

Teachers, collaboration, praxis:

A case study of a participatory action research project in a rural
school of Bangladesh

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A thesis submitted in the partial fulfilment of the requirement
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education

College of Education
University of Canterbury
Christchurch, New Zealand

January, 2016

Abstract

A Bangla saying suggests that when people work together they enjoy the wisdom of engagement irrespective of the extent of accomplishment and final outcomes. This research reports and illustrates the development of a learning community of teachers in a rural Bangladeshi secondary school. I argue that a participatory action research process, in a many different ways, not only provides opportunity to explore existing conditions of teaching practice, but also offers explorative tools to collaboratively examine and reflect on the practices in order to strategically change them for better students' educational outcomes.

The study is based on a Bangladeshi remote rural secondary school. It considers the wider context of current social and educational development within Bangladesh. The project works within the tension between external influences and the real needs of teachers, students and local community.

In terms of educational outcomes, the rural schools are far behind the urban schools. However existing professional development programmes and in-service teacher training are centrally developed and top-down and do not fully align with the rural teacher's needs. Thus there is a need for alternative processes that might better meet the educational needs of a rural community. The process of how one such school learning community developed and worked is important because it creates opportunity to make incremental and varying shifts in teacher's understanding and actions. Moreover, there are no similar published accounts of such development in Bangladesh and this can therefore serve as an illustrative model of possibilities as well as the challenges and tensions inherent in such an undertaking.

The investigative focus of this project was based on two goals. The central goal was focused on the evolution of the teachers' learning community and the changing understandings they developed of their role and their practice. The second goal was to reflect on my own evolving understanding of my role as facilitator and participant in the project and on what was happening through the project.

Therefore, this research examines and reports how the teachers and I undertook different activities that allowed us to explore changes to existing teaching practices. It utilises the teachers' direct dialogues that I weave into a narrative of the process to show how we collectively and individually developed commitment and willingness to adapt and relate the emergent understandings with the students' varying educational needs.

The study engaged the head teacher, teachers, and students in the research process to see themselves as active agents in their changing conditions. Initially the project began as my

initiative and then it was enabled to progress through two key factors. First the head teacher of the school envisioned the development of a teachers' learning community as means to bring useful change in the school as well as in the community. And second the teachers showed commitment to the project and determined its overall direction through their active engagement.

The conceptual framework of this study draws on literature from three intersecting fields: research from Bangladesh, indigenous approaches to knowledge and the influence of colonisations, and notions of action research, reflective practice, learning communities and situated learning. It also describes the experiential context of the community and school.

The most significant observable outcome of the project was the sustenance of the teachers' commitment in examining their practice for more than six months, despite having an already full workload, and despite the challenges, and occasional pain it created for them, emotionally and conceptually. This commitment to the research process gave rise to an attitude to and a practice of sharing and exchanging. Beneath these observable outcomes were less overtly visible shifts, including the gradual surrender of aspects of a role they had thought they had to act out, that of being the authority and expert in their classrooms, and beginning to explore other possibilities. I gained several understandings from the project. First I understand that if we look at the possibilities within our reach we can make some difference in rural schooling. My second key understanding is that the goal of *emancipation* in an educational setting can be a shift in thinking and part of an on-going process of reflection and so translate into informed action.

The study illustrates how teaching practice in a rural school can be improved for better educational outcomes for students. The outcomes and the shifts of teachers' understandings provide exemplars for the forms of professional development programmes we need to create, for their content, and for the skills needed in facilitating them.

I conducted my research in a situated Bangladeshi rural school. I acknowledge that the outcomes are inspiring but limited to a specific context. However, the processes and the outcomes that were involved in my project can be adapted in other rural schools inside and outside of Bangladesh to generate further knowledge about learning communities, praxis and participatory action research process, and thus to improve our national capacity to educate our children.

Acknowledgements

In the name of Almighty who is the source and symbol of wisdom for the whole universe!

I dedicate this thesis to the known and unknown tax payers of Bangladesh and New Zealand who have created an inspirational opportunity for me to undertake my doctoral study. I also dedicate this thesis to my parents, to Salma Fufu, to my extended family members, especially, Zoha beta and Reba chichi-amma, to Lucky apa and most of all to my daughter, Aurpee and my wife, Lucy. They all helped me to devote my energy fully to my doctoral study by taking all my family responsibilities.

I want to acknowledge and express my gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Janinka Greenwood and Associate Professor Kathleen Quinlivan whose insights, creativity, criticality, and humility helped me to finish the journey. I also want to acknowledge the examiners' feedback which has created opportunity for future development. I owe and pay my deep respect to the participants in the study, the head teacher, teachers, and the students who sustained their effort in the project for six months.

I acknowledge the valuable feedback from the members of the Reseach Lab for Creativity and Change, College of Education, University of Canterbury, who helped me to rethink many of my educational ideas directly linked with my research. And I must remember some names from the research lab: Salahuddin bhai, Haroon, Mahbub, Al-Amin, Hasnat, Tisi, Abdullah, Brad, Louis, Trudy, Faye, Joanna, Tariq, Harpinder, and Karna.

I pay special thanks to Abanti bhabi for providing support in making some corrections in the reference list, to Liana Aisyah for giving suggestion to prepare my oral presentation, to Zaman for giving me moral courage and sharing some profound educational thoughts, to Akram for giving time in the last stage of my doctoral journey, and to all the others (I cannot mention all the names) who gave me moral support throughout my whole journey.

রবীন্দ্রনাথ আমাদের অনুধাবন করতে বলেছেন কিভাবে সবুজ ফসলের মাঠে ভোরের শিশির সূর্যালোকে দ্যুতি ছড়ায়। সেই দ্যুতির কিছুটা এই গবেষণায় উল্লোচিত হয়েছে। ভবিষ্যতে আরও উল্লোচনের প্রত্যাশা রইল।

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Rice or salt?

It was in the last stage of the project. An overseas scholar had joined us and after some discussion about what we had learned from the project one of the teachers asked the visitor about the role of creative questioning in Europe and America.

Is a creative questioning system part of education in the whole world? Or is it only in Asia? What is happening in Europe and America? We know that creative questioning is very good for learning. But in a traditional education system such as in this rural school how much can creative questioning be useful for the teachers and the students?

The question arose because the Bangladesh national education policy had recently highlighted the need for creative questioning and signalled it should become part of the examination system. The teachers in the school I was working with, as well as teachers across the whole of Bangladesh, were wrestling with how to make sense in their teaching of the concept of creative questioning, particularly in a context where rote learning was a dominant pedagogical approach and the examination system itself was struggling to accommodate the new policy.

The discussion became argumentative about whether we need foreign experts to improve our curriculum and our teaching practices or whether we should rely on our own strengths. Then a teacher impatiently interjected:

It can be said that we finish rice when we buy salt! How much we can develop with existing facilities and conditions? These are just pleasing words.

Others in the group agreed that he had captured their dilemma.

The interjection used a common Bangla colloquial saying:

নুন আনতে পান্তা ফুরায়

nun ante panta furay

It means that if I buy salt I will come home and see there is no rice; so how can I eat?

At one level it expresses the dilemma of poverty: if we spend our resources on the flavourings, we cannot afford the staples. At a further level it talks about the need to carefully prioritise when we have limited resources. Both levels of meaning are relevant to this account of a project in a rural Bangladeshi school. Poverty and limited resources were tangibly real aspects of the teachers and wider community's lived experience. And the project provoked all of us to consider the most useful ways we could shape our teaching practice, given the conditions of the context

and the resources we could draw on. It made us carefully consider, and frequently re-consider, what the staples of teaching actually are.

The focus and purpose of this study

This study reports a participatory action research project in a remote rural secondary school in Bangladesh. The project developed a learning community among the teachers and set out to collaboratively examine their existing teaching practices and their existing and shifting understandings of their role as teachers and to explore how they might further develop their practice to better meet the needs of students. Exploring what those needs actually were was one of the goals of the project.

In terms of educational outcomes, rural schools in Bangladesh are reputed to show less achievement than the urban schools. However the existing professional development programmes and in-service training are centrally developed and top-down and do not fully align with the rural teachers' needs. Thus there is a need for alternative processes that might better meet the educational needs of a rural community. The process of how one such school learning community developed and worked is important because it shows that change can occur from the ground up and teachers can support each other in exploring how to make change and embody it in their practice. It shows how opportunity was created to make incremental and varying shifts in teachers' understandings and actions, and it argues that these shifts are as important as the final outcomes in changed teaching practice and student engagement and achievement. Because there are no published accounts of such developments in Bangladesh, this project can serve as an illustrative model that others can build on and further develop. Behind this study is global context of complex monetarist and political pressures on education and within Bangladesh itself there are also complex responses to these pressures. They are acknowledged as background to this study.

The metaphor of rice and salt can take on a further dimension as a counter narrative to the official statements made by both donors and government about educational goals and teachers' professionalism. In this project the teachers placed their professional role, identity, and pride of teaching at the centre of their investigation and examined what is important and what is not. By incrementally coming to see their own practice, their relationship with their students and the support and helpful critique they could give each other as the core of their concern and potential for efficacy they asserted that this was the staple, the source of sustenance. Thus outsiders'

offerings, be they professional development programmes, research findings or subject guide books, became the salt – valuable flavouring but requiring careful application.

The overall research design and the nature of this report

As is explained in more detail in Chapter 2, this is a case study of a participatory action research project. The project involved teachers in discussions of their own and each other's practice, in collaborative explorations of the needs of students, and in experimentation of how they might change their practice to better meet the needs of students. It began as my initiative, but it was enabled to operate firstly because the head teacher of the school saw the development of a teachers' learning community as means to bring his own vision for the school to fruition, and secondly because the teachers themselves embraced the project and determined its shape through their active participation.

The investigative focus is twofold. The central focus is on the evolution of the teachers' learning community and the changing understandings they developed of their role and their practice. A secondary focus is on my own evolving understanding of my role as facilitator of and participant in the project and of what was happening through the project. Accounts of both are reported in Chapters 5-9. In these accounts I have sought to retain a sense of the narrative of the project, of the way that events and understandings unfolded, of the crises that occurred and of ways meaning was negotiated through discussions. Therefore I have retained as much detail as possible of process and the participants' dialogues, and I have limited my theorisation of what was occurring to the final part of each chapter

This project takes place within the wider context of education and social development within Bangladesh. The present government of Bangladesh has undertaken significant reform initiatives at both the macro and the micro levels of the education system. The National Educational Policy-2010 has been enacted in the national parliament, although its implementation is still in early stages. The stated main focus of the policy is to provide the students with the techno-scientific knowledge they need to contribute to the economic development of the country. In itself this is an ambitious reform initiative. Questions might be raised about the influence of global economics on the focus, and about the extent to which it acknowledges the rural agriculture based economic activities on which more than 60% of the population rely to earn income. Such questions sit in the background to this study, and they are discussed a little in Chapter 4 as well as acknowledged throughout the narrative. However, they are not the main focus of this thesis. My concern here is to report how a group of teachers in a school situated in a rural community

deals with improving their practice within the context that exists and within the guidelines of the national curriculum, confines of the examination system and within their limited resources.

It is not that the wider questions are unimportant. As a teacher educator and project administrator, I know that in Bangladesh various and often contradictory purposes of education are played out at policy level, in people's perceptions, as well as at the micro contexts of schools. Some of the complexity exists because, as Pike (2008) points out in a more general context, we try to impose global economic imperatives and international educational perspectives onto the face of the local context without considering the lived experience and needs of the communities involved, and without acknowledging that the people live in culture, customs and language, and are different from those that inform the internationally sourced goals and strategies. However, while I and several of the teachers in our project were very aware of these wider issues, we recognised we had little power, if any, to create change on a national scale, whereas we found we could create significant change on our home ground. Perhaps the metaphor of rice and salt could apply here again: we used our resources to work on what was within our reach. Exploration of that change and the process of creating it is, therefore, the focus not only of the project but also of my account of it.

Building capacity

As is evident in Chapter 3, research into education in Bangladesh tends to fall into one of two categories. There are reports from large scale, often internationally supported, projects that detail teacher participation in training programmes, increases in student enrolments and retention and other quantitative data. There are also locally initiated research studies that tend to focus on the problems in education and on the shortcomings of teachers. The findings of these studies tend to highlight the deficits of the system and of classroom teachers, and on the basis of the findings and of exemplars from overseas recommendations are made for change. What has been missing is detailed qualitative research about cases where change has been successfully created within Bangladesh itself, within individual schools or by individual teachers. Therefore, the key contribution of this study is that, rather than just looking at what does not work, it shows how a school, situated in a specific context, explored how to do things differently and how the teachers themselves worked collaboratively to identify what needed to be improved in their practice and found ways of actualising those improvements in their classrooms. As an educator and as a citizen of Bangladesh, I believe we need case studies that investigate how some of the often abstracted dreams for improvement are given reality within the actual contexts we live in,

as well as case studies that show how particular teachers recognise, tackle and overcome the obstacles that are also part of our lived experience. Such case studies can build our educational capacity.

The term *community capacity building* is widely used by international development organisations, such as United Nations, the World Bank and many non-governmental organisations, and because of its wide political use it is sometimes seen as euphemism for developing conformity or developing the capacity to contribute to the global market place. Here I want to return to its basic meaning. Every community, it might be argued, already has some capacity for sustaining its well-being that it has built up over time. Such capacity is not only material but also attitudinal and strategic. In this project the teachers were already a community that had built up a certain degree of capacity for teaching the local children. The processes of participatory action research enabled them to engage in investigating what they already had, what it seemed to lack and what they could do to improve it. It enabled them to be active agents in changing their practice and the conditions of student learning within their school. In this way capacity building is an integrative approach that allows teachers to investigate their own reality at the same time as they effect change. The process is collaborative and capacity is built through the growing understandings of the participants and through their willingness to embody these evolving understandings in their practice. It might be argued that these shifts in understanding and their translation into experimental practice give rise to an emancipatory potential.

In the dialogue reported briefly at the beginning of this chapter the teachers saw their currently existing practices, even though these were evolving, as the staple of teaching, the rice, whereas the not-yet-understood notion of the *creative question* was seen as the salt, potentially desirable flavouring but probably not affordable. If they chased the salt, they feared they would lose the capability to buy rice. Earlier in the project they had had similar views about the notion of student-centred teaching that is articulated in the national curriculum and that they had encountered in regional training programmes. Preparing students for examinations was the obvious staple of their work: notions of participatory teaching and learning were clearly salt, unaffordable within limited resources, time and energy. In the final stages of the project they demonstrated they had come to see the active engagement of students and the role of their questions as the basic component of teaching and learning, and the final examination success of the students perhaps became the salt, but now seen as affordable. This was observable evidence of their building of capacity.

The conceptual frameworks I draw on

In the project, at first unconsciously and later consciously, I drew extensively on two broad conceptual frameworks. The first is based on the writings and cultural legacy of Rabindranath. The rest of the world knows Rabindranath Thakur as a Nobel Prize winner and through the often quoted lines of his poetry. For us in Bangladesh he is one of our most influential philosophers and a writer who captures the grace and the rich imagery of our Bangla language. Writing in the early nineteenth century Rabindranath urged his people to transform their understandings of education. His arguments are still relevant now. He asks us to look at local values for our educational interventions. He asks us to check the contextual validity and relevance of any external importations and he strongly advocates rejection of any external idea about education that seems unnecessary and does not fit with our needs and values. He gives importance to promoting students' imagination, and to developing a trustful relationship between teachers and students by creating an open and free space to communicate. The key insight that I draw from Rabindranath is that for educational reconstruction we need to navigate between our ancestral culture and contemporary needs.

The second framework is based on the approach to participatory action research that is offered by Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) and that positions it as a social process of learning. Kemmis and McTaggart also helped me to see how the process of participatory action research can be aligned with the concept of a learning community. As I detail in Chapter 3 I read a range of theorisations of participatory action research and learned different things from each of them, but I found I drew more and more on Kemmis and McTaggart's explanations, particularly on their conceptualisation of the development of a communicative space and exploratory action. How I have followed this model methodologically is further explained in the next chapter, and how I adapted it to the context I worked in and the process that evolved in that context is described in chapters 5-9.

When I set out to organise an account of the research and theorisations that are relevant to this study and that informed my thinking I was faced with a challenge. Because my doctoral candidature is based in New Zealand, I read a lot of international literature and have valued what I have learned from many international educational theorists. However, I had also gradually developed awareness, as stated earlier in this chapter, that it is important to look at educational change in Bangladesh in terms of the experiences, needs and perspectives of the Bangladeshi people and that I needed to evolve the project that is the subject of this thesis within terms of the experiences, needs and perspectives of the teachers themselves and of the local community. I wanted to follow the advice of Rabindranath: to engage with international scholarship but to

make sure that first I develop a platform that acknowledges the knowledge systems that belong to Bangladeshi roots. Therefore the review of literature that I present in Chapter 3 focuses primarily on research about education that has been carried out in Bangladesh, and on a number of writers, including Rabindranath, from the broader sub-continental region who offer insights into what it means to develop a local, indigenous, perspective. Because I have studied in New Zealand, I have also benefitted from learning about Māori perspectives about the situatedness of knowledge and the importance of building encounters with the global world on a strong basis of cultural identity. So these writings are also included in my review. And I have reviewed a number of writings about participatory action research, reflective practice, learning communities and situated learning. Most of this last group have come from the western academy and I have carefully thought through how they might align with my commitment to prioritise Bangladeshi perspectives. Then I made a decision to not try to find ways of including all the other significant theorists I have read. Some I include briefly in the chapters that report the progress of the project. However, I realised it would be an extensive project in its own right to thoroughly investigate how the rich legacies of all the western theorists I have studied might be aligned with the local perspectives of the context I worked in, without performing a new act of intellectual colonisation, and that is beyond the focus of this thesis. The balance of the choices I made might be seen as a further reflection of the metaphor of rice and salt. And perhaps in further research I will develop my own capacity, and as I become more confident in navigating between western and local understandings and learn how to strategically and ethically interlace them, I will be able to buy more salt as well as rice.

