida Akhtar Begum, June 25-27, 1992.

adjustment has been to include two health books for adolescent girls in the schools for girls only, under the Women's Health Development Program.¹²

"Education can help to equip these girls with knowledge of eg [sic] preventive health care, nutrition and family planning" (Akhter & Juppenlatz, 1990, p. 2).

Limited understanding of gender issues is also evident in curriculum materials which illustrate girls and women in domestic roles the majority of the time (Kabir, 1992).¹³ Perhaps somewhat dated, Krippendorff's (1977) content analysis of school Bangla Readers from Class 2 - 10 is, nevertheless, enlightening on this point. It shows, for example, that only 14.6% of all dramatic characters in stories are women, whereas the national female population is 48%. Out of 95 human illustrations with 306 figures, 36 are female and 270 are male. Women are not depicted as "working" whereas men are.

To summarize, at the first level of the textually mediated and organized knowledge of literacy for women in Development each of the Development approaches identified above (welfare, equity, etc.) has given rise to "buzzwords," policy initiatives, and "in" strategies or techniques. These appear in planning documents, funding criteria guidelines, handbooks for NGOs, speeches of government officials and texts which may become available to the

¹² From interview notes with the Program Coordinator, December 7, 1992.

¹³ This was a point of criticism that the director of a women's literacy program levelled at BRAC: "They don't have anything in their materials that is gender conscious. They just have the woman in the house and the man working outside" (Ntbk II, p. 115). She said her organization had developed curriculum that portrayed women in non-traditional roles and "working" roles.

public. These themes and terms include arguments about development, the impact of literacy for girls on development and the role of women in development, (as well as other topics such as human rights and good governance which are outside the purview of this thesis).

The education of girls in developing countries has been given prominent treatment in Overseas Development Assistance strategies and national budgets in recent years. Most commonly, benefits of girls' education are seen to regard social policy issues of population and family health. In and of themselves these are not unimportant considerations. In relation to the Development enterprise, they are crucial. In relation to the lives of girls who enrol in basic education programs, they fail to address the concerns of poverty and systemic gender discrimination.

Level Two: Intermediary Texts

Both of the travellers, the foreign expert and researcher alike, base their initial images of BRAC on the accounts presented in documents from the Development discourse. From my entry point at level two, which admittedly is a place of dominance--I was 'literate' in the ways of Development and academic literature, and of a literacy mediated bureaucracy: I knew, for example, how to negotiate the post office in spite of my 'technical literacy' lacuna--I came to expect that the program I was about to observe and participate in would fairly closely match the ways in which it was written into

texts.

In Smith's (1990) words, what I had come to know (about BRAC) had already been worked up and produced in a process mediating its relation to what people had actually done in the place where the process begins, that is in the classrooms and training courses. In other words, my knowing of BRAC was already ideologically structured.

However, rather than incorporating the official textual accounts of BRAC "unanalyzed and unexplored" (Smith, 1990, p. 46) into my research results, they too became an object of inquiry. I came to see that the textually mediated processes that link implementing organizations to donor agencies make up a second level of organization of ruling processes of Development. There are funding submission forms, for example, with spaces to fill in, which will demonstrate how the NGO proposes to meet the exigency of the donor's current themes. Also, in response to program initiatives publicized by the multilateral and bilateral donor communities, NGOs write statements of program objectives. Then, they send letters to the public and mount fund-raising campaigns that feature the current 'target groups' who will benefit from the public's donations. Northern and Southern NGOs compile descriptive and statistical accounts of program outcomes which they publish in their annual reports.

Evaluation teams, contracted by donor agencies to appraise an executing agency's performance and impact in the priority sectors, produce reports which

then enter the files of donors and executing NGOs. Consultants may even be hired by NGOs to enhance their capacity to textually mediate, that is to use the Development discourse which will enable them to meet the requirements of the donor organization.¹⁴ When a bilateral donor agency hires a consultant to do this for a project implementing organization, it may be called "institutional strengthening."¹⁵

BRAC designs accounts to portray to donors that it is responding to the priority sectors--low-income women, out-of-school children and youth--and uses strategies that are "in," for example, participatory training. They feature the efficiency (low cost per child, high completion rates) of their program, and cite research which indicates its contribution to an anti-poverty approach: "women with even a small amount of education are more receptive to new ideas, to family planning, to nutrition teaching, to improvements in hygiene and sanitation, to understanding about immunization and diarrhoea control" (Lovell & Fatema, 1989, pp. 8-9).

The features in the BRAC program that are of interest to the 'foreign expert' are: (1) BRAC sees itself as creating respectable employment for women thus responding to the call for integrating women into the economic development of their nation; (2) BRAC claims that this is 'bringing women out'

¹⁴ For example, through correspondence with a consultant for CIDA, I learned that a Canadian NGO had hired him to view one of their projects in Asia and to subsequently write it up for a funding submission (Personal correspondence, Spring, 1993).

¹⁵ Personal correspondence with CIDA program officer (August, 1993).

into society and breaking down the social restrictions of *purdah*¹⁶ thus contributing to the call for equity; and, (3) BRAC aims to make its model of non-formal education replicable across Bangladesh and even transferable to other NGOs and other countries (BRAC, 1992a; Lovell & Fatema, 1989).

This second level of textually mediated co-ordination creates a nexus between donor agencies and funded NGOs. In this nexus the consultant's discursive practices apply and elaborate the ideological currency of the Development enterprise which provides "schemata and methods that transpose local actualities into standardized conceptual and categorical forms" (Smith, 1984, p. 65). Her report is not a simple "telling" or "translation" of the BRAC NFPE for her contracting agency. She has indexed her account to the texts of Development.

The consultant's perception of the ways in which BRAC corresponds to Development's themes and priorities constitute the observables reported in her account. These key concerns serve as 'interpretive schemata' which order her descriptions of actualities (Smith, 1984).

The discourse of Development allows local actualities to be transformed into standardized conceptual and categorical forms that conform to the managing practices of Development. "Ideological practices bind the local to the discursive through interpretative circles whereby local instances index the 'text'" (Smith, 1984, p. 65). An interpretative schema such as 'providing

¹⁶ Literally 'curtain' or 'veil', refers also to the traditional institution of female seclusion.

literacy for girls' or 'women in development' is used to assemble and order a set of particulars--descriptions or instances of actual programs being implemented such as the NFPE. These descriptions aim at and can be interpreted by the Development schema used to assemble them. The particulars become indices of an underlying pattern, e.g. employing village women as teachers is an effective way to meet their strategic needs and increase their participation in the national economy, corresponding to the schema in terms of which they make sense. The way that the program is then written up in reports at Level Two is thus pre-informed by the schema of Development discourse.

The consultant trades in the currency of Development discourse by using its interpretive schema to index her observations and eventual final report.

Level Three: Program Implementation

The third level of textually mediated social organization played a crucial role in my sense of disjuncture in the field. It alerted me to the other levels because what people were actually doing in the classrooms and training courses did not match my expectations, based on a reading of documents from Level Two in the light of my own notions of participatory and liberatory education.

In the classroom and in teacher-training I encountered interaction among participants that was structured by the Basic Teacher Training Manual and by scripted methodology. Group discussions did not introduce new ideas

arising from the participants, but revolved around rehearsing the assigned section in the Training Manual. Daily review exercises, which might have provided a prime opportunity for analysis of the content's implications for their village contexts and for self-expression, consisted of testing the memorization skills of one's colleagues. Lesson plans prepared by teachers according to the "chart-book-board-slate" guideline, and modules prepared by Program Organizers for the Monthly Refreshers according to accepted format, also gave BRAC's pedagogical work the form of adherence to a script.

"Strong" and "weak" teachers were defined by the extent to which teachers observed their lesson plans at school, followed the schedule set out by Field or Program Officer, conformed their hand writing to the norm, achieved the month's target page, and adhered to other teaching norms set out in the Training Manual. To strengthen the "weak" ones the POs and occasionally the FOs "are so much hammering to the weak teachers at refreshers" (Ntbk II, pp. 112-13), and what they "hammered" was the scripted performance criteria.

Problem solving during the Monthly Refreshers also proved to revolve around those problems which the teacher training curriculum was prepared to deal with. The possibility that students might not learn something even after the teacher's instructions was not conceded and therefore not a subject of discussion. The solution in every case was to follow the steps laid out in the Training Manual.