My interest in the field

I undertook this project with a school that is situated in the rural community that I belong to, and I personally as well as professionally care about the people's struggle, history, and educational processes. I want the children in the community to be able to learn who they are, to be curious about their challenges, and to become better able to learn to negotiate their challenges. I want the teachers to be able to really help the children learn, and, rather than seeing themselves as on the margins of the centre of educational improvement and change, to become agentic in creating the changes their community needs.

My interest grows from two aspects of my experience. First I was born and brought up in the region where the school is situated. During my early school days and during my adolescent period I experienced the challenges of rural poverty, schooling and restricted educational

outcomes. After my graduation from university I started teaching as a physics teacher in an old and well-reputed higher secondary college in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. I started to recognise the gap between rural and urban schooling. Though my teaching experiences were based on meeting the demands of an examination focused education system, I became interested to share my knowledge of teaching with my community's schools, but it was still an emotional aspiration. In 2005 I was seconded to the Teaching Quality Improvement (TQI) project. The key aim of the project, which is further described in Chapter 4, was to implement participatory teaching and learning in all the secondary schools of Bangladesh.

Through the project I came to New Zealand to study for a Masters degree in education. During my study I started to better understand the complexity that involve in rural schooling and education. As a privileged person from a rural community I got the opportunity to experience different educational perspectives. I was able to compare and contrast the processes of teaching and learning in two different contexts. As I came to understand the value of research, I developed the desire to explore how research can speak to the actual needs of the people that I left physically but still strongly belong to. As a beneficiary of the TQI project I also felt, and still feel, an ethical responsibility to use my opportunity for research to add something useful to the knowledge base of my own country. Although exploration of ways to develop teachers' agency and students' academic success are significant issues globally, in Bangladesh they are critical. While the government has an explicit agenda of improving educational outcomes, the concept of collaborative learning communities is a relatively new one and there is little available about how they might be developed within the constraints of existing school practices and resources. Moreover, people tend to package teachers within a vision of the nobility of teaching without considering the fact that they also live in a society where there is rural poverty and teachers are poorly paid. As teachers struggle to create a balance between pride of teaching and immediate life realities, they experience unresolved shifts of feeling between power and powerlessness. Perhaps this tension exists in many countries but for Bangladesh it is the grounded reality. So I believe that this project is useful because it provides opportunity to listen to the teachers who are at the centre of what happens in the classroom.

Exploring *place*

During my doctoral candidature I became part of a Research Lab that investigates creativity and change and that operates as a learning community. In collaboration with others I took the opportunity to investigate how research of education in Bangladesh might best be located in a

conceptual and epistemological framework that is relevant to Bangladeshi experiences and needs. Several publications and conference presentations¹ arose out this exploration. Here I briefly refer to some of the concepts that are most relevant to the development of this project. In the introduction to a book that collated the work of new and emergent Bangladeshi researchers we wrote:

Our theories of education and society and our plans for change do not exist in a contextual vacuum. They are shaped by geography, history and culture. While international perspectives are invaluable, they are ready to be applied to our practice when they have been filtered through our experience of living and working in the here and now (Greenwood, Everatt, Kabir & Alam., 2013, p.viii).

In seeking to identify aspects that differentiate localised experience from that of potentially homogenising universals, we later wrote:

Concepts of individualism and collectively attitudes to elders and to children, roles of women and men, religious and ethical restrictions and expectations are among the issues to be considered. Also important are the legacies of knowledge from local history and literature, and the explorations of ways to reference them. Arising out of these is the exploration of approaches to research that are culturally fitting, that utilize existing local knowledge and legacies and that call for strategic improvement in education rather than simply emphasise shortcomings (Greenwood, Alam & Kabir, 2014, p. 358).

In 2015 a small group of us published a joint account of how our individual research projects addressed a range of significant educational issues in Bangladesh. We acknowledged that knowledge is not a homogenous entity, and argued that:

¹ These include Greenwood, J., Everatt, J., Kabir, A. & Alam, S. (Eds.) (2013) *Research and Educational Change in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Dhaka University Press.

Greenwood, J., Alam, S., Salahuddin, A. & Rasheed, M. (2015) Learning communities and fair trade in doctorates and development: report of a collaborative project. *Globalisation, Societies and Education* (early access online)

Greenwood, J., Alam, S. & Kabir, A. (2014) Educational Change & International Trade in Teacher Development: achieving local goals within/despise a transnational context. *Journal of Studies in International Education* 18(4): 345-361.

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Greenwood, J., Lim, J., Alam, S., Salahuddin, A. Hasnat., A., Rahaman, M., Amin, Md., Kaur, H., Rana, R. and Tisi, S. (2015) *Learning Communities and the Doctoral Journey: Exploring Understandings of Place*. Budapest: ECER European Conference of Educational Research, 8-11 September.

The privileging of western constructs in research and education, it is contended, is a hegemony that continues processes of colonisation... Of immediate relevance to our project is awareness that while western scholarship may offer useful insights into issues that currently face education in Bangladesh, it is not sufficient to rely on western analyses nor is it necessarily useful to transport western criteria or values into Bangladeshi contexts. In the short term this speaks to the need for respectful partnerships, and in the longer term for development of Bangladeshi scholars who understand their own context and its complex cultural and intercultural values and who can deconstruct the power relationships implicit in western scholarship as well as use its benefits. It also speaks to need for awareness of the contextual limitations of the dominant epistemologies in existing research literature and awareness of different ways of understanding and inscribing the world (Greenwood, Alam, Salahuddin & Rasheed, 2015, p. 3)

So developing and describing a sense of place that acknowledges its histories and its living community has been a vital aspect of my work. I needed to not only use my own understanding and experience, but also talk to the people in my community, explore histories and popular discourses. I needed to place my own reading of the intentions of the national curriculum against the expectations and doubts of the teachers I worked with. So the sense of place that grounds my research is not only physical but also experiential and social. I explicitly describe how I understand this *place* in Chapter 4. However, I have also sought to capture it as background to our work throughout the account of the project.

Use of language

I describe the research process and outcomes with a borrowed language. However, I am aware of the need to communicate the verbal content and the emotional nuances of the encounters that occurred in different stages of the project, and to make these clear to readers who know little about Bangladesh. I also need to communicate with local readers. So I have had to make a range of language choices.

One of the problems is associated with referring to the country where I live. Today it is Bangladesh. Just over half a century ago it was India. In between it has been East Pakistan. But these are the constructions of successive colonisations and the carving up of geography by those in global power. Throughout it has been the land of the Bangla or Bengali people. One of the sadnesses of history is that now part of that Bengali land had been cut off and placed inside

India, as the result of a colonial way of accommodating religious differences at the expense of cultural identity. It is important for the reader to know that there is a continuing line of cultural history through these various namings. So Rabindranth, while labelled Indian, is Bengali and so is part of the continuing line of our cultural history. And many of the postcolonial scholars from India, like Spivak and Bharuccha, who I discuss in Chapter 3, share similar histories and concerns to those of Bangladesh. Therefor when I refer to India in this thesis it is not to our neighbouring country but to our land, as it was named in previous history. For the same reasons of history there has also been need for some juggling of the terms *Bangla* and *Bengali*.

Another problem arose with the term developing. I do not like to package Bangladesh into such terminology, as we have developed for many thousands of years. However, the fact remains that many successively colonised countries like Bangladesh have less economic strength and more seriously poor people than the countries that call themselves the *first world*. However, to avoid repeated long explanations I use this and similar other terms to refer to the fact that Bangladesh is economically marginalised but is resisting continuing marginalisation.

A third problem comes with the word *indigenous*. Because of the strength of indigenous scholarship in postcolonial settler countries like New Zealand and Canada, the word has acquired the connotation of *not –the-mainstream* as well as native. In Bangladesh the Bengali people are indigenous as well as people from several other tribal groups. It is their knowledge systems, not the people, which are outside the mainstream. So despite its other accumulated connotations, I use the word indigenous to refer to the culture, history and ways of knowing that are native to Bangladesh.

Chapter Overview

This thesis is organised into ten chapters.

In Chapter 2, I detail the methodology of the study. I explain how I understand participatory action research in terms of the goals of my project and how I use it both as a learning process and as a means of researching the learning that takes place. In this chapter I summarise the conceptual bases from which I work, outline the research design and align the processes of collating, analysing and presenting data and findings with the processes of action research.

In Chapter 3, I review the literature that is most relevant to the design of the study and to its outcomes. As indicated earlier, this review focuses on research and other writings about aspects of education in Bangladesh, the work of scholars who help define a sense of indigeneity, and on

academic theorisations of action research, reflective practice, communities of practice and situated learning.

I describe the place where this study is situated in Chapter 4. Initially I lead readers into the space through my eyes. Then I broaden the discussion to examine the context more fully, particularly the education system of Bangladesh, the intentions and initiatives for school improvement, the local community, the school, the students and the teachers.

In Chapter 5-9, I present the narrative of the project and reflect on its progress and on successive shifts in understanding, those of the group and my own. I also develop successive theorisations of what is happening within the project and how it is adapting existing models of participatory action research, learning communities and praxis.

In chapter 10, I reflect on the outcomes and suggest some implications for policy and practice.

In summation, this study offers an account of how the idealism of curriculum policy aspirations may be translated into and grounded in the evolving practice of a particular group of teachers. It records some successes and it also records areas where change seemed beyond our capacity. On the surface it may appear as if the issues explored here are relevant only to countries like Bangladesh, which are called *developing*. And indeed a Bangladeshi focus is the primary objective of my study. However, all countries and all communities have histories and concerns that can be considered as local and all are in some or other ways still developing. So the discoveries made in this study may well have relevance for research and teaching practice in other contexts.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter explains the methodological approach to the study. The study investigates the development and action of a learning community of teachers in a rural Bangladeshi school. The learning community evolved as a result of a participatory action research project that had the objectives of engaging the teachers in examining their existing individual and group practices, developing awareness of students' educational needs, and exploring changes in practice that might better meet those needs. As is explained in Chapter 5 this goal originated from my own understanding of the issues challenging rural education in Bangladesh and it was further negotiated with the head teacher and teachers when I entered the field. The guiding question was: How can a rural school in Bangladesh develop pedagogical approaches which can enable students to live and learn in their local context?

I chose action research because it directly combines research with action, thus allowing me and the teachers to initiate and critically reflect about change at the same time as we investigated problems. I used a participatory approach because it was fundamental to the purpose of the project for the teachers to own the investigation and the challenges that arose from it, and so it was important that they themselves were researchers as well as participants. In keeping with the self-reflective nature of participatory action research I added a layer of my own critical reflection about our progress and the process. How our understandings of our roles and the process as a whole evolved is one of the findings of the research and is reported incrementally in Chapters 5-9.

As Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) among others explain, *participatory action research* is not a rigidly fixed or mechanistic sequence but rather a broad structural and epistemological approach to collaborative investigation of and strategic change to practice. In this project, as I will further explain below, I conceptualise the teachers' engagement in investigating their own problems and practices in terms of the development of a learning community, a community of practice that develops better and new understandings of members' vision and practice through active and collaborative exploration and dialogue. I also layer my reporting of the group's collaborative exploratory process with my own examination of the progress and direction of the project, my evolving role within it, and with consideration of the ways the local Bangladeshi context might adapt the participatory action research process to its own needs.

The situated context of the project is important for the study as the community in which the school is located has its own history, economic constraints, social structures, values and

understandings of what is important in the world. Throughout the project, therefore, I have been aware that I am navigating between local perspectives and knowledge and imported scholarship, hoping to adapt an imported methodological approach and some imported concepts in ways that are relevant and useful locally.

In the sections that follow I further outline the research paradigms and theoretical concepts that inform my design, explain the data collection process and tools I used, and explain the data analysis and the manner of presentation.

Qualitative research, specific context, and participants' engagement

Because of its evolving and interpretive nature, my study is based on a qualitative framework. The choice was made because it allowed me to explore people's daily experiences and the complex implications of people's choices through a naturalistic, descriptive, and inductive inquiry process. Within that broad framework I chose participatory action research because it provided a means of identifying and investigating the specific problems and insights that people encounter within their own setting and of collaboratively developing practical strategies to overcome, or at least reduce, their problems and because it emphasises the development of participants' understandings through the research process.

Denzin & Lincoln (2003, p. 5) emphasise that qualitative researchers attempt "to make sense of or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them". Although qualitative researchers work in a diverse range of settings and use many different research techniques, there are certain common characteristics. Qualitative research is naturalistic in that the researcher collects data from natural settings. It is descriptive in that the data takes on a narrative form and helps provide a comprehensive understanding. It focuses on process to clarify "how people negotiate meaning" (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007, p. 6). It is inductive in the sense that it does not use data to test a hypothesis. An important concern is making sense of participants' lives.

Setting is important within an interpretive paradigm. In my research not only is the physical, economic and social context of the rural village important, so are the world views that shape the values, discourses and expectations of the community. For this reason Chapter 4 describes the context of the project in detail. Moreover, I believe it is important to describe and interpret the context, and the project that takes place within it, in terms that suit a Bangladeshi way of exploring and understanding the world.

As is discussed in Chapter 3 Rabindranath (1908) warns his countrymen against uncritical adaptation of European, and thus external, criteria of what is important and against imported ways of describing experiences and knowledge. If Bengali do so, he argues, they will neither succeed in really understanding European experience and perspectives, nor will they be able to describe their own experiences, values and ways of knowing the world. Rabindranath is asserting the importance of knowing the ground, the history, culture, values, language, social and environmental experiences that Bengali stand on, and working from that ground to understand the world. He does not necessarily reject or ignore European or other ways of knowing, but he asserts the need to carefully and strategically negotiate` the difference between Indian² ways and European ways.

Rabindranath gives importance to not borrowing wholesale from western experiences and discourses and grounding within the needs and perspectives of Bangladesh. However, it is also important to recognise that Bangladesh is not a homogenous entity, and that different interests within Bangladesh vary in the extent to which they adopt, or oppose western ideologies. With other authors (Greenwood, Alam, & Kabir, 2014), I explored a range of conceptual lenses that might be used to evaluate a particular project that sent Bangladeshi teachers overseas for their professional development. The lenses included monetarism, indigenous constructs of knowledge, capacity building and reciprocity, and the neo-liberal concepts of market fundamentalism, commoditisation and competition (Hayek, 1976; Buchanan, 1999; Harvey, 2006) that to a large extent govern the basis on which developing countries can enter the global community and so impact on thinking, policy and action within Bangladesh. There we affirmed the need to develop conceptual and epistemological frameworks that are relevant to the developing country, at the same time acknowledging that there was no ready-made prescription for doing so. My search for perspectives that are based on Bangladeshi experience and belief, but are willing to selectively adapt western ideas is thus tentative, but I offer it as a building block for others to develop further. On that basis I take Rabindranath's assertions as a foundation to work with.

Rabindranath's attitude has strong correspondence with what many indigenous researchers say about research and its impact on their people. Linda Smith (2005), for example, asserts the importance of indigenous perspectives in research.

Indigenous people are used to being studied by outsiders... More recently, however, indigenous researchers have been active in seeking ways to disrupt [this external gaze], in order to develop methodologies and approaches to research that privilege indigenous

² At the time of Radnindranth's writing, Bangladesh was part of larger Bengal, an integral part of India.

knowledges, voices, experiences, reflections, and analyses of their social, material, and spiritual conditions. (p.87)

Smith (2014) further asserts the importance of regarding research as a meeting between researcher and researched, occurring on the space controlled by the researched. She compares the encounter to a *powhiri*, a ritual that “recognises the humanity, the spirituality, the genealogy, the sacred power of the individual, and the group or community”. (p. 16)

Therefore, I drew on an epistemological framework that grounds investigation and discussion within Bangladeshi aspirations and needs, while acknowledging that these are not uniform or static. Such a framework privileges the experiences, perspectives and understandings of the participants (including me and what I bring to the encounter), while acknowledging the need to look beyond existing practices to develop strategic and useful new directions. This gave rise to a research approach that was situated in local place, and that built knowledge through the explorations of a community in which I and the members were accountable to each other and challenged each other.

Participatory action research, reflection, and development of a learning community

In coming to understand the participatory action research process and planning my own approach I explored a range of explanations of the process before I entered the field, as I detail in Chapter 3. As I worked in the field and reflected on the experiences I found the concepts and arguments developed by Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) most closely aligned with how I had adapted my approach to the local context. Therefore, I now draw primarily on their conceptualisations. Kemmis and McTaggart position participatory action research as a progressive and cyclic process of self-reflection leading to further action. They acknowledge that initial plans are quickly superseded as participants learn from experience. They argue that participatory action research is best viewed in collaborative terms and that it is in itself a learning process. They contend that “participatory action research offers an opportunity to create forums in which people can join one another as co-participants in the struggle to remake the communities in which they interact” (p. 563). They align this process to what Habermas (cited in Kemmis and McTaggart 2005) called ‘opening the communicative space’. They stress that participatory action research involves investigation of actual practices, not abstract or generalised ones: “It involves learning about the real, material and concrete, and particular practices of particular people in particular places” (p. 564). This emphasis on the specificity of people and place aligns with my intent to privilege Bangladeshi experiences and ways of seeing the world and to capture

the perspectives, fears, hopes and understandings of the teachers in the rural school. The emphasis on reflexivity and participation accords with my understanding of the need to engage the teachers as investigators of their own practice. I drew three key principles from Kemmis and McTaggart that I see as significant to serve the purpose of my study: respecting people's multiple perspectives and differing aspirations in the process of identifying educational issues in the school; ensuring active participation and collaboration of the co-researchers in the research process so that understanding of teaching and learning is deepened at both individual and collective levels; taking suitable action(s) on the basis of collective understanding, and reflecting on the actions.

The importance of reflection within the participatory action research process invites an alignment with constructs of reflective practice, as a research process and as a tool in teachers' professional development. Greenwood (2013) examines similarities and differences between reflective practice and participatory action research. In reflective practice a particular practitioner sets goals and employs strategies to achieve the goals. In participatory action research people collectively set goals or refine goals and work together for change. However, what is common in both is the aim of change, the opportunity to research one's own practice, the way that reflection and research and action blur with each other, and the sharing of insights gained so that they can be useful to other practitioners. Schön (1983) examines ways in which practitioners can both reflect-on-action and reflect-in-action. My research approach drew extensively on teachers' reflection-on-action in a series of debriefs that we held at successive stages of the project. By the end of the project as reported in chapters 9 & 10, teachers also reported on their reflection-in-action. However, I also noted that I was often reflecting-in-action as I made quick judgements about how to perform my role in the project. Russell (2005) highlights three elements of Schön's account of reflection-in action that he now uses as the basis of his work with pre-service teachers. He examines the ideas that:

- (1) A puzzling or surprising event during teaching might stimulate 'reframing, recognizing a new way of perceiving or thinking about practice;
- (2) the new perspective might stimulate a novel course of action;
- and (3) actually carrying out the novel action might provide evidence for deciding if the new perspective and associated ideas deserved to be included in future professional practice. (p. 200).