This structuring of the teaching process was called "avoiding hodge podge" (Ntbk I, p. 74), whereas at Level Two it might be called ensuring replicability. In a similar relation, a TARC trainer described the BRAC schools as those where "the students talk more and the teacher talks less" (Ntbk II, p. 48), and a teaching style was described as "caring and respectful" (Ntbk I, p. 87). These practices were called a "participatory method" at Level Two in reports and in interviews with managers.

Summary of the Consultant's Account

The consultant's account is thus constructed through her participation in a set of textually co-ordinated social relations in her professional culture of Development. She shares a common discourse with others in Development--practices of reading and writing--by which she enters into, carries out and extends the organized, administrative, managing, and ruling practices of Development. The texts she prepares become active constituents of that discourse.

The Construction of the Researcher's Account

Earlier I wrote that both travellers were introduced to BRAC through the same documents, which in the preceding section have been identified with a level of textually co-ordinated organization mediating between actual programming activities and the general themes of Development discourse. The

consultant, coming from within the Development institution, applied the schema of Development discourse to her reading of these documents and subsequently to the observations she gathered during her mission to Bangladesh. The researcher, on the other hand, experienced disjunctures between the actual realities of the teacher training program and the way she had read about the program in "Level Two" documents.

Reviewing the Research Process and Methods

The initial objective of my research was to study BRAC's non-formal teacher training method. Anticipating a participatory, learner-centred training environment, I had proposed studying modelling versus mentoring approaches among teachers as they learned together. I expected to observe the teachers participating in the creation of knowledge that would help them facilitate a basic literacy program aimed primarily at girls. A secondary objective was to inquire into ways that the women teachers were experiencing 'advancement' through their employment with BRAC. Naturally, I first turned my attention to the teachers during the Basic Teacher Training.

It was soon evident that my conceptions of participatory education and emancipatory employment did not match the reality I was observing. This mismatch of expectations and observations led to an investigation of my observations and account as those of a 'researcher traveller' in order to mark them more clearly as objects of inquiry and understanding. Thus the following

analysis continues to employ the third person when discussing the construction of the 'researcher's' account.

The disjuncture rested between the researcher's knowledge of BRAC, and the knowledge that seemed unproblematically adequate for purposes of official reports and for BRAC managers. Hence, the thesis came to be reshaped as an investigation of the textually mediated social organization of literacy for Development as displayed in BRAC in particular, and the Development enterprise more generally.

Analysing the Researcher's Account

The researcher was committed to grounding her account in the activities and material conditions of teachers and trainers. She did not, however, embark on her research *tabula rasa*. She already maintained that literacy is a constituent of social relations and practices. Furthermore, she advocated a model of education which involves participants in dialogue that leads to action, that is to "*collective struggle* to challenge the existing social relations which determine some of the basic components of social life, such as, access to land, water, housing, and income" (Kidd & Kumar, 1981, p. 31). This action must be followed by analysis and evaluation before further action is initiated.

A 'liberatory' understanding of key issues, such as grass-roots dialogue, a participatory approach, and opportunities for women, led the researcher to read and hear the level two documents and discussion in a particular way. The

official documents of BRAC and descriptions by BRAC employees, as she interpreted them, suggested to her that the NFPE program practised a liberatory model of education. However, the incongruence that the researcher experienced between her observations of educational practice in BRAC's NFPE training programs and her interpretation of the textual accounts of BRAC, suggested that she had in an important sense misread those documents. Her reading had led her to observe in ways and look for things that the consultant would not.

Whereas the consultant went out asking 'Is there any participation of target group beneficiaries?' and 'Are women being integrated into the labour force?,' the researcher was looking for and was oriented to ways that Bangladeshis in their teaching and learning process, and in their uses of literacy in everyday life, might be extending their understanding of and their capacity to control their worlds.

The consultant saw that teachers in training answered the trainers' questions and talked in group work. She saw that all the kids around the neat, orderly classroom had an opportunity to call out responses and that some of their parents came to the parents' meeting conducted by the Program Organizer in the village. She saw that women from village families had a job with BRAC. She saw "participation" and "women in development."

Looking for ways that people were enabled to extend their understanding and capacity to control their worlds in this 'liberatory' non-

formal education program, the researcher was impelled to observe, over and over, how the development of their understanding and control were thwarted by the BRAC pedagogical and organizational structures. She saw that teachers could indeed offer responses but were constantly evaluated on the basis of their conformity to accepted texts, scripts and formats. She saw that most of the teachers were certainly women, but teachers had no opportunity to advance beyond the three-year contract on stipend pay, that even women with six or more years of experience could not be given a supervisory position, and that women Program Organizers were a small minority due to educational requirements and physical and cultural constraints of travel and household responsibilities. These observations were made with the sense of increasing frustration expressed in the field notes as exhibited in Chapter Three.

As the writer of this thesis, I have used the metaphor of two travellers, a 'consultant' and a 'researcher,' to facilitate the telling of the two ways of knowing. It has allowed me to view the textual reality of BRAC's NFPE program not as a cover-up of some 'truer' reality but as one component of social courses of action tying together individuals in the literacy mediated ruling processes of Development. The consultant is a participant in these courses of action.

The researcher, simply by writing up her findings here, is also participating in a textually mediated social organization of knowledge, but insists on allowing space for the voicing of observations and experiences that

do not fit the categories of Development schema. Her conceptions of participatory and liberatory education have served as directives to open up inquiry into how this particular education program works on the ground.

Summary

This chapter has analyzed how the travellers constructed their two different accounts. Each one launched her mission to Bangladesh from a foundation of assumptions. The consultant worked from the objectified knowledge of the textually-mediated culture and organization of Development. Working at an intermediate level of the textually mediated social processes of Development, the consultant completes her mission by conforming her report to the Terms of Reference set out by the donor agency which employed her. Exercising the interpretive schemata of Development, she writes favourably of BRAC's successful, replicable, and cost-effective program, in which the sheer numbers of village women employed meet a criterion of integrating women into the national productive labour force. The researcher, on the other hand, returns to write about what she has come to know of the BRAC NFPE program from her weeks of close observation and participation and in particular how it did not fit into her preconceptions.

I have also come to turn the research process on myself and examine "the researcher's" way of coming to know the NFPE program. Juxtaposing the two accounts has enabled me to comprehend and to display knowledge of

literacy for Development in a broader way.

My final objective is, while acknowledging the significance of this extensive program, to suggest questions that might open up avenues for moving it toward an educational model that extends people's literacy to their actions in the broader world. This objective is addressed in the next and final chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

JOURNEY'S END – NEW HORIZONS

Introduction

To bring closure to my investigation, I propose to do two things in this final chapter: first, briefly review the two ways of knowing, and second, in the space cleared for alternative readings and actions, suggest questions that conventional Development discourse may not raise.

Reviewing Two Ways of Knowing

The consultant's way of knowing constitutes her participation in the dominant institutions of Development. It is structured in relation to the donor community and in relation to ideological constructs of literacy and women and Development. This kind of knowing works to absorb new knowledge that might be produced on the ground into the ideological circles of the dominant discourse of literacy for Development and women in Development. In absorbing this knowledge, Development also routinely removes it from the location of its production. For instance, Bangladesh has less organized information about itself than do researchers and activists abroad, forcing the more privileged and motivated activists and scholars to travel abroad periodically to gather the knowledge about Bangladesh that has been amassed

in institutions affiliated with international donors there (Alam & Matin, 1984).

This way of knowing may also invalidate or marginalize the knowledge produced on the ground:

Donors are motivated to sponsor research that will help them make their programmes more effective....Studies therefore participate in and sustain aid discourse by their focus, concerns, priorities, the data they collect and the way they construe 'evidence'....[restricting] opportunities for the aid discourse orthodoxies to be challenged by indigenous voices with quite different perspectives. (White, 1992, pp. 16-17)

Certainly "indigenous voices" might make observations like those I made as the researcher, and even official documents reveal contradictions in the ways that BRAC's "participatory" education was nevertheless structured for consistency and replicability. But this does not pose a problem for the ways in which Development uses the terms of liberatory education. The use of terms such as these in Development discourse has been analyzed as "pseudo-Freirean" by Kidd and Kumar (1981). They argue that terms such as "participatory" and methodologies such as "problem-solving" have been co-opted by organizations that seek to incorporate the small peasant into the consumer economy *without naming the central problem as oppression, not poverty, and without identifying the cause of poverty as oppression, not the self-inflicted deficiency of the poor.* Their analysis might be applied to Development organizations that wish to change people's behaviour by transmitting skills and information, and not to engage people in collective action for transforming the political structures of

their situation.¹

Furthermore, the construction of the BRAC NFPE program as "participatory" is a knowable product of a certain social organization of knowledge. The term has not been simply adopted from theories of liberatory education, but has been defined and given shape within the textually mediated social processes and relations of Development so that local actualities are transformed to fit an ideologically structured notion of "participation." Thus,

in reading back from the account to the actuality...the interpretive procedure bypasses the processes producing the account and lodges directly in the actuality thus constituted as "what actually happened/what is." (Smith, 1990, p. 79)

"What actually happened/what is," is not the same as "lived actuality," but rather the virtual reality intended and organized by the text of the factual account (ibid., pp. 71-2).