This sequence resonates strongly with my own process of reflection throughout the project, as is further detailed in Chapters 5-10.

Kemmis and McTaggart identify the opening of a *communicative space* as a primary goal of participatory action research. They argue that because the process of participatory action research is one of mutual inquiry, the creation of circumstances “in which people can search together collaboratively for more comprehensible, true, authentic and morally right and appropriate ways of understanding and acting in the world” (p. 578), is itself a tangible outcome, regardless of whether other planned outcomes are achieved. I see this concept of a communicative space as important in allowing me to ground my project in local experience and understandings. I also see it as the means by which a *community of practice* becomes a *learning community*.

Wenger (1998) explains a community of practice as a group of people who are engaged in a common domain and so have a common interest in its proceedings. Consequently they are involved in a common enterprise of practice and they share, unconsciously as well as consciously, a repertoire of common knowledge and understandings, at the same time as they may hold individual opinions and develop individual insights. In the case of my project the teachers within the school can be seen as a community of practice who each contributed to making the school function and who shared a range of common understandings of their community and of what was involved in teaching and how that led to learning.

Wenger (2000) warns that communities of practice should not be romanticised and that as well as learning they can also learn not to learn. He argues that they can “deepen their mutual commitment when they take on a learning agenda which pushes their practices further.” He suggests that activities towards this goal might include “exploring the knowledge domain, finding gaps in the community practice, and designing projects to close those gaps” (p. 232). Noble and Henderson (2008) explore how such learning agendas can be explored in a *learning circle* that enables teachers to come together and engage in critical reflection on their practice. How I see the transition from community of practice to learning community in my project is examined in Chapters 5-9. Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) discuss how *communicative action* can be fostered when participants use the communicative space they have created and “adopt a thoughtful but highly exploratory view of what to do, knowing that their practice can and will be ‘corrected’ in the light of what they learned from their careful observation of the processes and consequences of their action as it unfolds” (p. 580). They conceptualise the collaborative learning that occurs through participatory action research as exploratory action that “generates and conducts action in an exploratory manner, with actions themselves standing as practical hypotheses or speculations to be tested as their consequences emerge and unfold” (p. 581). The

collaborative learning that occurs is a further important outcome within my project and is examined throughout the chapters.

My role

As is described in Chapter 5, my own role within the research is a twofold one. I positioned myself within the research process as an active co-participant. At the same time I also endeavoured to periodically step outside the process in order to reflect on its direction and to consider how the model I had planned changed in the field as a result of the local context.

As a participant I initially intended to be a non-directive facilitator. But the teachers' preconceived notion about me as expert in science and math disrupted my non-directive role. I responded as I read the needs of the various situations that unfolded. My reflections on my shifts in role and on my evolving understanding of the contribution I could make in the project are described in Chapters 5-10. Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) reject the notion of neutrality on the part of the facilitator. They argue that "preoccupation with neutrality sustained the positivist myth of the researcher as detached secretary to the universe and focused attention on the social practices (and research practices) of 'the other'" (p.570). They also argue that it is unrealistic to expect that asymmetries in the balance of knowledge and power between the *facilitator* and the *facilitated* could disappear. Instead, they contend, "the facilitator *can* be a co-participant, but one with some special expertise that may be helpful to the group in its endeavours" (p. 594). Their construction aligns with what Smith (2014), as well as other indigenous researchers, advocates as positive research contributions: that researchers should offer their knowledge and experience as a *koha*, or gift, to be used by researched communities according to how those communities perceive their own needs. Kemmis and McTaggart see the *doubleness* of the role as existing in the critical tension that holds between the personal and collective self. Tracing how my understandings of my role developed and what I learned in the process is another of the outcomes that I report in successive chapters.

I entered the field prepared to see myself as both insider and outsider. I now position myself unreservedly as insider in as much as Bangladesh is my country and I am engaged, professionally, practically and emotionally in developing equitable and empowering education within Bangladesh. Moreover the village in which the project school is situated is my village and I have grown up immersed in its culture and relationships. However, I was prepared to see myself as outsider to the current experience and concerns of the teachers in the school, as I have been engaged in national projects and I have been studying in an overseas university. It became

quickly clear, however, that neither the teachers nor the head teacher saw me as any other than as one of them, despite their recognition that I had been able to gain some additional expertise that they tended to value. This was apparent in the term *bhai*, brother, that they attached to my name, and in the way the head teacher fully expected me to help develop the school so that it could build the capacity of the community. Because of the way they regarded me and my own passionate engagement in the well-being of my own community and country, I position myself as insider in this research. And it is as an insider that I interpret local concerns and needs and that I reflect on the process and implications of the project.

The following sections describe the details of research design.

Guiding question, component aspects and resulting broad design

While participatory action research projects are aimed towards a purpose, a fundamental feature of this approach is that the purpose evolves throughout the work. Moreover, as explained above, the reflections, decisions and shifts in understanding made during the process are as important as final outcomes. Therefore, as stated above, this project was conceptualised with a fairly open guiding question:

How can a rural school in Bangladesh develop pedagogical approaches which can enable students to live and learn in their local context?

Two component aspects were embedded within that initial guiding question. The first concerned my direct work with the teachers and could be summed up in questions that I framed in terms of collective effort:

How can we use a participatory research process to examine our existing practices and better understand the needs of our students?

How can we explore and initiate change to our practices?

What evolving changes occur in our understandings?

The second aspect concerned my quest in developing and facilitating the project and could be summed up in questions which I framed in personal terms:

How can I facilitate the development of a learning community among the teachers?

How can I utilise and adapt the concepts of participatory action research and learning communities to the context of rural Bangladesh?

What evolving changes occur in my understandings?

As the project developed, further questions emerged and these are discussed in the following chapters.

A generalised model of the progression of action research involves a spiral of self-reflection that involves planning a change, acting and observing the process and consequences of action, reflecting on those processes and consequences, re-planning, acting again and so on. This is represented in Figure 2.1.

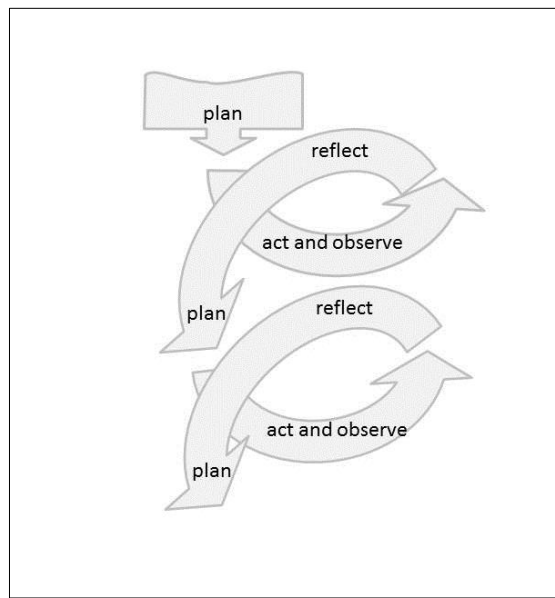


Fig 2.1: Generalised model of action research

It is generally acknowledged that an actual process will be more fluid. Cycles may overlap and there will probably be several nested cycles within particular stages. Moreover, especially in the embedded cycles, *action* may take many forms: it may be a decision, an exploratory dialogue, an intervention, a sequence of behaviour. As is explained below, my project followed a similar broad cycle, with four major stages. However, each stage consisted of multiple nested cycles that evolved as response to earlier action and reflection, and in each stage the two interconnected aspects of the research, the group process and my process as facilitator, operated. How these evolved and what reflections emerged is described in the following chapters.

The research setting

As a teacher I had some knowledge about the student population in the schools of a rural community in Bangladesh. I selected a rural secondary co-education school as a sole research setting in my own locality. I describe the school and its local and national context in detail in Chapter 4. In many ways this school is typical of most rural schools in Bangladesh, and so from one point of view, I could have chosen any school. However, because I wanted to ensure I was

responsive to the particularities of the local context and the people involved, I chose a school in the location I knew well and where I knew I would be welcomed to work. Moreover, because there is pressure from the government on these kinds of schools to increase the pass rate in the national examination, I wanted to choose a school that already has a strong emphasis on doing well in examinations but was also prepared to explore the more complex expectations of the curriculum and to actively examine the needs of its students. My initial meetings with the head teacher suggested that the school in my village community had these characteristics.

Stepping into the setting

The head teacher was the gate keeper with whom I had to negotiate to enter the school. First I talked with him from New Zealand over the telephone about my intention, and again when I arrived in Bangladesh. We agreed a date to meet in person at his home, and there we discussed my project. I gave the head teacher a clear idea of the extent of engagement I hoped for from him, the teachers and the students. He also expressed his expectation, which was to bring change in the school, particularly at the level of classroom teaching and learning. He told me that he had already talked with the teachers about my project and that every teacher wanted to work with me, and that they were considering me as an expert in science and math. I did not argue with the head teacher. Initially my plan had been to work with five or six teachers only. As I explain in more detail in Chapter 5 I decided to accommodate all the teachers in the research process, as I thought it better to work through their enthusiasm.

Participants

In my study all the teachers in the school became the primary group of participants, and co-researchers of their practice. Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) in examining the notion of *participation* in participatory action research, argue that inclusion should not be regarded as fixed. They affirm that, “in principle, all of those involved in and affected by the processes of research and action... have a right to speak and act in transforming things for the better” (p.579). However, they also acknowledge that “in reality, not all involved and affected people will participate”. They explain that “some may resist involvement, some might not be interested because their commitments are elsewhere, and some might not have the means to join and contribute to the project as it unfolds”. In this project all teachers asked to be involved. However, as the project progressed, some became less active. In part this was unavoidable as there were numerous school responsibilities that needed to be carried out and later the school

examinations needed to be supervised. At the time of the school examinations each of the cluster groups themselves decided who would participate in the next phase that included a three day workshop.

As the project developed I negotiated with the teachers about how we could bring the students' insights into our collective exploration so that we could better understand their educational needs. The detail of the negotiation is given in Chapter 7. We reached a consensus to actively involve the students in the next stage of the research process. While the students can be considered as investigators of their own learning needs, their opportunities for direct input into the project were confined to one particular meeting and to their input during class discussions. In terms of the project as a whole, I am not classifying them as co-researchers.

Before the start of the project I also talked with two School Management Committee members, two national educational project leaders, and two teacher educators. These conversations informed some of the understandings of the context that I report in Chapter 4. I value the views they shared as providing insights into the local context beyond those that are published in academic literature.

The following tables summarises the participants' names and roles.

	Pseudonym	General professional role	Gender	Age (appx.)
Participants for action research cycles	Shabbir	Head Teacher & Elected Chairman of Union Council	Male	45-50
	Shisupal	Assistant head Teacher and English Teacher	Male	45-50
	Rojen	Religious Studies (Islam) & Bangla Teacher	Male	40-45
	Shriti	Social Science & Bangla Teacher	Female	40-45
	Nuri	Social Science & Bangla Teacher	Female	35-40
	Nayan	Social Science and Math Teacher	Male	45-50
	Shanto	Chemistry and Math Teacher	Male	35-40
	Sodananda	Librarian & General Science Teacher	Male	30-35
Participants for trialling change	Nandan	Bangla, Physical Education, & Religious Studies (Hindu) Teacher	Male	40-45
	Aaron	English & Religious Studies (Hindu) Teacher	Male	40-45
	Arman	Physics and Math Teacher	Male	35-40
	Kusol	Biology & Bangla Teacher	Male	40-45
	Polash	Social Science, English, & Math Teacher	Male	35-40

Table 2.1: Teacher participants

	Pseudonym	Grade/Class	Girl/Boy	Age (appx.)
Student Participants for focus group discussion	Sufia	Grade-6	Girl	11-12
	Subir	Grade-6	Boy	
	Monir	Grade-6	Boy	
	Kajol	Grade-7	Girl	12-13
	Tamanna	Grade-7	Girl	
	Shofiq	Grade-7	Boy	
	Tapan	Grade-8	Boy	13-14
	Farhana	Grade-8	Girl	
	Farjana	Grade-8	Girl	
	Mahin	Grade-9	Boy	14-15
	Samanta	Grade-9	Girl	
	Nilima	Grade-9	Girl	
	Shirin	Grade-10	Girl	15-16
	Sayham	Grade-10	Boy	
	Morium	Grade-10	Girl	
Conversation while cycling to school	Tuhin	Grade-6	Girl	11-12

Table 2.2: Student participants

I did not name the students who I cited in the observations, but rather presented them as S1, S2, and so on. They did consent to participate in class observation during the project.

I too of course was a participant, as I have explained earlier.

Ethical issues

Permission was gained from the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee (ERHEC) of the University of Canterbury for conducting this study. In the first day of my field work I gained informed consent from the participants. This involved not only the formal processes covered by the information letter (explaining the project, negotiating the participants' rights to anonymity

and confidentiality, their choice of whether or not to participate and their right to withdraw, and explaining that I would use records of our work in writing my thesis and perhaps in other publications) and the consent form, but also careful explanation in Bangla of various aspects of the work and of the records we would make. In particular I gained consent to make video and audio recordings of as many aspects of the process as possible. Often the participants contributed to this process of recording through capturing portions of the process through their videos and by taking photographs. I gained their permission to use these as well.

The head teacher and teachers wanted me to directly identify their school, and they and the students involved gave permission to be visually identified in photos. Initially the teachers preferred me to use their own names. But when I considered the possibility that they might change profession or change their opinions over time, I thought they might possibly later feel uncomfortable about specifics of what they said. Moreover, some part of the discussion involved expressions of dissatisfaction about salary which I considered could possibly later be held against particular individuals. I, therefore, proposed we should use pseudonyms, and after further discussion they agreed. Since the photos identified them as participants but did not connect them directly to potentially contentious opinions they did not withdraw their consent to use the photos.

Another significant ethical issue was how I would deal with language and particularly with the process of translating from Bangla to English. I used some Bangla scholarly literature in developing the conceptual framework. I talked with the participants in Bangla and also analysed some policy documents written in Bangla. I was aware that I was ethically accountable for ensuring that I preserved the meaning and intention of the speakers and writers. Therefore, I sought to translate for meaning rather than word for word exactness. I checked samples of the translated material with other doctoral students from Bangladesh. They suggested minor amendments, and I remained aware of the principles they had highlighted in successive translations. I also returned sample portions of the translations to those participants who had working knowledge of English.

Another ethical issue arose when I handed the teacher participants the information letters I had prepared for the university Educational Research Human Ethics Committee. They were in English. Although I could readily translate them, the incident affirmed that I owed an ethical responsibility to communicate with participants in terms as well as language that was meaningful to them. This applied not only to formal documents but also to acknowledging the social, economic, conceptual, and educational differences between the university context and the local context in which the teachers and I would be working together.

Timeline of the project

The participatory action research project took place over six months, from 29th March 2013 to 16th October 2013. There was a summer vacation at the end of May. In June I took a two week break from the field after finishing the workshop and left the five teachers who participated in the workshop to each develop the action they had planned, and returned with the intention to listen to their experiences. Because of a sudden flood I ended up listening to only three teachers, and negotiated further action with the whole group. Two weeks later we again observed teaching to develop some points of reference for our discussion of the changes in practice that were occurring and exploration of further challenges. Further debriefs followed these observations. There was a further gap in time because of Ramadan, Eid, and Puja. Finally, in October we collaboratively evaluated the whole project, and wrapped up.

Collection of *data*: the processes of planning, acting and reflecting

As explained earlier, the successive processes through which the teachers examined their understandings of teaching and their practice and through which I examined my understanding of facilitating the project and my practice are as important as the changes that were made and the learning that occurred. Thus it is the movement of the research, the cycles of planning, acting and reflecting that constitute data in this research, as well as the dynamics of group discussions and the specific components of individuals' speech, actions, and recorded reflections.

While the components of planning, action and reflection are the central core of action research and represent its dominant rhythm, in practice they seldom occur with mechanical regularity. Accordingly, a first concern in collecting data was to capture what did actually take place. I looked for and recorded attitudes to participation, shifts in engagement, emerging understandings that came through reflection, and examples of classroom practice and deliberate decisions and actions. I sought to notice and capture the nature of interactions, aspirations, silences, contradictions, reactions, moment of joy and celebrations, teaching and learning process, surprising events and incidents, and interventions that worked and those did not work. Part of each of the following chapters reports the progression of the project and seeks to capture the content of discussions, individual concerns, and attitudinal and cultural nuances.

I used a number of strategies to collect these materials. Some are intrinsic to processes of participatory action research, such as group discussions, observations, debriefs, workshops and reflective journals. Others were specific tools we used to create a basis for our discussions such as the use of *photovoice* and the group reading of documents. I also used spontaneous

conversations and unstructured interviews as means to find a natural starting point for the project. Audio and video recordings, photographs and my field journal were used to record these processes and their resulting products. In addition many of the participants also took photographs and videos of portions of the work and they gave me some of these to use.

Below I further detail how I used these strategies in activating the formulaic cycles of action research.

Talk, conversations, and interviews

People in rural communities in Bangladesh are accustomed to talking as a means of establishing relationships, exploring common ground, and discussing issues. It is common to *sit with* someone with the objective of clarifying a matter, or to just *take tea and talk*. Thus sitting together in small or larger groups and talking was a fundamental process in our project. Fontana and Frey (1994) describe the value of unstructured interviews as a means of allowing research participants to express themselves, and to an extent our *talk* in small groups tended to parallel such an intention. Most of these conversations were spontaneous, even when I planned their direction in advance.