A second way of knowing stems from the research of one who began with a notion of literacy as social practices and relations and of education's liberatory potential. However, the lived reality of the researcher's observations of and participation in the teacher training events contrasted with her conception of what they would and indeed should be. This meant that I, as writer, had to struggle with the implications of that disjuncture.

In spite of the limitations of the data, the notes and recorded interviews throbbed with voices of people whose names I knew, with whom I had eaten

¹ Kidd and Kumar (1981) have described this as a "deprivation-development" strategy, rather than a "dependency-liberation" strategy.

bhat and *mach*² and whom I had watched interact in classrooms. The story of my observations was almost silenced by the tone of authority in which various documents described BRAC and wrote about literacy for girls and women in developing countries. In time, however, I came to understand more clearly the construction of the official documents of the NFPE program as products of a social organization of knowledge.

I argue that recognizing and understanding that social organization of knowledge serves as a tool for fighting against the danger of absorption and marginalization of local observations and questions (Escobar, 1984-85; Mueller, n.d., 1987; White, 1992; Wood, 1985; *inter alia*). It certainly provided me with an intellectual basis for taking ownership of and being committed to my experience and observations. Making this dominant ideology explicit (Smith, 1984, 1990; Street, 1984) enables us to know what we are working 'in and against' (Mueller, n.d.). The analysis of Development discourse and the consultant's account is intended to raise our awareness of the textually mediated processes in which you and I participate when we approach Development texts as readers and writers. It also serves to clear some space for posing questions and alternative possibilities.

² Rice and fish.

Questions and Alternatives

Important questions arise from the understanding of literacy as social practices and relations with a liberatory potential, and from using concepts like "participatory," and "dialogue," and "opportunities for women," not as ideological terms to categorize action but as a way of thinking from inside it. Concepts used in this way facilitate the study and practice of liberatory possibilities. Used in this way, the notion of "participation" in teacher training and in classrooms generates a number of questions that have not been asked by BRAC and are certainly not part of its official reports and planning documents.

In what ways could the teachers' knowledge of their villages and the social practices of literacy there, inform and expand the current teacher training curriculum? How could they be involved in producing materials that are based directly on the lives of the children and youth in their village in a way that incorporates both the fundamental literacy 'skills' that the BRAC curriculum aims to transmit and the aim to read and write the world around them?

For children and youth in the classrooms, how could the curriculum be modified to make it more "participatory"? For example, to what extent could children's own stories be incorporated into reading lessons? How could practical reading and arithmetic, for example the income generating projects of their parents, be introduced as real problems to work on in class?

Questions may also be asked about what happens to children who graduate from BRAC schools. Even though 90% of the children and youth have been eligible to continue in the formal system, not all do. To continue schooling, the obstacles of tutoring fees, school uniforms, and the cost of books, which most families don't have the means to provide, must be overcome. If BRAC were committed to further extending opportunities for girls, could it organize the tutoring program necessary for them to make it through the formal system? Could school regulations on uniforms be relaxed? Who could cover the cost of books?

Similarly, graduates from a BRAC school do not necessarily continue literate practices outside of school. To BRAC's credit, this concern is being discussed. In the fall of 1992, plans were being made to set up "reading clubs" for the young women graduating from the PEOC classes. How could these clubs become a venue for integrating social practices of literacy with the schooled literacy they had memorized? Will the "reading clubs" promote a political reading of issues affecting the young women?

A third area of concern focuses on the opportunities for women who are presently teaching. Could BRAC create any possibilities for teachers to secure additional training or education to become eligible for Program Organizer positions? Related to this, if we look carefully at the statistics on women's secondary school completion, we can infer that BRAC's teachers are already in an elite minority in the villages. Could alternative or additional forms of

training be established to allow women who are not already members of this elite to become NFPE teachers?

Fourthly, it seems unusual that a program which in other ways seems to be organized especially to benefit women and girls does not feel the need to let this target group influence its approach to pedagogy. The NFPE aims to keep its curriculum and pedagogy general. Could BRAC design its texts and manuals to portray alternative gender relations? What could be learned from the experience of the women's literacy program which has developed alternative portrayals of gender relations and revised its materials three times on the advice and input of women in the villages?³ Are there ways to incorporate other than "practical" gender interests in curriculum designed especially for girls in the WHDP education classes?

Finally, BRAC has become an extremely large organization and the NFPE within BRAC is a massive education program by any standards. What can be done to keep BRAC continually in touch with the grassroots? Could teachers themselves be involved in research which evaluates the impact of innovations such as story-telling and wall journals? Might teachers be encouraged to write accounts of problems they have encountered, which were not defined in the Teacher Training Manual, and how they solved them? Could teachers be invited to present their input to staff at the head office? How might research be conducted to assess the impact of the children's

³ See footnote 13, Chapter Four.

schooling on their families? Have the families become more socially and politically conscious through the influence of the children's and youth's education? If not, why not? If so, what avenues could BRAC create to facilitate hearing feedback from parents?

Questions such as these are not only being asked by a foreign researcher. Inside and outside of BRAC in Bangladesh, I met Bangladeshis who were working within Development but who were wrestling with similar questions and possibilities. One was the new senior BRAC employee who was struggling with how to write up program observations in such a way that they could be either "interpreted as not useful information and ignored" or that they might "be heard by someone [and acted upon]" (RJ, p. 35; see Chap. 3, p. 55). Another was the director of the women's literacy program, to whom I have referred earlier. She and others of her staff encouraged the input they received from women in the learning groups and challenged the predominant view that BRAC was the major literacy education success story in Bangladesh.

At the same time, such questions and the actions they would point to would certainly make contradictions visible. A close reading of the BRAC employee's observations might elicit the kind of response he received from a major donor agency who short-listed him for a senior position but did not offer him the job: "The director did not want to hear the negative observations I had of development work in Bangladesh" (RJ, p. 36).

Modifications of BRAC's curriculum might endanger the role the NFPE schools play as feeder schools for the formal system. Curriculum changes might elicit hostile reactions that might threaten the program. Curriculum changes presenting non-traditional gender roles might elicit reactions from village people that would upset BRAC's good reputation.⁴ A tutoring program for poor girls could cause resentment among families that could afford to pay for tutors.

Teachers and BRAC staff might feel their status threatened by an emphasis on the value of indigenous knowledge, and by encouragement to facilitate more knowledge creation and less knowledge transmission.

If teachers were to receive further education and become eligible for PO positions, that might upset the current employment opportunity open to thousands of mostly male university graduates who have not been trained in education. Teachers might be wary of upsetting the recently gained 'freedom' of holding a position of respect and of gaining remuneration within their own village.

These possible forms of resistance to the actions that raising such questions and possibilities might invoke, must not be taken lightly. Because Development deliberately uses 'development' as a means to alter values, behaviours, and social structures (Goulet, 1992) we must work within

⁴ Various studies suggest, however, that the poorer people of the village would react less negatively than the rising lower/middle middle class (Feldman & McCarthy, 1983; Hale, 1988; McCarthy, 1977).

Development to ensure that space is given to questions and that people are enabled to change those values, behaviours and social structures in directions that empower them, not the Development enterprise. Herein lies the value of a way of knowing which uses concepts such as 'participatory' and 'liberatory' as a means to think about observations and about actual practices of development.

To conclude, it must be recognized that this thesis is not a claim to know, finally, the 'lived reality' of the women teachers or the girls in the BRAC schools. It is a critical study, not as a fault-finding quest, but as a contribution to explicating the managing and ruling practices of Development. Essentially, it is less about Bangladesh and BRAC than it is an investigation of the construction of my own knowing, an unveiling of textually mediated knowing, and a recognition that both may be held up to the light of further inquiry. It is about the textually mediated social organization of knowledge in Development.

Understanding that social organization of knowledge gives us a place from which to work in and against Development's powerful ruling practices which silence, absorb or marginalize knowledge that gets produced on the ground by women and men in real life situations with real voices and real knowing of their own worlds and the competence to act in and transform those worlds.

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