My conversations with the head teacher when I sought entry into the school were in the nature of a partially structured interview (with the structuring on his part as well as mine). It enabled me to get to know his vision about education, teaching and learning and his expectations from the project, and I later utilised the information that I had got from him in setting the initial goals for the project and finding a space to begin talking with the teachers. I also had a partial plan for the conversations I held with individual teachers in a later stage of the project to discuss how they regarded the outcomes of their shifts in their classroom practice. At other times, conversations were more spontaneous such as the discussion of Rana Plaza reported in Chapter 5, my conversation with a SMC member reported in Chapter 4, and my conversation while cycling with Tuhin, reported in Chapter 7. Prior to starting the project in the school, I utilised a more structured approach in talking with project leaders and teacher educators.

Group discussion

Group discussions were the main vehicle throughout the project through which we shared ideas, identified the actions we would take, reflected on actions taken, made further plans, and generally processed information. *What* we discussed was interwoven with *how* we discussed and both aspects have been used to construct the narratives that are told in the following chapters.

Observations & debriefs

Early in the project we collectively decided to observe lessons and debrief afterwards. The negotiation leading to that decision is reported in Chapter 5. The decision by the teachers to open their classroom doors to each other was a courageous one and a mark of the extent to which they were prepared to engage with the project. What was even more courageous was the ways they were prepared to allow critical discussion by others of what they had done and to join in that discussion. In the observations and debrief the attitudinal and emotional aspects of our collaborative inquiry into practice became apparent. Sometimes the emotional factors were overtly expressed in participants' words; sometimes I recorded my observation of them in my field journal, and sometimes I recognised them from silences or vocal tones as I transcribed dialogues.

Initially the main purpose of our collective observations of teaching practice was to develop a shared basis from which we could examine and discuss what was actually happening in classrooms and how the teachers understood their teaching. As is reported in Chapters 5 and 6, the teachers initially viewed these observations and subsequent debrief as opportunities to elicit and to give directive professional advice. One of the matters I report through successive chapters is how they incrementally used their reflections to *understand* their practice rather than aligning it with some kind of conceptual template. As our observations continued we began to be more focused in looking for contradictions between students' apparent attentiveness and their understanding of the lessons, moments that sparked our curiosity or discomfort and provocative points of reference. In the debrief we sought to reflect on and make meaning from what we observed. We particularly focused on the kind of relationship teachers had with their students and the nature of students' participation and engagement as means to understand what was happening in teachers' practice and as a basis for exploring possible future shifts and changes.

Photovoice and photographs

Photographs were used both as a deliberate meaning-making strategy and as a spontaneous way of recording moments in the projects.

The deliberate use drew on the concept of *photovoice* (Wang & Burns, 1997; Baker & Wang 2006; Castleton, Garvin & Huu-ay-aht, 2008), a participatory research method that uses participant-employed photography and dialogue to help people record and reflect their interests and concerns and to promote critical dialogue through discussion of the photographs. In this project teachers were given cameras to capture photographs during observations. Afterwards they were asked to select the photographs they considered most important and to write

reflections in terms of what they perceived was happening. Similarly a few days after the discussion between teachers and students, students were invited to take photographs of what interested them in the school and to write commentaries. The photographs and written reflections were again used as points of reference in debriefs and workshops.

I and several of the teachers also took photographs at various stages of the project. I drew on some of these in describing the context of the school in Chapter 4, and as a further basis for reflection after the project ended.

Teacher workshop

In the third phase of the project we were able to arrange a three day workshop while the school examinations were taking place. As has been explained earlier, the teachers themselves had decided who would participate in the workshop and who would supervise the examinations. However, the workshop participants finally reported back to the whole group in a discussion. The workshop focused on exploring what *quality education* meant to us, in grounded terms of this school and this community and in terms of some achievable indicators. Then we planned for specific changes in classroom interaction. During the workshop we sometimes worked in a single group and sometimes in two separate groups. The teachers, by rotation, took responsibility to write down questions and significant points that emerged in the discussion, and to summarise the understanding that they agreed they shared. The workshop is reported in Chapter 8

Research journals

At the beginning of the project I gave each teacher a notebook to use as a research journal, and requested them to write anything they felt was important for the project. Most of the teachers utilised the notebook to record information and quick reflections during observation. They mainly recorded the points that were related to functional aspects of teaching and learning. Later, during the debriefs, in group discussions, and in workshops they referred to their notes to support their arguments and reflections. However they all reported that they could not manage to find time to write anything more in their journals. The few overarching reflections that were written tended to be brief, although not without insight. For example, one teacher showed me that he has written “quality education and sustainable development is not a matter that can happen once or that we can do in one day”. There was indeed pressure on their time, but I also became aware that they had a preference for talking rather than writing and so our discussions took precedence over written reflections.

Throughout the research process I utilised my own research journal to record how the project was initiated and how participation, engagement and the research process evolved. Initially, I recorded events as they unfolded. As time went on I also focused on my and others' reactions, incidents that were provocative and surprising, acknowledging my fears, and reflecting on insights I gained. One such example was my response to Nuri's teaching about government. I report the episode, my reflections and the use I made of them in subsequent discussion in Chapter 5. As my own understandings grew as a result of sharing my reflections with the teachers and observing their reactions, I utilised the journal to record key ideas about my and the teachers' fears, vulnerability, and shifts of awareness.

I also maintained a process of writing my journal at the end of each day to consolidate my notes and to reflect analytically on what I considered had been significant. One example of such a reflection is the episode of my cycling conversation with Tuhin, which I report in Chapter 7.

Meeting with the students

The teachers' arranged meeting with students, that is reported in Chapter 7, was an important episode within the project. It can be regarded as an outcome in its own right. However it was also an important source of material that showed how teachers and students were examining their understandings of what teaching meant and what was involved in learning. And it became a continuing point of reference in later stages of the project. Why it was a significant outcome and what was explored in it is detailed in Chapter 7. How it was used in the following stages of the project is detailed in Chapters 8 - 9.

Collaborative reading of the curriculum document

At several stages of the project we read small selected portions of the Bangladesh secondary school curriculum. The first reading involved several pages where various approaches to teaching and learning were described. It quickly became clear that these were new and challenging for the teachers. This reading became a provocative intervention that promoted discussion about the traditions of teaching that the members of the group were accustomed to and allowed exploration of what could change and what might happen if it changed. In one of these discussions the metaphor of *akshi* arose. The metaphor and its implications for our research as explained in more detail in Chapter 6. Here I just want to briefly note that an *akshi* is a tool for reaching fruit on high branches and that it became one of the significant metaphors for our search for tools to make teaching more effective.

In the three day workshop we read two other pages from the curriculum that explained constructivist learning theory and inquiry based learning. At one level, familiarisation with

concepts in the curriculum statements was another small outcome of the project. However, it was also instrumental in generating discussion about how the understandings that had developed through the workshop related to the statement of constructivist learning theory that was written in the curriculum, and thus was a further source of critical reflection and new individual and collective understandings of practice. In addition, the teachers' initial bewilderment with the theoretical statements promoted a new exploration of the importance of questions, and shared observation of how we as adults asked questions made us more aware of the potential role of questions in the classroom. Detailed report of the discussion and shifts in understanding is given in Chapter 8.

Analysis and interpretation of *data*: the processes of reflecting and further planning

Within the process of the project

Many qualitative researchers (for example, Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Bishop & Glynn 1999; Skate, 2003) maintain that analysis begins concurrently with information gathering. In approaches that are collaborative, information gathering and interpretive analysis are often collapsed in the co-operative process of constructing accounts of practice. This is particularly so in participatory action research which, in the words of Kemmis and McTaggart, "is directed towards collaboratively studying, reframing and reconstructing social practices" (p. 563). Each of these elements involves concurrent processes of collecting information, critically reflecting on it, analysing its implications and interpreting its usefulness. So a defined separation of analysis from data collection would be artificial. However, as well as noting the way analysis is embedded in each stage of the project, it is also useful to highlight the times and the processes through which deliberate reflection and interpretative analysis took place.

Analysis and interpretation took place from the very start of the project as I and the teachers sought to define our role and responsibilities in the project and identify an initial first action with which to begin. At this stage the teachers only shared their thoughts in relatively formal discussions but it was evident from comments that are reported in Chapter 5 that they were sifting through information (verbal and enacted) and analysing it for what they perceived as its relevance to their own needs. My initial analytic reflections concerned how to ground my preconceived understandings of the participatory action research process in an actual context of work. As I assessed the field and reflectively navigated between my discussions with the head teachers and my subsequent discussions with the teachers, I crystallised the new insights and understandings I was gaining and decided on what I saw was a necessary first action. I

sacrificed my previous planning and instead actively looked for a starting point that would align with the varying expectations of the teachers as well as with the overall planned purpose.

The gradual building of a shared communicative space may be seen as another illustration of how collation of information, ideas, and disagreements, interpretive analysis and exploratory action combined. Our reactions to each other and to the processes were part of on-going analysis and interpretation during field work. These led us to engage with how to align the emerging and shifting understandings with practice. It also prompted me to regularly reconsider and re-orientate my role in facilitating continuing re-examination of provocative issues in teaching and learning. In these ways analysis and interpretation occurred as a cumulative process of collective and individual reflection and action throughout the project.

At specific points in the project we sat together to deliberately analyse aspects of our understandings, our perceptions of the process or our discoveries and learnings. These are described in the following chapters. At the end of the project we sat together and analysed the overall outcome of the project in terms of how it affected teachers' practice and students' learning.

Throughout this period the analytic lenses we used were those that arose out of participants' evolving understandings of their professional role, their purpose in teaching, their awareness of the needs and capabilities of their students, the opportunities and limitations in their local context and the expectations of the national education system.

After the project

After I returned from the field my own analysis and interpretation of what had occurred took place in several stages. First I worked with the records I had taken of the project. I manually transcribed and translated key parts of the discussions, conversations and recorded observations of lessons, focusing on the themes that I began to see emerging. As I translated I frequently phoned the teachers to check ideas that arose from the transcriptions to ensure I was expressing their meaning clearly. Then, as I translated, I briefly analysed the ideas that were emerging from the dialogues to establish links between observed lessons, debriefs, discussions, photovoices and my field reflections. I shaped these and an account of the process of the project into a series of narratives, aligning with each major movement in the course of the project. Then I carefully re-read the narratives, marking some questions that arose in each episode and refining my understandings. One such question was: *is teaching a profession of pride or just a job of technical competency?* In this re-reading I developed a further layer of reflections. These arose from being able to look back at the work in its entirety and complexity, and from navigating

between what were in the narratives and what various works in local and international literature said about participatory action research, learning communities, and teaching and learning. The reading of literature helped me to strategically step outside the immediacy of the shifting awarenesses and understandings of the teachers and explore further theorisations.

Further analysis through sharing

Another stage of analysis and interpretation came through participation in lab meetings and presenting in conferences. I belong to the Research Lab for Creativity and Change at the University of Canterbury. The lab operates as a doctoral learning community (Greenwood et al, 2015; Greenwood et al, 2014). I presented parts of my fieldwork in the lab meetings and had feedback from the other students. The discussions helped me to ‘think otherwise’ (Noble, 2007) about my analysis and the directions of my reflections. For example, I presented a draft chapter to the lab on pride of teaching. Then I sat in the *hot seat* and was challenged by some doctoral students from my home country and some others. One of the questions that forced me to think further was: *what factors lead to a community of practice becoming a learning community?* My immediate reaction to the challenges was not pleasant, but later it became very meaningful. I not only refined my emerging understandings of pride of teaching and learning communities, but I also gained experiential insight into how the challenges in the project must have affected the teachers.

I also presented papers developed from my fieldwork in ECER conferences in 2013 and 2014. I utilised the feedback and written comments of the reviewers as a reflective tool to reframe some of my analysis and interpretation. For example in the ECER 2013 conference, after my presentation, the chair of the session asked me to think about how I negotiated my role as a researcher and as an interventionist during my field work. The question heightened my awareness about my role and its shifts at each stage of the project. Prior to the 2014 ECER conference I received reviewers’ written feedback on my draft paper. Three of the following comments were significant for my reflection:

The relation of teacher’s pride and emotional setting of the students within the learning community is not adequately explicated. If I understand it right, the teacher becomes a part of the learning community. What does it mean for the project?

I would expect more information with respect to the qualities of a learning community.

Certainly the reference to Paulo Freire makes sense for a Bangladesh rural secondary school, but what is missing is a description of the political, economic, and

societal/cultural situation of the school, the teachers and the students. I would expect more information concerning the emancipatory potential of the project.

The first two comments guided me to think deeply about the risk and emotional challenges that were involved in the discussion between teachers and the students, and to carefully consider what I meant by a learning community. The third comment provoked a complicated reaction. I did indeed try to understand and to explain the complexity of the context in terms of local, national, and global forces, and this is addressed in various ways within this thesis. However, although I played with theorisations about the emancipatory potential of the project in Freirian terms, I later decided this would not be my primary conceptual base as it did not emerge from the project itself or from rural Bangladeshi context and because, as I discuss in Chapter 3, I turned to a range of ways to examine the emancipatory element in the project. However, the feedback challenged me to carefully consider the connections.

To a large extent the process of analysis and interpretation that I have explained above involved successive drafts of writing. The integral role potentially played by writing in the sorting of ideas and in the researcher's own learning is widely recognised (for instance Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul, 1997; Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005). As I developed successive drafts of the narratives in the thesis to get feedback from my supervisors and from colleagues in my lab and at conferences, I gained clearer understandings of what had been achieved through the learning community and how the participatory action research process had actually operated within my project.

Decisions in presentation of the research: my final cycle of action in the project

Within the project my actions and reflections had a twofold aspect. I was a participant within the learning community. I was also the facilitator of the project. Both these aspects, and the relationship between them, are discussed throughout the following chapters. However, when the project finished and I returned from the field, I was also the doctoral student seeking to explain not only what happened in the project but also the meaning of what happened. In this way I had a final cycle of reflection and action to complete, which was to present the project to the reader.

This section identifies and explains some of the choices I made in deciding the format of presentation.

The most important choice was to present the project and its outcomes as a sequential narrative. I made this choice because I have studied how a learning community evolved and so it is important to show how teachers made sense of the activities in the project and how

understandings evolved through the process as well as what shape those understandings took at the time I left the field.

I also decided to report large sections of teachers' direct dialogues as they examined their own practices and reached out to understand their students' needs. These show the hesitations, the resistances, the emotional reactions, the tentative articulation of new ideas, the acceptances and rejections of others' ideas as well as the commitments and the actions that were finally agreed upon. In reporting their dialogues I sought to retain as much of the flavour of their speech as I could, even across the medium of translation. I tried to reflect the habits of formality and kindly courtesy as well as the passionate exclamations that occurred when teachers were deeply moved or strongly disagreed. Where I thought it would help readers understand the feel of Bangladeshi thinking I sometimes retained Bangla words or expressions and even occasionally used phrases from *Banglish*, the form of English that is used colloquially in Bangladesh. I also report some portions of Bangla poetry and proverbs that I used to facilitate discussion and to prompt my own analysis. I provide my own translation of these, and have also provided a glossary. In some cases I also used footnotes to explain the meaning of local colloquialisms for readers.

Because I chose to present the teachers' dialogues and their discussion with the students as flowing narratives, I do not cite dates after each utterance. I provide two appendices that detail the source, time, and context of the talks, discussions and interviews that I have reported.

Inevitably some selection of episodes had to be made. I made this selection on the basis of the overarching narrative that I saw emerging from the project and that I describe in Chapters 5 -9. As will be seen in these chapters I chose a range of episodes that captured moments of hesitation, decision, shifts in thinking, break-throughs and seeming failures. Each of these choices is further explicated in the relevant chapters.

I faced a challenge in deciding how to report episodes. Initially I introduced each episode by framing it behind a summative comment, Then I realised this presented the narrative as a kind of proof of my summation. So I decided to present the narrative first. Then I could draw meaning from the narrative. This change was significant because it helped me to ground any theorisations of practice in terms of what was happening.

I wove in my voice, in the form of my reflections throughout each chapter. And I have ended each chapter with a retrospective reflection on the ideas that emerged, the shifts in my understanding, and the ways that the learning community and the participatory action research approach evolved in the context.

As I write this thesis I am aware that I was writing to communicate with international as well as local readers. The project unfolded in Bangladesh and most of the dialogues took place in Bangla. I find that as I reflect on the project I also think in Bangla. I have consciously struggled to transport the physical and emotional sense of the encounter into English and to make it accessible to readers who do not know Bangladesh. I regularly wrestle in finding words that will fully and directly communicate the thoughts that were expressed in Bangla and to convey the meaning of Bangla conceptual understandings. In some cases I found it impossible to find a simple term that could express my Bangla idea. After feedback from my colleagues I have sometimes reluctantly sacrificed a term I had thoughtfully created and instead sought to give a more roundabout explanation. Throughout I have sought and received help with editing my language, but I have also tried to retain the Bangladeshi nature of my thinking. The chapters that follow show the extent and the limit to which I have achieved this goal.

Chapter 3: Review of literature

A first cycle in action research involves exploration of what knowledge is already available and may be used to inform the first plan of action. Chapter 4 relates what is distinctive about the local context of the project: the interactions between people, the geographical, social and economic features of the rural region, the influence of national policies, aspirations and practices. This chapter explores relevant literature.

A number of separate but intersecting fields contribute to the conceptual framework for this study. The first relates to the national context of my study and involves research about education in Bangladesh. The second relates to my purpose of grounding the study within its experiential and local context and involves theorisations and examples of indigenous approaches to knowledge, and of the impact of colonisations. The third relates to my investigative approach and involves literature that discusses action research, reflective practice, communities of practice, learning communities, and the concept of situated learning.

Education in Bangladesh

Education is considered a high priority in Bangladesh (Bangladesh Ministry of Education, 2010) and is seen as a tool for national development so that “citizens can be groomed to become leaders in pro-people development programs and progress of the society”(p.8) and as a means of competing globally since it is seen that “it is only education that can equip the nation to acquire the qualities and skills that will strengthen Bangladesh to work with equal capacity and pace of the global community”(p.8) as well as a means of developing individual and communally shared awarenesses and values, as it is perceived that education can help the students to “become rational and intellectually accomplished human beings with ethical perceptions” (p.8).

A policy paper, *Bangladesh vision 2021*, published by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (2007) considers the year 2021 when Bangladesh will celebrate its fifty years of independence. According to the paper public feedback in Bangladesh suggests eight goals and some concrete measures to achieve by the year 2021. In the paper it is hoped that by 2021 Bangladesh will be able to transform itself into a proud nation by addressing the aspirations of economically inclusive and politically accountable society that emerged through the glorious war of independence. The *nagorik* committee, an established forum of professional people, outlined the following educational goals for Bangladesh in the policy paper.

A creative system of education must be in place to develop the minds that will create knowledge, reinvigorate our economy, make further improvements in our schools, revitalise our communities and value system, help our industry develop new products, make business operations run more profitably, restructure government agencies to become more effective and less encumbered, and replace old, ineffective methods and systems with new, more workable ones. Children from both urban and rural areas will have to have access to such a system. (Centre for Policy Dialogue, 2007, p. 27).

The educational goals developed by the *nagorik* committee are also reflected in the official documents planning for Vision 2021 (Bangladesh Planning Commission, 2010). Of particular interest to this project is the statement in the educational goals that suggests our students need to achieve analytic and creative thinking abilities. This suggests a special kind of teaching approach is needed to be in place. The policy paper suggests that “Special emphasis will be given to teaching methods that sharpen these qualities in our students at all levels.” Ahmed (2009), in a reflective article on the education policy, identified the educational goals as “normative” and asks the government to select priorities and develop an achievable operational plan that considers adequate resourcing, incremental adjustments to the plan and that responds to the contextual conditions. Such operational plans have yet to be developed.

However, published research shows a range of enduring problems, including a dominance of top-down and examination-focused teaching (Podder, 2013, Rasheed, 2013), reliance on afterschool coaching (Alam, 2013), gaps in teacher’s content knowledge (Rahman, 2013), uncertainty in how to develop subject-specific literacies (Sarkar, 2013; Chowdury 2013), lack of strategies for community interaction (Salahuddin, 2013) and for recognising differences in language and cultural values (Khan, Rahman, Hornby, Sutherland, Everatt, & Greenwood, 2013).

The UNESCO report (2011) highlights shortcomings in the examination system, particularly noting that examinations “do not adequately attempt to measure the wide range of learning outcomes” and that “the topics included and the distribution of marks do not correspond to the course objectives or expected learning outcomes”. It further states that the examinations “mostly test knowledge and ability to recall facts and information” and that “hardly any attention is given to the higher abilities of reasoning, understanding application, analysis and synthesis.”

CREC, the national analytic review team in Bangladesh has conducted research to analyse different aspects of access to education to identify what is known about key impediments including poverty, gender bias, and other forms of disadvantage and to generate conclusions which prioritise key issues and frame research activity for further exploration (Ahmed, Ahmed,

Khan, & Ahmed, 2007). The research was based entirely on secondary sources: published and unpublished research reports, government documents, databases and other statistical information. One of the key findings of the study suggests that what the authors label as “silent exclusion from engagement in learning” (p. xiv) is as serious a concern as open exclusion, and the fact is that this phenomenon has drawn little previous attention in research. They argue that this means that the students who get enrolled nominally finish schooling but without being engaged in learning. This suggests an absence of adequate learning opportunities and dysfunctional pedagogy that affect students’ learning outcomes. These findings challenge claims of meaningful access to education. The concern of meaningful access to schooling and learning is also addressed by Ahmed (2009).

Ilon (2000) questions the relevance of the British colonial model of Bangladesh secondary education in the global age. He shows how economic distortions are caused by the process and practices of secondary education in Bangladesh. The central focus of secondary and higher secondary schooling on public exams creates what he calls a “de facto relevancy” of curriculum, pedagogy, and structure because of the way students need that content to maximise their “chances of passing the exams and moving up the educational ladder” (p.95). In such a context teaching in another way means putting the students in a vulnerable situation in terms of ensuring a chance at what he calls “the education/income lottery payoff” (p.95). The “education/income lottery payoff” also created demand for an informal system of private tuition which undermines the major goal of public funding of education: that is, meaningful educational access and equal opportunities. By comparing costs of different kinds of secondary schooling and of private tuition, Ilon shows that the current processes of education contribute toward increased economic inequalities. Therefore, some of the teachers may reserve their energies for high income earning private tuition and surrender the delivery of high quality classroom teaching. Thus educational achievements get trapped in the high value of private tuition and the poor are forced to “spend considerably more of scarce family resource to fund participation in this lottery” (p.98). Ilon argues that it is very unlikely that the poor get effective return for their energy and investment in such a system of education. Finally he suggests improving access and quality by utilising the public and private educational expenditures to focus on equity. Rahman, Hamzah, Meerah, and Rahman (2010) also analyse the historical evolution of Bangladesh secondary education and argue to retain the positive gains in access, reduction of gender inequality, increased enrolment for girls, and revision of curriculum by focusing on the resources and training that would enhance quality learning at school level.

Criticism of teachers' didactic and interactional styles

My earlier research (Alam, 2011) explored the centrality of the transmission model, inside and outside of school, which values notions of student achievement in terms of memorisation and doing well in exams. The study argued the notable absence of students' engagement in teaching and learning practices, and that the demographic, economic, social, and political goals of education, as stated in policy, are not well reflected in Bangladesh secondary school classrooms' teaching and learning practices. The study argued that it is unlikely that current teaching practices will enable Bangladeshi students to either contribute to global economic competitiveness or build national solidarity and critical consciousness.

The cause of these problems could be partly identified through the research of Salahuddin (2012), exploring the leadership challenges in four Bangladeshi secondary schools. His findings indicate evidence of a colonial legacy in administrative processes, lack of professional knowledge in leadership, teaching and learning, and lack of resources (physical and manpower). The leadership role in these four schools is largely focused on achieving good results in the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination. The schools' head teachers give little consideration to leadership as distribution of responsibilities among the teachers. In Salahuddin's study many of the school leaders fail to see themselves as leaders of learning. However, his research opens up opportunities to introduce dialogue on the greater concerns of pedagogy and inclusion and, as a whole, the greater concerns of school curriculum in operation. While Salahuddin (2012) advocates the need to bring change into our present attitudes of leadership, my earlier research (Alam, 2013) argues the need to develop students' curiosity and engagement in learning and contends that when teachers teach only what they know and what they believe to be important there is risk that we undermine the students' voices and limit their opportunity to become agents of their learning.

Criticisms of English language teaching strategies and outcomes

Since 1997 there is a national commitment to develop communicative competence in English as a way to strengthen the national economy and development (Bangladesh NCTB, 2012 & 2003). While the commitment is not questioned in current Bangladeshi research, problems are identified. The government of Bangladesh has introduced English as a compulsory subject from grade one to twelve. In some cases it is also compulsory in some disciplines at tertiary level. The notable absence of using English successfully in national exams and in practical life (Bangladesh NCTB, 2003) provided the rationale to introduce a communicative approach to teach English in

secondary schools. This was a curricular intervention jointly undertaken by the British Department for International Development (DFID) and government of Bangladesh. Through this intervention the English text books for grade 9, 10, 11 & 12 were changed and the English language teaching improvement project (ELTIP) was launched (Hamid & Baldauf, 2008).

The key purpose of the project was to change the English teachers' orientation from grammar-translation method of teaching to a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach (Paul, 2004, Hamid, 2005, & Rahman 2007) through 13-day professional development training. However, although the introduction of CLT signalled a new policy direction, the socioeconomic, material and pedagogical conditions of schools remained the same. Later in 2005 the unfinished training activities of ELTIP were taken up by the TQI project. Reading these report I reflect on the extent to which this intervention impacts the English learning outcomes in rural schools. I return to this theme later in the thesis. However, the desire behind the CLT intervention was that it would improve the standard of English teaching and enhance the English learning outcomes. Around a decade after this intervention Hamid & Baldauf (2008) explore the extent to which CLT played in developing learners' competence in English in secondary schools in Bangladesh. They argue that "ELT policies, which are translated into action through public investment in education, do not substantially represent the complex dynamics that mediate students' English proficiency achievement in rural Bangladesh" (p.17). Rasheed (2013) and Choudhury (2010) explore the rural teachers' perspectives towards the effectiveness of CLT for their teaching context and have similar findings. By drawing on three English teacher educators' perceptions Mazumder (2013) argues that the problem lies in the way CLT is implemented. He finds that teacher educators acknowledge "the disconnection between secondary teacher education and realities of practice in secondary schools" (p.99). Hamid, Sussex, and Khan (2009) explore a different dimension of the complexity of learning English in a disadvantaged rural context in Bangladesh:

Pedagogically, the learning of English in Bangladesh is shown to have a complex relationship with PT-E³ because of the demonstrably unsuccessful performance of the school system on the one hand, and the virtual absence of appropriate self-study resources on the other (p.304).

In less affluent areas the complexity creates serious pressure on school curricula, family resources, parents and learners. A more serious concern explored by Chowdhury and Le Ha (2008) is the cultural incompatibility of CLT and the conflict of values. They argue that "the

³ Private tutoring in English

issue of respect between teacher and student is another source of conflict in implementing CLT. In Bangladesh, hierarchy determines the nature of teacher-student interactions which are facilitated by mutual respect” (p.309). They also assert that cultural constraints “inhibit the communicative competence of students and limit the choices they could make outside the classroom” (p. 309).

These studies highlight significant problems in adapting and interpreting ELT in diverse classroom settings. Podder (2013) explores how the national confusion and flaws in policy dictated the classroom practices and negatively impacted the desired outcomes for listening and speaking. Moreover he points out the national examinations only assess reading and writing. This leads both teachers and students to reduce the focus of English learning to only reading and writing. The other two skills (listening and speaking) remain untouched in classroom activities. Though in 2010 a new assessment policy was introduced and marks were to be distributed for all four skills, practice remains unchanged.

Imam (2005), Rasheed (2012) and Shamsuzzaman (in press) extend the criticism of CLT approach to a discussion of its failure in achieving critical intelligence. Imam (2005) argues that there is a serious need to decide the extent to which English language is needed for national development and consider a more strategic orientation towards English teaching and learning. Rasheed (2012) critically examines the implicit social aspirations in learning English language. He draws on his personal experience to question the degree to which learning English allows entry into global citizenship. He urges change in policy in order to bring critical perspectives to the teaching of English and introduction of critical thinking into the processes of teaching and learning so that the students gain the aptitudes to become global citizens while still retaining awareness of their own context. Shamsuzzaman, Everatt, & McNeill (2014) and Shamsuzzaman (2014) explore the emergence of ELT in Bangladesh against the paradoxical position of English in the Indian subcontinent. They situate the teaching of composition in some conflicting undercurrents of English studies in Bangladesh. This is well known that in Bangladesh the dominant paradigm of English has evolved through the study of Western literature for more than hundreds of years. In a recent work Shamsuzzaman (in press) argues that the trajectory of composition studies in Bangladesh is critically influenced by literary works and disadvantages the teaching of composition. He maintains that the idealistic edifice of literary works ignores the students’ need of reading critically and writing convincingly.

Criticism of lack of development of science literacy

Sarkar (2013) explores Bangladeshi science teachers' perspectives of promoting the concept of scientific literacy as a curricular goal. In the study most of the participant teachers recognised the notion of scientific literacy as a primary purpose of school science education and as way of utilising science education in everyday life. He found that most of the teachers in the study hold utilitarian perspectives of science learning. Some teachers also understand scientific literacy as a way to build a solid knowledge base for future study in science. A few teachers perceive scientific literacy as "the ability to communicate" (p.146). Sarkar identifies some of the perspectives as naïve and argues that they may constrain the opportunities of exploring scientific knowledge in the classroom. He also mentions the tension that some teachers "encounter between their religious values and science values while they were teaching science in a culture with a religious tradition" (p.135). He argues that it is very unlikely teachers' conflicting ideas would help students to generate scientific knowledge. Moreover, he asserts that the transmission mode of teaching and learning practices in science classes does not allow the students to engage in scientific activities. Regarding this challenge, Rahman (2013) took a collaborative approach in engaging fourteen science teachers in professional learning through observing, sharing and critiquing each other's practice. He utilised an intervention which involved a constructivist teaching approach. Rahman argues that "the intervention process guided participant teachers to develop the capacity for building shared leadership through sharing their practices" (p.153). He also asserts that the intervention helped the teachers to leave aside didactic teaching perceptions and develop a culture of professional practice by knowing each other's content and pedagogical knowledge. He claims, without giving more detail, that these occurred within a learning community.

Studies of teacher collaboration

Thornton (2006) explores the extent to which secondary school teachers in Bangladesh perceive the role of collaboration with each other in improving teaching practice and identifies the potential of collaboration in improving teaching and learning in classrooms. The exploration was part of a wider study (Thornton, 2004) of four urban and four rural Bangladeshi secondary schools. She utilised questionnaire, classroom observation, interviews, and focus group discussions "to develop a picture of the way in which the teachers were supervised and supported in their work in eight core secondary schools" (p.185). The participant teachers in the study stated that "we occasionally ask each other for advice, but we do not really sit down and discuss

issues, neither do we watch each other's classes" (p.198). This suggests that the teachers sometimes ask for help from one another to resolve specific subject content problems, but they seldom discuss the possibilities of different teaching approaches that could tackle the varying learning challenges of students. The teachers suggested the reason for absence of reflection on practice was a mismatch between official curriculum and the contextual needs of teachers and students. Thornton challenges the validity of teacher development programme which predominantly focuses on teaching practice in terms of delivering the "perfect lesson". She argues "differentiation is not even on the agenda in Bangladesh and training does not address it, leaving teachers with a problem and no strategies to deal with it" (p. 189). This suggests that there is need to recognise and facilitate the teachers as professionals who can implicate the process of education at school level. She advocates that, to realise the potential of teacher collaboration and reflection on practice, there is a need to work and develop support networks at the institutional level. She argues that formal and informal approaches to collaboration in school level can enable teachers to work together to explore students learning needs and promoting positive teaching approaches.

Hoque, Alam, and Abdullah (2011) conducted a quantitative study in over 30 secondary schools in Dhaka city, the capital of Bangladesh, to examine the impact of teachers' professional development activities on whole school improvement in the context of city schools. The researchers suggest that teachers' collaborative practices could be a significant way to transform individual knowledge into organisational knowledge if they include "reflective dialogue and open sharing of classroom practices" (p.345). They argue that through collaborative work teachers can review their practice and develop awareness for change. Thus they assert that the schools in Bangladesh need to recognise "action enquiry" (p.345) as a collaborative work for school improvement. Other studies (such as Shohel & Banks, 2010 & 2012; Shohel & Power, 2010) also suggests that school-based teachers' professional development (in their case through technology enhanced open and distance learning) is contributing significantly to in-service training in the resource constrained context of Bangladesh.

Teachers' engagement with research

Anwaruddin and Pervin (2015) conducted a small-scale research of English teachers' engagement with research in a Bangladeshi urban context. They conceptualised engagement with research as reading and systematically using research knowledge for professional development. The key purpose of the study was to understand the extent of English-language teachers'

engagement with research in professional learning and adding data about Bangladeshi teachers to the existing body of knowledge on the research-practice gap. After employing a questionnaire survey and six in-depth interviews they argue that there is an absolute absence of teachers' engagement with research for professional development. From the interviews key factors were identified that inhibited the teachers from engaging with published research outcomes or reports. They are: poor teacher salary, private tutoring and lack of time for professional development, and the lack of contextual relevance of the research. Within the scope of this research there was no evidence of effort to understand the gap in roles between researcher and practitioner. However, two of the respondents' comments are significant. One says "I am encouraged but the problem is most researches are conducted in the west. There's a serious dearth of original research by Bangladeshi researchers' (p.31). And another one believes "most research papers do not normally address our practical classroom problems" (p.32).

To a very large extent published research findings about education in Bangladesh tend to be quantitative. Project reports draw heavily on national statistical data bases and individual research studies tend to use surveys. In addition, studies seem to have focused particularly on problems and inadequacies and therefore there is a dominant focus on findings that describe deficits in educational processes and outcomes. While there is undoubtedly value in the identification and recognition of problems, detailed studies of how improvements can be made in practice are also needed and these are lacking in the current literature. The project reported in this thesis provides one such contribution to fill the gap.

A further gap in the published research findings about education in Bangladesh is that western perspectives dominate in the accounts. Much of the research has been carried out by external consultants or by international aid agencies and offers little evidence of consideration of how Bangladeshi values or social practices might be utilised in creating opportunities for improvement. While there are a growing number of emergent Bangladeshi researchers, at this stage, perhaps because they are the recent products of western universities, much of their research also tends to be based on western epistemologies and on comparisons with western practices. I am not rejecting the potential usefulness of comparisons or of negotiation with western perspectives, but there is need to overcome the absence of Bangladeshi perspectives and to lay foundations to develop epistemological perspectives that suit the community needs of Bangladesh. In recent earlier writing I have participated in exploring the need to recognise local educational needs and local potential to build capacity (Greenwood, Alam, & Kabir, 2014; Greenwood, Alam, Salahuddin & Rasheed, 2015) and in editing a collection of Bangladeshi research studies (Greenwood, Everatt, Kabir & Alam, 2013) that addresses current challenges in

education from the perspectives of researchers who are active participants in the life of Bangladesh. This study is a further contribution to the development of a body of research that is *indigenous* to Bangladesh.

Indigenous approaches to knowledge

Assertions of the importance of *indigenous* approaches to knowledge have been strongly made by writers who are Maori (including Durie, 2001; Smith, 1999; Penitio, 2004) Aboriginal Australians (including Bamblett, 2013; Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010) and Native and First Nations North Americans (Barnhard, & Angayuqaq, 2005; Battiste & Henderson, 2000). Although the term indigenous is not used, similar claims about the importance of local, as opposed to colonially imported knowledge have been made by a number of Bengali, Bangladeshi and Indian writers, particularly, Rabindranath Thakur, Kazi Nazul Islam, Jibanananda Das, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Rustom Bharucha.

The indigenous writers cited above make three fundamental assertions about knowledge. The first is that we understand as knowledge is dependent on culture and history and the knowledge systems of indigenous people have validity and importance. The second is that the act of researching indigenous people from *the outside* without consideration of their own ways of knowing the world is an act of on-going colonisation. The third is that research should build on what already exists in indigenous communities to build further knowledge that should primarily be used to further the well-being of those communities.

This section first examines the work of Bengali writers who make such assertions. It then aligns their concepts with a number of Maori and other New Zealand writers who have examined the concepts of situated knowledge and how it relates to place and indigeneity. I have not found English translations of the work of Rabindranath Thakur, Nazul Islam, Jibanananda Das, so I have made my own translations from the original Bangla.

Legacies of Rabindranath Thakur, Nazul Islam, Jibanananda Das

Rabindranath Thakur wrote at a time when British colonisation was creating a form of globalisation. He (1908) talks about the evolution of a dysfunctional Bengali society that has been torn from its roots through an education system that is based on Eurocentric norms and philosophy and warns about the associated dangers. He argues that we need to create a free space

for education where our students can relate their thinking and imagination with their ancestral memories, just as we do for free physical movement as we need free space.

He critiques use of the England-based school readers that were used in his time, saying “the debate between Charly and Kety⁴ in the *snowball story* cannot lead our students to understand the situated nature of the history and knowledge that exist in the story itself nor that of their own ancestral rituals and memories” (p.9). Therefore, he argues, students do not become excited to express their thoughts and they fail to create meaning. He argues that perhaps they collect some kind of information but it cannot project any image or meaning in their minds and thus it remains meaningless in their way of life. An almost “impregnable division is being created between education and its application in life”, he states (p.15). He presents this as a disconnection between language, knowledge and the legacy of life. He says that because of this disconnection “we remain naïve in understanding the full meaning of the Eurocentric knowledge base on the one hand, and we fail to respect the power of our own language and tradition on the other hand” (p.18). He asserts that this colonisation of knowledge and the language we express it results in “a complex disconnection” between what we say in words and our perspectives of life (p.18). Because of this disconnection, he maintains, we can articulate and verbally recognise the Eurocentric notions of science, philosophy, and freedom but what we have learned from them in practice is a focus on how to maximise personal material gain.

He argues that we can create a bridge back to our own authenticity. He refers to the idea of *Bongodorshon*, embodied in the movement of Bengali literary resurgence initiated by the renowned writer, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay. He argues that there was nothing in Bankim’s *Bongodorshon* that could not be found in some form in the Eurocentric knowledge system. But, he explains, what was new is that *Bongodorshon* “broke the barrier between the British oriented English education system and our internal world that we had constructed through our language and history” (p.16), and so this body of writing invited us to explore our own identity through our own values as they are expressed in our own culture and language. Rabindranath sees this as an occurrence of joyful connection between imagination and life experience.

Rabindranath argues that the material that was provided in most of the education system during British rule was alien and therefore obscure. “We read other peoples’ writing of history,” he writes, “but we never read and discuss the complex wave of forces (Aryan, Dravidian, Hindu,

⁴ Rabindranath has written in Bangla and so these names have been transposed into Bangla script. I have translated directly from the Bangla. The original English names were possibly Charlie and Katie. However, I retain the immediately translated form of the names because it conveys some of the alien-ness of the story for Bengali readers.

Muslims, and British) that shape our own history and that have evolved through our people's experiences and way of being. We need to see a clear picture of who we are, and how we have been shaped through those immense and complex forces and energetic chemistry of human exchange. We never look at the elements, symbols, memories of history that vividly exist around us" (165).

He noted that "we memorise linguistics and get higher positions in examinations" "but we do not invest energy into investigating how our own languages have been transformed and into exploring how our language itself carries the imprint of our own people's ancestral experiences" (22). In the Bengal region as well as in greater India there is diversity in society and religion. He reminds us that to fully understand the nature of diversity of our religion and society we need to search with attention. "This has to be done from inside!" he emphasises. "*Bongodorshon* gives us insight to reflect on our history and people." (16)

By considering the historical legacy of the Bengal region Rabindranath challenges the political and pedagogical intentions of the educational reform initiatives taken by the then British government in India. He says "the hidden purposes of education generate dislocation: they encourage our people to build a false sense of well-being. Textbooks are now selected and prepared in such a way that the neutral and free exploration of knowledge is diluted in the political purpose of education" (p.35). He emphasises that an "educating process for learning to think, search for and apply ideas is different from learning to be obedient" (p.36.). He argues that we intend to educate our children to maintain their uniqueness and interests, but "the imposed discipline that is coming through the educational reform will destroy our children's natural enthusiasm, fluidity, agility and curiosity" (pp. 35-36). He sees the British education system in India as a production industry and the products, the students, are programmed in such a way so that their behaviour becomes predictable.

Rabindranath wants to see school as an institute that rejects the materialistic vision of life that he sees as growing and cultivates the wisdom of its local community. He strongly argues for a transformative goal for schooling for Bangladesh⁵. Such transformation involves establishing a strong connection between community needs and the basic activities of schooling. He rejects the idea of education being a process of learning abstracted concepts. Instead, Rabindranath argues, school should create opportunity for the students to become aware of the value of creativity, enjoy the pleasure of exploration, and learn to give value to humanity, people, community, history, environment and ecology. In this way they can develop what he calls *bromhoogyan*,

⁵ To represent the Bengal region he uses the terms, Bongodesh, Bengal, and Bangladesh

transcendental knowledge. As Khan (2007) explains, the term brings together two ideas: *Bringhoo* or *brinhoo* means the explorative energy that we bring, and *mon* means the mind that carries the external and internal energy and *gyan* means knowledge. Rabindranath says that in our schools the opportunity for exploring *bromhoogyan* is replaced with instructional pedagogy. Giving instruction conflicts with the notion of *bromhoogyan*, and “when students are given instruction they might feel that they are accused of their ignorance” (p.43). He conceptualises teaching as a process and practice of reaching students’ imaginations and enabling them to learn to think and apply their thinking. He asserts “teachers need to generate energy to explore students’ ability and enable them to connect with ancestral memories so that they can understand the value of living in the present situation” (p.48).

To encounter the materialistic vision and the exam orientation of education he urges us to develop a classroom practice that embodies an educational purpose of facilitating students’ natural attachment to learning, and argues that teachers should relate their emotional and mental energy towards this goal. By drawing on ancient Indian constructs of teaching practices he understands teachers as *manobchitter mali*, gardeners of the human mind and spirit, where the outcome of the gardener’s love are different flowers and fruits of students’ learning. He says when a teacher’s mind and student minds harmonise together in the process of learning they achieve pleasure. He terms this pleasure *srijonishoktishil*, creative and innovative, the embodied meaning of *bromhoogyan*. He acknowledges the importance of responsibility as well as pleasure. He says that the key element for realising such pleasure is to establishing “the simple mutual respect and relationship between teachers and students” (p.245).

He contends that this relationship can be established if students can extend their hand freely and fearlessly to their teachers for help. To respond to students’ needs with care and responsibility teachers need to have a childlike mind, he claims. He asserts that a childlike mind inside a teacher is the fundamental basis for developing trusting relationships between teachers and students. Finally he asserts the value of perseverance in teaching. He argues that teachers sometimes cultivate an austere presence in order to hide ignorance. Rabindranath identifies the source of such austerity as the power difference between teachers and students and teacher’s predetermined ideas about students. He warns that the power difference can make teaching a job of oppression, and contends that oppressive teaching is a symbol of incompetence.

In his discussion of education Rabindranath proposes an encompassing emancipatory plan for Bengalis through a knowledge system that is based on Bangla language and history. While my project is much more modest and confined to the practice of one rural school, his ideas provide an important platform for my critical reflection on existing practices within the school and on

the changes that emerge. The most significant concept for my work is his identification of the need for a Bengali-based approach to knowledge and consequently to learning. He does not reject Eurocentric influences but he adamantly asserts that first we need to understand and draw on our own history, language and culture and only then can we usefully engage with the knowledge and culture of others. Over time his writing too has become part of the historic resource base of Bangladeshi culture, and therefore his other ideas on education also provide a reflective lens for aspects of my projects. Particularly significant is his insistence on allowing freedom for students' natural inclination towards learning, on providing real experiential, rather than abstracted, opportunities for learning, on drawing on the practical life needs and opportunities of the local community, on developing classroom relationships that are encouraging and enabling and on nurturing learning that is both personally meaningful to each student and encourages them to make sense of their whole life. Also significant is his rejection of top-down instruction and of the examination orientated memorisation. In the following pages I will relate these ideas to those I have found in contemporary writings about the importance of indigenous bases for making knowledge, but first I will briefly examine the work of two other influential Bangladeshi thinkers.

Kazi Nazrul Islam is another renowned and influential Bangladeshi writer, known as *bidrohi kobi*, the rebel poet. He also argues for emancipation through the reclaiming of a Bangla knowledge base. Whereas Rabindranath invites us to navigate through the complexities of our roots and experiences, Nazrul directly challenges sectarianism (Haque, 2015) the materialistic world view that he sees as predominant, and the injustices that characterise it. Through his poetic works, such as *Sammobadi* (Islam, 1993a), Nazrul explores the inclusive and non-sectarian spirit that, he argues, Bengal has inherited and upheld through its language and history. He directly invites people to be aware of oppression and injustice. His writing repeatedly rejects bigoted notions of religion and gender. In the poem *Kandari Husiar* he exclaims against those who allow suffering in the name of religious affiliation: “Who says they are not Hindu, they are Muslim?⁶ Leader, say that they are all children of a mother who are dying⁷” (Islam, 1993b). Addressing the injustices of gender, he writes in the poem *Nari*: “The day is not too far⁸, when this world will simultaneously celebrate women's laurels with those of men⁹” (Islam, 1925).

⁶ “হিন্দু নয়, ওরা মুসলিম ওই জিজ্ঞাসে কোনজন

⁷ কান্ডারী বল, ডুবিছে মানুষ সন্তান মোর মা'র।

⁸ সেদিন সুদূর নয়

⁹ যেদিন ধরণী পুরুষের সাথে গাহিবে নারীরও জয়!

Against injustice, he writes in his poem *Bidrohi*: “I will become calm¹⁰, only when the miseries, the cries of the oppressed will not be echoed in the air and sky¹¹” (Islam, 1993c).

Nazrul also wrote in protest against British imperialism, but most importantly he addresses the conflict of identity our people experienced between seeing ourselves primarily as Bengali or as Muslim. Although his immediate concern was rooted in the politics of the era leading to the partition of India, his challenge is still very relevant today as it urges us to look the ways the spirit of non-sectarianism is already embodied throughout our language and literary work and to ensure all religions have a place with Bangladesh. The fervour for emancipation in Nazrul’s work is sometimes expressed as rebellion against all forms of oppression and what he sees as the fascist nature of established power, and at the same time it is an expression of love for humanity. Freedom is at the root of his understanding of human identity and existence. Like that of Rabindranath, the canvas of Nazrul’s philosophical thinking is vast. What I take from it to better understand my own project is his passionate activism against all forms of oppression as well as those based on gender and religion. The freedom he constantly cries out for needs to be seen in our classrooms if it is to be seen in our students’ future lives. I also take from him an endorsement that we in Bangladesh need to look into our own cultural roots.

A third Bangladeshi writer I draw on is Jibanananda Das. Literary scholars in Bangladesh term Das as most prominent poet in the post-Rabindranath era, in large part because of the sophisticated and profound voice he gives to Bengali consciousness. He reminds us of the importance of our indigenous roots by the love he expresses for our motherland, and our people’s relationship to the land. In the poem *Abar asibo fire* he writes that if he was to be reborn, “I will return here again because of loving the river, the crop field of Bangla¹², in this compassionate green land of Bangla which is wet by the waves of the flowing river¹³” (Das,1998a), and in the poem *Banglar mukh ami dekhiachi* (Das,1998b) he creates an image of Bangladesh that is composed of people, nature, agriculture and birds. It refers back to the historic and mythic past to anchor the present and to transform our awareness of how we need to relate to our communities and environment. Das’s influence on my project is his reminder that we are part of the land we live on and of the community that shares it with us. He reminds me of the importance of looking to local needs and local aspirations as the basis of my project.

¹⁰ আমি সেইদিন হব শান্ত

¹¹ যবে উৎপীড়িতের ক্রন্দনরোল-, আকাশে বাতাসে ধ্বনিবে না

¹² আবার আসিব আমি বাংলার নদী মাঠ ক্ষেত ভালোবেসে

¹³ জলঙ্গীর ঢেউ এ ভেজা বাংলারি সবুজ করুণ ডাঙ্গায়।

Other assertions from the subcontinent: Spivak and Bharucha

The concerns expressed by Rabindranath, and by Nazrul, about how imposed Eurocentric perspectives impacted on indigenous knowledge in their time, reoccur, more explicitly and uncompromisingly, in the work of Spivak and Bharucha, two contemporary critics of globalisation from the subcontinent. Each has developed extensive theorisations of the ways that the power held by what is called the *West* marginalises people, values and knowledge systems outside its centre. Here I do not attempt to review the full extent of their work, but rather I focus on what each says about the relationship between indigenous knowledge and dominant western epistemologies.

Spivak is a literary critic, and so many of her arguments centre on literary texts, but they also have wider implications. Spivak scrutinises both how the West has constructed itself as the *centre* and the counter-discourses that are ignored by the West. She writes repeatedly about the subaltern, the one who holds a position only through the authority of those in power. She explains that the subaltern is known only through the epistemology of others (1996 a, 2008, 2010). It is not necessarily that the subaltern cannot talk, she states, it is that existing distributions of power reduce the possibility of anyone listening (1996a). For example, she examines the way third world women have reconfigured through the discourses of the West:

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the women disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the “third-world woman” caught between tradition and modernization, culturalism and development (2010, p.61).

She argues that it is possible to see the West as itself marginal by giving attention to those at the margins and by using oneself “as a shuttle between the centre (inside) and the margin (outside) and thus narrating a displacement” (1996b, p.35). Spivak acknowledges her position as a privileged Western-based literary critic, and like Rabindranath before her, she talks about *negotiation with* rather than simple rejection of Western knowledge constructs (1990). While she firmly rejects discourses that simplify or try to homogenise the identities and values of people outside the West, she affirms the need for risk-taking, saying that refusal to critique is a hollow “way of salving your conscience and allow you not to do any homework.” (1990, p.63). She talks about the value of keeping questions “alive, not answered too quickly” (1996c, p.237).

Spivak writes a number of times about work of the Bengali author Mahasweta Devi, and is overt in her admiration of the writer’s powerfully disturbing mix of fiction and activism, and of the ways she located her stories in tribal contexts yet refuses to romanticise the tribal. In her essay

on the story *Stanadayini* (Spivak, 1987) Spivak takes the opportunity to critique the World Bank's interpretation of "learning from below" as way to extract methods from so called indigenous knowledge that will not promote any change in the mindset of the researchers. Instead she urges the need to "learn love", which she explains as "a simple name for ethical responsibility", in order to reach justice to women and "an ecological just world" (1996d, p.276). She acknowledges that "this relationship, a witnessing love and a supplementing collective struggle", is the lesson she takes from the work of Mahasweta Devi (pp. 276-277).

In keeping with what she acknowledges she has learned from Mahasweta Devi, Spivak combines her academic theorisations with practical activism. She has become founder and primary donor to a literacy project in a remote tribal region in West Bengal. She added her prize money and some of her salary to the money she had made translating Mahasweta Devi's work. As reported by McMillen (2007) she works in a rural area with 80% illiteracy and with schools where she found imagination was killed by rote learning and memorisation, and she makes a commitment to dispense with the idea of knowing what is best for people. "If you know the answer when you go in you won't be able to learn yourself," McMillen reports her saying. "I think that classrooms are really places where collectivities are formed. It is because I am confident in myself that I can let myself go and let the directives come from the people in the class. And where I don't know the answer, I will say so" (p. 17).

Bharucha's work grows out of theatre. In his work he has explored the political theatre of Bengal (1984), the music of Rajasthan and its relationship to the land (2003), and critically analysed the way the media, and that of the west in particular, creates re-presentations of terror and terrorism (2014). Like those of Spivak his theorisations have implications beyond the field of theatre.

Bharucha vehemently critiques the practices of western intercultural theatre, as he sees it as part of the process of making the orient an exotic commodity for consumption (2000, 1996, & 1993). As he sees it, the West cultivates intercultural theatre as a source for self-definition. It is the very 'otherness' of a text, he asserts, that western artists use to create their own imaginary *Orients*. He writes: "Our traditional disciples - our 'modernity' being of no concern to most interculturalists - have been recorded, transported, appropriated, and transformed in other scenarios for other audiences" (p.207). The danger, he explains, is not just that the west appropriates Indian culture but also because of the media power of the west, Indian culture may become understood mainly in western terms within India itself.

He argues (2000, 1993) that equitable global cultural exchange is only possible if each culture has the opportunity to present itself in its own terms. He reports his own cross-cultural work in

consecutively producing a solo theatre piece with three actresses from very different cultures within India (1993, p.90-155). He explains that what is different from the intercultural practices he has critiqued is that he has not arbitrarily uprooted this material just to make theatre. Instead he learned “not to take the familiar for granted, but rather, to absorb its cluster of auras, which in turn contain layers of history” (p.148). He concludes that there is no way to understand another culture, but to live within it: “Only then can one confront one’s own mediation of its realities, without which one can never truly understand how people represent themselves to one another” (p.155). Like Spivak, he abandons his incisively critical stance when he talks about theatre that he believes truly reflect the values of a local community and their relationship to their place. He describes a performance of the ritual of Krishnatta, and writes; “I have found at last a ‘theatre’ that answers my deepest questions of love.”

From both Spivak and Bharucha I take a warning against imposing on my project western perspectives of education and western constructs of the needs of the so called developing world. From them I also take encouragement to explore local needs and values within the terms of the experiences of the local people themselves, and to allow my emotional engagement with my home community and the local people I work with. By their suggestion, it is only then that I can cautiously negotiate alignments with western academic theories. From Spivak I also take advice to admit what I do not know, to keep questions alive, and to take risks at the same time as I do my homework.

Comparison with New Zealand writers

I begin the negotiation with looking at educationists in New Zealand who discuss the situatedness of knowledge and the importance of indigenous perspectives

Penetito is one of a growing number of Māori academics who emphasise not only that knowledge is situated but also that regard for the situatedness of knowledge is important in education planning and practice because it provokes social, political, historical, conceptual, and moral exploration of how people connected to the land or context that is their home. Penetito (2009) situates discussion of education in the political and personal context “which asks not only who we are and where we are, but how we fit in, what the place means to us, and what we mean to the place” (p. 24). He thus suggests that education needs to recognise the importance of situated learning which occurs in the relationship between forms of social participation and cognitive process of learning. He also sees the dominant educational research tradition to

“concentrate on what works for the mainstream and then consider how non-mainstream groups compare with the mainstream” (p. 6) as a problem.

Penetito (2010) expresses his concern about the socialisation agenda of the mediating structures of mainstream education in New Zealand to “getting the Māori to fit in” within the dominant sociocultural ideology. Thus he raises the question of agency. He argues for a transformative role of using mediating structures to shift the emphasis from one of socialisation to that of education that authenticates Māori identity as *tangata whenua*, the people of the land. He asserts that “the role education plays in this construction... is referred to as an ‘imbricated’ relationship, that is, one that retains the integrity of both/all parties while seeking an education in the interests of all” (p. 250). Penetito (2015) talks about the intersection of Māori and mainstream worlds, and asserts that “the very rules of engagement are problematic if their parameters are defined by a more dominant and more powerful voice” (p. 36). He cites the concept *he taonga tuku iho*¹⁴ that knowledge is handed down from the ancestors, as a Māori way of acknowledging the situated nature of knowledge (p. 39). He argues that parochialism (local, tribal, marae-based) and cosmopolitanism are two sides of the same coin (p. 42) that are both important to Māori identity.

Linda Smith, like many Māori and other indigenous researchers, asserts the need to explore indigenous knowledges in education and indigenous approaches to research to enable indigenous people to be self-directive and self-defining (2012). At the same time she warns against trying to homogenise indigenous knowledge. She argues that “the desire for ‘pure’, uncontaminated and simple definitions of the native by the settler is often a desire to continue to know and define the Other, whereas the desire by the native to be self-defining and self-naming can be read as a desire to be free, to escape definition, to be complicated, to develop and change, and to be regarded as fully human” (p. 86).

Smith (2014) draws on the *pōwhiri*, the Māori ritual of encounter between home people and visitors, as a way to illuminate the accountabilities behind “the deceptively simple moments of meeting as researcher and researched” (p. 15). She likens the encounter to a *pōwhiri*, in order to reflect on “what can happen when researchers are actually invited in by a community engaged in its own well-being”, rather what has historically happened “when ethnographers have invited themselves in to eat the food, disturb the well-being and unsettle the spirits” (p. 15). Similarly Bishop (2005) argues that just as a *pōwhiri*, fulfils “the enormously important task of recognising the relative *tapu*¹⁵ [and] *mana* of the two sides, the hosts and the visitors” (p. 122), so should the process of research. He emphasises that when indigenous aspirations are central to the research

¹⁴ A treasure handed down to us.

¹⁵ Bishop explains *tapu* as “specialness; being with potentiality of power” and *mana* as “power” (p122).

context “the situation goes beyond empowerment to one in which sense making, decision making, and theorizing take place in situations that are ‘normal’ to the research participants rather than constructed by the researcher” (p. 126) The major implication for researchers, he continues, “is that they should be able to participate in these sense-making contexts rather than expecting the research participants to engage in theirs” (p.126). What is fundamental, he concludes, “is not the approach per se, but rather establishing and maintaining relationships that address the power of the participants for self-determination” (p.126).

Pasifika approaches to research emphasise a similarly respectful approach to research and the need for open spaces where all the participants can explore their relations to the research. O’Halloran (2015) talks about her research in terms of the Samoan expression “teu le vā”, which she cites Wendt to translate as “cherish, nurse, care for the vā, the relationships”. “This taking care of relationships,” she explains “is informed by a Samoan view of reality where the concept of vā is as the space between, the between-ness, not empty space, not space that separates, but space that relates ... crucial in communal cultures that value group unity more than individualism, that perceive [of things] in terms of group, in terms of vā, relationships” (O’Halloran, 2014, pp. 14-15, citing Wendt, 1999). She further explains that this means she has prioritised “keeping the space between the relationships... tidy clear, cared for, where critical deconstruction is not undertaken at the cost of relationships, where relationships come first” (p. 15).

Durie (2003) stresses that realising Māori potential and hearing the voices of Māori themselves provides the most useful framework for considering Māori educational advancements. It is important for those we educate, he says, “To be Māori, live as Māori, and participate as citizens of the world”. He argues that for Māori to be *successful* in the academic world, they need not only to succeed according to criteria that might be called global or universal but also according to Māori criteria, which involve their potential for participating effectively within the context of Māori values and Māori aspirations. Durie’s construct of *te whare tapa whā*¹⁶ (2012) adds the proposition that it may not be possible to consider students’ academic achievement without also considering their holistic overall development, including physical, spiritual, communal, and mental aspects. Durie offers a further image of Māori health in that of the Southern Cross, *te pae mahutonga*¹⁷, the star constellation that is an icon of New Zealand (1999). The stars, he suggests,

¹⁶ Durie places taha tinana (physical health), taha wairua (spiritual health), taha whānau (family health) and taha hinengaro (mental health) as four walls of the house of Māori wellness.

¹⁷ Mauriora, Waiora, Toiora, Te Oranga, Nga Manukura and Te Mana Whakahaere.

can represent the following qualities: autonomy, community leadership, physical environment, cultural identity, healthy lifestyles and participation in society.

On a broader political front Walker (2004), overviews the Māori struggle for justice and self-determination, his title designating it as one “without end”. He describes Māori ancestral origins, the last two centuries of colonial and postcolonial struggles, and what he elsewhere (cited in McAllister, 2004) calls the most powerful cultural renaissance in the history of colonised people. Throughout he speaks from a decisively Māori world view. He draws on Māori cosmology to explain the existential world as divided into three distinct phenomenological parts: Te Kore (the void) which signifies a space of potential and contains the seeds of the universe, Te Po (the dark) which is the domain of gods, and third Te Aomarama (the world of light) which is the world of light and reality and a dwelling place of humans. He contends that the spiritual values of Māori, including the source of all *mana* and *tapu*, come from the realm of Te Po, the sphere beyond human shaping.

The educator and artist Arnold Wilson (in Greenwood and Wilson, 2006) argues that the land itself carries the imprint of the stories of the people who live on it. He had looked for ways to bring Māori cultural values into education and developed a long term project whereby in the 1970s and 1980s, when New Zealand schools were visibly monocultural, he brought groups of school to live on their local *marae*¹⁸, learn from the elders and wider Māori community and create a group art work that expressed their understanding of local history and cultural values. He encouraged the students and their teachers to listen to the stories “whispered by the land”, because they have been “spun by generations of living on the land, reacting to its forces, telling the stories of the relationship” (p. 96).

In these writings, though situated in a different geographical and historical context, I find strong resonances with Rabindranth’s claims that Bengali need to look at their own knowledge bases and at their relationship to the land they live on and to the communities they are part of. I also find a parallel to Rabindranth’s assertion that Eurocentric ideologies threatened to deracinate Bengalis unless they first develop a strong awareness of their own cultural roots, their language and their own identity. In addition, in Smith’s and Bishop’s exhortations to researchers I find affirmation of the need to work collaboratively with the teachers I research, acknowledging they already have a vested interest in creating a teaching practice that will benefit their community and finding a way to work within their understandings rather than imposing those of the outside

¹⁸ Māori communal space

western academic world. The next section of this review examines literature that discusses research approaches that I believe are compatible with this advice.

Action research, reflective practice, situated learning and communities

The literature reviewed in this section involves discussions of approaches to research that are practice based, in which action and research are contemporaneous, and in which reflection, collaborative or personal is the main means of analysis. It also included brief discussion of approaches to learning that are situated, participatory and embedded in practice. My own choices of investigative strategy have been detailed in the previous chapter; here I review selected significant writings, and the concepts within them, that inform my understanding of the wider field.

While much of the theorisation about participatory action research has appeared in western literature of the last twenty to thirty years, the process and concepts can also be found in the literacy development work of Freire (1970), in the community problem exploration processes of Boal's (1979) *Theatre of the Oppressed* and in the Nordic *folkhögskolor* (Rönnerman, Furu, & Salo, 2008).

An approach to research involving learning and action

Lewin, often regarded as the initiator of action research describes it as “a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action and research leading to social action” that uses “a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action and fact-finding about the result of the action” (1946, p.35). Emphases on change and on the iterative cyclic nature of the research were fundamental concepts.

To these basic constructs a number of theorists added understandings of the type of knowledge that comes through action research. Reason and Bradbury (2008) add the understanding that in action research knowledge is generated through reflection on action designed to create change. And McDermott (2007) emphasises that the theoretical underpinnings and practical methodologies of participatory action research are significant because they have “resisted traditional models of knowledge construction which privilege expert knowledge” (p.405).

Altrichter, Kemmis, McTaggart, & Zuber-Skerritt (1991) add further conceptual dimensions. “Action research,” they say, “is a form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social

or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out” (p.3). They also bring a concept of cultural responsiveness to the action research approach. They argue the need “to ‘reshape’, to ‘remake’, to ‘reconstitute’ action research in ways that make sense within the culture while nevertheless attempting to maintain some connection with what people of other cultures mean by the term” (p. 4).

According to Bawden (1991), “action research is a particular way of critically learning about events in this world in order to change them. It combines theory with practice in a critical process” (p.10). In his work, Bawden explores connections between learning theory and research praxis. He constructs action research as an experiential, systemic and critical process which involves people working together to improve complex problematic situations. He explains an experiential approach to learning as “a synthesis of finding out with taking action” (p.11) and as “a synthesis of the concrete and the abstract; of facts with theories, of matter with mind, of the objective with the subjective” (pp. 11-12). Drawing on Reason and Rowan, he contrasts experiential learning (learning for being) with both propositional learning (learning for knowing) and practical learning (learning for doing). Drawing on Rogers, he argues that we eventually come to know through non-rational ways; “our intuitions, our aesthetic likes and dislikes, our cultural beliefs and traditions, and so on” (p.17). Because of our non-rational knowledges, we may often not do anything with the logical, rational, reasoned, and scientific knowledge we have gained from propositional or practical learning. However, he argues, the distinctions between rational and non-rational knowledge bring different perspectives in the process of learning and because of their “differences in emphasis, in philosophies and in methods, they provide useful perspectives to guide strategies for education and research” (p.17). Therefore he emphasises the need to pay attention to multiple ways of knowing as these “might be considered as inter-relating with others - again in a glorious unity of interdependent, interpenetrating opposites” (p.17).

A focus on learning is also a focus in Zuber-Skerritt’s (1992, 1993, 2001, 2009) work with action research. She positions action learning and action research (ALAR) as different but aligned aspects of an approach to making change that involve active and reflective learning and systematic inquiry directed at problem solving. She argues that active and reflective learning and systematic inquiry are useful in seeking innovation, change, growth and transformation of organisations and of their leaders and managers. She defines *action learning* as “learning from action or concrete experience, as well as taking action as a result of this learning”. Similarly, *action research* “is a cyclical iterative process of action and reflection on and in action. Through reflection we conceptualise and generalise what happened (action)” (2001, p.2). In practice she sees the two processes as often interconnected, with the emphasis of action research being the

creation and publication of new knowledge. When she creates the ACTIONS acronym (2005) she identifies seven core values as inherent in an ALAR culture: “(1) Advancement of knowledge and learning; (2) Collaboration; (3) Trust, respect and honesty; (4) Imagination and a vision for excellence; (5) Openness; (6) Non-positivist beliefs; and (7) Success” (p.53). Here she is speaking about something that not only about a process but also an ethic of relationships and a commitment to the pursuit of successful outcomes. Success is not just a desirable possibility, it is a goal that ALAR strategically adapts and works towards.

In her further work Zuber-Skerritt (1996 & 2011) extends the idea of action learning and action research towards a participatory paradigm. She argues (2011) that participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) “aims to improve practice not just at a technical and practical level but also at a deeper critical/emancipatory level – by the practitioners themselves, in collaboration with each other and often with facilitators, specialist educationalists or social researchers.” She argues that PALAR is a holistic approach to development and inquiry. She cites Cooperrider who describes how collaboration allows people to turn tension “to enthusiasm, cynicism to collaboration and apathy to inspired action. . . . It evokes trust. . . It lets people see and experience a purpose greater than their own. . . It satisfies the human need to be part of a larger community. It taps into our tribal consciousness. . . People transcend the *I* and become a *We*” (Cooperrider cited in Zuber-Skerritt, 2011, p. 8). She also argues (2009) that the processes of becoming a collective ‘we’ are integral to teaching, learning, and development in practice. She situates people as “learner/researcher” and then urges them to build on their existing capacity “by asking, probing, and guiding questions” (p.32). She maintains that this constructs the epistemological premise of PALAR in which knowledge becomes “a product of people learning about learning: what it is and how to do it” (p.32).

Wadsworth (1998) conceptualises participatory action research in terms of the dynamic and relentless interplay between action and research. She explains that participatory action is not research that hopes to be followed by action. Rather she asserts that it is “action which is researched, changed and re-researched, *within* the research process by participants” (p. 5). She argues that “essentially participatory action research is research which involves all relevant parties in actively examining together current action (which they experience as problematic) in order to change and improve it. They do this by critically reflecting on the historical, political, cultural, economic, geographic and other contexts which make sense of it” (p.9).

Other cultural inscriptions of participatory action research

Te Aika and Greenwood (2009) explore the alignment of participatory action research with kaupapa Māori research. They liken participatory action research to a *whare korero*, “a house not only built through talk but also built to safely house and support further talk” (p60). They interpret four projects through this lens, likening them to the pou, the carved pillars of the house. They argue that the notions of action and investigation, reflection on action, involvement of participant as co-researcher, and working for collective well-being is embedded in Māori traditions that are at the basis of the working of a marae. They explain that contemporary kaupapa Māori research, “upholds the building of capacity and the development of well-being for the iwi, or people, as the primary goals of research”, emphasises “the importance of accountability to iwi”, and “signals preference for methodologies and methods that involve collective decision-making rather than individual and that engage participants as co-constructors of the findings” (p. 59). They argue that knowledge and knowing need to be considered according to the value system of the host community. In their projects they describe the engagement of the participants “not only in terms of data but also in terms of identity construction” according to the Māori values of kaitiakitanga, rangatiratanga, and mana¹⁹. Their discussion offers an example of how the core principles and processes of participatory action research can be re-inscribed with the learning processes and community development values of another, non-western, culture.

Brydon-Miller, Kral, Maguire, Noffke and Sabhlok (2011) also look at participatory action research through the lenses of different cultures. They report projects in India, on an American Indian in the south-western United States, and in an Inuit territory in Canada. They compare participatory action research with jazz. They argue that success in composing jazz music lies in willingness to innovate and explore and in respect for one another’s differing contributions. From this analogy they asserts that participatory action research is “built upon the notion that knowledge generation is a collaborative process in which each participant’s diverse experiences and skills are critical to the outcome of the work” (p.387). They also relate participatory action research with the banyan tree, referencing Rabindranath Thakur’s symbolisation of the banyan tree as source of “learning meditation, reflection, and enlightenment” (p.387). In rural sub-continental tradition the banyan tree is a place where rural people gather to discuss community issues and take decisions. From the example of the banyan tree they argue that “participatory action research process provides a space within which community partners can come together

¹⁹ Kaitiakitanga is guardianship; rangatiratanga is chiefly leadership, and mana is dignity and power.

and a process by which they can critically examine the issues facing them, generating knowledge and taking action to address these concerns” (p. 387).

They locate participatory action research within the broader context of action research practice where action involves movement towards a *better life* as understood by those in the situation and conceptualise research “as a social process of gathering knowledge and asserting wisdom”. They align the roots of participatory action research with Freire’s literacy work in Brazil and the Scandinavian folk school movement. They emphasise that respect for local knowledge and “trust in ability of democratic processes to lead to positive personal, organizational and community transformation” (p. 389) guides the work of participatory action research. They are concerned in analysing the dynamics of power and privilege, and exploring the integral connection between social theory and social action. They argue that “theoretical frames are seen as integrally connected to politics, meaning not only in the examination of the workings of power, but also the nature of participation, and in activism as a contributor to the fight for social justice” (p.389). They relate participatory action research to indigenising of the research process and for the most part “the emphasis is on creating dialogue and generating knowledge through interaction” (p. 390).

Projects in schools

Greenwood’s (2009) account of participatory action research in a New Zealand school provides an understanding how participatory action research facilitates the development of teaching practice through shared learning. She utilises participatory action research principles to collaborate with the head teacher and teachers. She argues that the success of a school based participatory action research project depends on a commitment to shared learning approaches and a belief that recognises teachers as “professionals who, if encouraged, can and will take responsibility for growth of their awareness, knowledge, and skills in order to better meet the needs of their students” (p.37). She affirms that for change to occur in a school based participatory action research project there is a need to accommodate different waves of thinking and to think differently. In her project the teachers shifted their original positions as leaders of learning and developed learning relationship with the students. The significant success of her project, she claims, was the teachers’ unanimous assertion in a teachers conference “that the knowledge that they could themselves gain and use was more significant for the success of their students than all the body of external, and unread, academic research findings” (p.45).

Rönnerman, Salo, Furu, Lund, Olin and Jakhelln (2015) describe how the Nordic network of action research has explored, bridged, and nurtured the inherent ideological and methodological dynamics of action research in preschool and school contexts. They argue that the work is anchored in Nordic educational traditions and shaped by three significant education concepts: *bildung*²⁰, *folk enlightenment* and *pedagogy*. The strategies used in the network for learning were based on dialogue and transformed into activities after logical scrutiny. The activities are further developed collaboratively by the researchers, teachers, and leaders in the network and used in school and preschool contexts.

Kemmis and McTaggart

In developing my understanding on the processes and principles of participatory action research and constructing an approach for my project I draw on a range of theorisations as I have mentioned above. As my field work progressed and as later I reflected on the experiences, I found that Kemmis and McTaggart's (2005) conceptualisation of participatory action research process provided a useful basis for examining how I had adapted my approach to the local context. Therefore, I now review their conceptualisations in some detail.

Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) extend their previous conceptualisations of participatory action research and argue that “a mechanical sequence of steps is considered to be a poor description of process of participatory action research” (p.563). They contend that in a real situation the participatory action research process become more fluid, open, and responsive. They conceptualise participatory action research as “ a learning process whose fruits are the real and material changes in the following: what people do, how people interact with the world and with others, what people mean and what they value, and the discourses in which people understand and interpret their world” (pp.564-565). This suggests that through a participatory action research process people can understand the conditions under which their practices are shaped and occur and how it might be possible to transform their practices.

They argue that participants come to “understand practice from *both* its individual and its social aspects and understand it *both* objectively and subjectively”. As participants reflectively examine their own and one another's practice, they come to “view practice as constructed and reconstructed *historically* both in terms of the *discourses* in which practices are described and understood and in terms of socially and historically constructed *actions and their*

²⁰ Bildung is originally a German term. It is not easily translated as it carries a range of connotative meanings. It refers to the process of acquiring knowledge that is holistic and that develops human beings. It is compartmentalised according to academic subjects and it is understood in terms of lifelong learning.

consequences”(p.574). Thus, they argue, participants begin to see “practice as constituted and reconstituted in *human and social action* that projects a living past through the lived present into a future where the people involved and affected will live with the consequences of actions taken.” (p. 574).

Drawing on Habermas, they claim that *communicative action* takes place through participatory action research when participants “interrupt what they are doing” to ask questions that align to four validity claims.

Whether their understandings of what they are doing *make sense* to them and to others (are *comprehensible*). Whether these understandings are *true* (in the sense of being *accurate* in accordance with what else is known). Whether these understandings are *sincerely held and stated* (authentic). Whether these understandings are *morally right and appropriate* under the circumstances in which they find themselves (p. 576).

Kemmis and McTaggart adapt Habermas’s concept of “opening a communicative space”. They claim that “the most morally, practically and politically compelling view of participatory action research is one that sees participatory action research as a practice through which people can create networks of communication, that is, sites for the practice of communicative action” (p.580). They argue that participatory action research creates a communicative space between participants that allows the kind of communicative action that can be designated as *exploratory action*. They suggest that “research and action converge *in* communicative action aimed at practical and critical decisions about what to do in the extended form of exploratory action, that is, practices of action and research jointly projected through history by action” (p.595). It is these concepts that I have found particularly useful in analysing my project. How I have adapted them is explained in the final sections of each of Chapters 5 to 9.

Kemmis and McTaggart claim that communicative action leads the participatory group to understand a new notion which goes beyond “reflection or “reflective practice”. They argue that “it does more than conduct its reflection in the rear-view mirror, as it was, looking backwards to at what happened to learn from it. It also generates and conducts action in an exploratory and experimental manner with actions themselves standing as practical hypotheses or speculations to be tested as their consequences emerge and unfold” (p. 581). They identify the basis of empowerment in a participatory action research group as coming through the development of communicative power.

They describe the role of facilitator as co-participant in the research, “but one with special expertise that may be helpful to the group in its endeavours”. Facilitation usually involves, they

explain, “an asymmetrical relationship of knowledge or power between a person expecting or expected to do ‘facilitation’ and people expecting to be ‘facilitated’ in the process of doing a project”, and it would be “naïve to believe that such asymmetries will disappear”. They assert help is sometimes needed and that facilitation cannot be withheld when it is sought and needed, and that it will not be “made ‘safe’ because the facilitator aims to be ‘neutral’” (p. 594).

They describe the role of the collective in a participatory action research project “as an open and inclusive space constituted to create conditions of communicative freedom”. They argue that the group should not be seen as fixed in its membership, but rather as retaining its connections with others in the research setting, and that it is may be expected to be “internally diverse, differentiated and sometimes inconsistent and contradictory” (p.596).

In reconceptualising critical participatory action research Kemmis and McTaggart explain that they moved from their primary aim of two decades ago of developing a form of research to be conducted by teachers and other professionals in their practices. Then they valorised the researcher – the one at the centre of the research act - now they believe that critical participatory action research needs *animateurs* but it also thrives in *public spheres* where “people can take a variety of roles as researchers, questioners, interlocutors and interested observers” (p.598). They state:

We now see a central task of participatory action research as including widening groups of people in the task of making their own history.... Now we are less inclined to think in terms of heroes of knowledge building or even of heroes of history making; we are more inclined to think in terms of people working together to develop a greater collective capacity to change the circumstances of their own lives in terms of collective capacity building (p.598).

They focus on “people securing new ways of working on the basis of *collective commitment*” (p.598). They see participatory action research “as a process of sustained *collective deliberation* coupled with sustained *collective investigation*... that allows people to explore possibilities in action.” (p.598).

Participatory action research and praxis

In recent theorisation Kemmis (2009) and Kemmis, Wilkinson, Edwards-Groves, Hardy, Grootenboer & Bristol (2014) view action research as way to transform practitioners’ *practices*, their *understandings* of their practices, and the *conditions* in which they practice. Kemmis

(2009) conceptualises transformation of practices as “transforming what we do”; transforming understandings of practice as “transforming what we think and say”; and transforming the conditions of practice as “transforming the ways we relate to others and to things and circumstances around us”(p. 463) through the critical and self-critical process of action research.

He identifies these transformational goals as “sayings”, “doings”, and “relatings”, and drawing on other philosophers, suggests these three are components of living life ‘philosophically’. He argues that “the ‘philosophical’ life was not and is not a matter of philosophical discourse or theory; it was and is a matter of practice” (p.465). He asserts that for professionals such as teachers in the field of education, to live a “philosophical life” is a matter of “*living* a ‘logic’ by thinking and speaking well and clearly, avoiding irrationality and falsehood; *living* ‘physics’ by acting well in the world, avoiding harm, waste and excess; and *living* an ‘ethics’ by relating well to others, avoiding injustice and exclusion” (p.465). He argues that the above three “come together in a unitary *praxis* - that is morally committed action oriented and informed by traditions of thought. This *praxis* comes together and coheres in a way of life, a way of orienting oneself in any and all of the uncertain situations we encounter” (p.465). He maintains that consciousness can be through “the experience of recurrently carrying through this reversal (i.e. the experience of experience itself)” because it “leads to a deepened self-awareness or self-presence in the truly experienced person; in becoming experienced, he has been involved not only in acquiring information but also, through this very acquiring, in a process of self-formation” (p.465). This notion of *praxis* provides a philosophical base of action research. Kemmis asserts:

In a ‘philosophical’ kind of action research, then, neither understandings nor practices nor the conditions that shape practices - sayings, doings, and relatings - is logically prior to either of the others. They emerge and develop in relation to one another (p.465).

Kemmis, sometimes writing in association with others (Kemmis and Grootenboer,2008; Kemmis et al, 2014) explores the idea that the *praxis* of individuals is shaped and formed by ‘practice architectures’. Kemmis (2009) explains that the following *architectures* constitute “*mediating preconditions* for practice”:

Cultural-discursive preconditions, which shape and give content to the ‘thinking’ and ‘saying’ that orient and justify practices; *material-economic* preconditions, which shape and give content to the ‘doing’ of the practice; and *social-political* preconditions, which shape and give content to the ‘relatings’ involved in the practice (p.466).

As seen in Chapters 4 to 9 consideration of such preconditions is important to the project reported in this thesis.

Adapting from Schatzki, Kemmis (2009) argues that practice architectures describes practices as prefigured as these are “the densely interwoven patterns of saying, doing, and relating that enable and constrain each new interaction, giving familiar practices their characteristic shapes” (p.466). One such example is “what education means (thinking, saying) to a teacher is always already shaped by ideas that pre-exist in various discourses of education” (p.466). The implication of this for projects of school change is that we need to change our sayings and relatings as well as our doings, because as, Kemmis argues, there is a need for coherence in these if we expect our change to be sustainable. Kemmis and Grootenboer (2008) explain this notion of action research as a *meta-practice*. Kemmis (2009) asserts that practice changing action research is a “practical, philosophical way of life - a way we can collectively learn the consequences of our human activity, the consequences of our social practice” (p.473).

Freire, situated learning, and praxis

Rabindranath, Nazrul, and Das assert the need to emancipate from an oppressive situation through a consciousness of Bangla language, ancestral memories and present needs. This concept of emancipation activates the need for what Freire (1970, 1998), working in a different context and time, defined as informed action. Here I explore Freire’s idea of informed action or praxis through following key concepts: situated learning, consciousness of present situation, natural curiosity, working together, and reflection on the action and consequences.

At the base of Freire’s work is emphasis on the meaningfulness of situated learning, on the importance of critical reflection and the ways these might lead to understandings of a liberatory praxis. The full body of his work encompasses philosophy, social theory and pedagogy. I do not propose to review it all here, Rather, I have selected aspects that are particularly relevant to situated learning and praxis.

Freire’s early work took place in Brazil with a project to develop adult literacy. He used study circles as ways to situate literacy within peasants’ experiences and with their concerns about local politics and social justice. His understandings of pedagogy and its potential towards emancipation grow out of this and further work in other parts of South America and Africa (Dimitriadis & Kanberakis, 2006).

What he writes about the acquisition of literacy has reverberations for pedagogy generally:

To acquire literacy is more than to psychologically and mechanistically dominate reading and writing techniques. It is to dominate these techniques in terms of consciousness; to understand what one reads and to write what one understands: it is to communicate graphically. Acquiring literacy does not involve memorizing sentences, words, or syllables - lifeless objects unconnected to an existential universe - but rather an attitude of creation and re-creation, a self-transformation producing a stance of intervention in one's context (1998, p. 86).

He adds that the educator's role is to enter "into dialogue with the illiterate about concrete situations." He emphasises that this "cannot be done from the top down, but only from the inside out" (p. 86).

Freire's emphases on consciousness, dialogue, and intervention are to develop disposition, awareness and commitment towards change.

Freire places the concept of praxis in a broader context of human activity. His pedagogical assumptions articulate the importance of emancipation and advocate taking informed action about teaching practice. One possible way to make practice informed, which Freire (1970) term as praxis, is to bring the contributing discourses in the educational activity setting together as a form of critical analysis. He argues to the importance of investigating "people's thinking about reality and people's action upon reality, which is their praxis" (p.106). He suggests that in the process of investigation people require acting together as "co-investigators". Freire says that through the process of co-exploration people bring an active attitude which deepens their critical awareness of reality. Freire explains the need of reflection as a way to develop conscience of situation and thus to develop willingness to change the situation as follows:

Reflection upon situationality is reflection about the very condition of existence: critical thinking by means of which people discover each other to be 'in a situation'. Only as this situation ceases to present itself as a dense, enveloping reality or a tormenting blind alley, and they can to perceive it as an objective-problematic situation - only then can commitment exist. Humankind *emerge* from their *submersion* and acquire the ability to intervene in reality as it is unveiled. *Intervention* in reality-historical awareness itself thus represents a step forward from *emergence*, and results from the *conscientização* of the situation. *Conscientização* is the deepening of the attitude of awareness characteristic of all emergence (p.109).

Consciousness develops as the result of reflection in situated contexts. Freire (1998) argues that critical reflection on teaching practice is not a thing that can occur automatically. Rather he

argues that “the practice of critical teaching, implicit in a correct way of thinking, involves a dynamic and dialectical movement between ‘doing’ and ‘reflecting on doing’” (p.43). He asserts that the reflecting subject needs to be fully aware of the methodological rigour such as acknowledging his or her own process of practice, attitudes, and reasons behind these and he argues that this methodological rigour characterises the “epistemological curiosity” of a reflecting subject. He emphasises that reflection needs to go beyond ingenuousness, and needs to be performed by learners in “communion” with the teacher responsible for educating them, and that through dialogue and reflection on given practice a ingenuous curiosity can be advanced to a critical stage. For this to happen the reflecting subject needs to have a disposition for change. To avoid idealistic exaggeration, he suggests the need to develop a consciousness about the consequences of a given act or habit. He argues that this consciousness leads to the development of a commitment to engage in new decision-making processes and thus practice become grounded on the light of considered consequences. He argues that emotional elements such as sense of joy or anger that comes with consciousness about consequences are fundamental in the process of reflection. Therefore, Freire suggests that there is a need to recognise the “value of emotions, sensibility, affectivity, and intuition” (p. 48). He argues that if teaching practices are premised on a technicist approach to education they fail to signify the importance of democratic practices and so are incompatible with learning.

Freire’s pedagogical practices (1998) suggest how *I* and *you* can become a collective *we*. He argues that “one of the most important tasks of critical educational practice is to make possible the conditions in which the learners, in their interaction with one another and with their teachers, engage in the experience of assuming themselves as social, historical, thinking, communicating, transformative, creative persons” (p. 45) who are being capable to see themselves as part and product of the social discursive context as well as understanding their role as actor within it. He argues: “it is the otherness of the ‘not-I’ or the ‘you’ that makes me assume the radicality of the ‘I’” (pp. 45-46). What he suggests is that there is inherent the possibility of becoming a composite *we* in this process of assuming oneself as actor and product of the system.

Reflective practice

A number of writers draw correspondences between participatory action research and reflective practice and practitioner inquiry.

In 1983 Schön proposed the idea of *reflection –in- action*. He recounts: “we are bound to an epistemology of practice which leaves us at a loss to explain, or even to describe, the

competences to which we now give overriding importance” (p. 20). He argues: “our knowing is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing. It seems right to say that our knowing is in our action” (p. 49). He asserts that the meaning of *reflection-in-action* needs to be considered in terms of the context and “complexity of knowing-in-practice” (p. 62). In answer to those who saw uncertainty as a threat, Schön provides a broader perspective of reflective inquiry as follows:

The study of reflection-in-action is critically important. The dilemma of rigor or relevance may be dissolved if we can develop an epistemology of practice which places technical problem solving within a broader context of reflective inquiry, shows how reflection-in-action may be rigorous in its own right, and links the art of practice in uncertainty and uniqueness to the scientist’s art of research. We may thereby increase the legitimacy of reflection-in-action and encourage its broader, deeper, and more rigorous use (p.69).

The implication of reflective inquiry for educational research and practice that he describes is that it helps reflective practitioner and researcher to explore the limits of his or her expertise and understandings. He suggests that significant implication of reflective inquiry is the researcher and practitioner enter into a collaborative mode of partnership where superiority dissolves in the experience of practice.

Brydon-Miller and Maguire (2009) warn that the emancipatory foundation of educational practitioner inquiry “is currently under threat by efforts to limit the focus of engaged form of knowledge generation to narrowly defined and decontextualized problems” (p. 79). They suggest that some of the participatory action research principles such as “the notion of research as a form of political engagement, a critical examination of systems of power and privilege, and the importance of collaborative relationships as a framework for effective practice” (p. 83) can provide a framework for practitioner inquiry in including students, community, and family in all phases of action-reflection cycles.

Greenwood (2013) argues that reflective practice and participatory action research are both “concerned with change, in any forms, and with the process of achieving it” (p. 47). The key idea that is inherent in both reflective practice and participatory action research framework is that “people can effectively research their practice and that the insights they gain... can be useful to other practitioners” (p. 47). She asserts that in both traditions “it is not necessary to separate research from action: that in grounded practice research can immediately inform new action and that in turn will provide a shifting terrain for the research. She points out that “scholarly

literature acknowledges that they are strongly interrelated and that the choice of terms to describe various studies of cases might sometimes be interchangeable”. However Greenwood also outlines some distinctive features of reflective practice that align with my research focus. The significant point that she makes is that in reflective inquiry “the research is based on a continuing process of critical reflection by the practitioner, and usually a number of critical lenses will be utilised” (p. 47). She proposes that “reaction of the other participants, verbal or embodied” could be a probable lens which “instigates engagement with the others who are involved in the project (students, colleagues, families or community) and allows the practitioner to adjust initiatives to make them more effective in prompting imagination and innovation, motivating sustained effort, re-examining an issue, changing direction or reaching consensus” (p. 47). For a reflective practitioner, Greenwood stresses the need to identify how and why a theoretical lens that he or she uses speaks to the actual need of the people who are involved in the research process. One of the critical lenses that might be used is a relationship to significant educational theory. In that case the practitioner might ask questions like the following:

What, for example, does Freire’s unpacking of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1972) have to say about the freedom to question and is this work supporting that freedom, or what does Spivak have to say about the power of the centre and the way it manipulates those at the margins (Spivak, 1979) and is this work reinforcing hegemonic thinking or is it encouraging curiosity and criticality?” (pp. 47-48).

Considering the distinctive features of reflective inquiry Greenwood argues that “one way of looking at participatory action research is that the participants in it are a community of reflective practitioners,... work collaboratively in the cycles of creatively envisioning change,... critically reflect on the impact” (p. 48).

Russell writes about the need to actively teach reflective practice. With Loughran (Loughran & Russell, 2009) he suggests that teaching “has long suffered from two competing views of practice” (p. 183). In the first view a teacher is conceived as an expert of delivering information. In the second teaching is a problematic enterprise “in which the skills, knowledge, and ability of the teachers is based on expertise that is developed and enhanced through reflection on experience over time (Korthagen, 2001)” (p. 183). For that reflection to be effective teachers need to develop knowledge of how to reflect.

In considering the process of initial teacher education, Russell expresses concern (2005) about the gap between the acknowledged goal of developing critically reflective practitioner and the absence of clear strategies to do so. He argues that “professional educators may have

underestimated the complexity of Schön's (1983) contribution to how we think about the nature of professional learning" (p. 203). He draws on his own practice and argues that "reflective practice can and should be taught... so that individuals will understand how reflective practice differs profoundly from our everyday sense of reflection" (p. 199), and offers examples of his own practice in modelling reflection interactively with his students. Consequently he asserts that teacher educators can teach reflective practice "explicitly, directly, thoughtfully and patiently—using personal reflection-in-action to interpret and improve one's teaching of reflective practice to others" (p. 203-4).

In the course of his discussion Russell (2005) develops an exploratory understanding of Schön's account of reflective practice that I find useful for my project:

Schön distinguished between reflection-*on*-action (which seems to closely resemble our everyday concept of reflection as thinking back through recent events) and reflection-*in*-action. Three elements of Schön's (1983) account of reflection-in-action attracted my attention: (1) a puzzling or surprising event during teaching might stimulate 'reframing', recognizing a new way of perceiving or thinking about the professional situation of practice; (2) the new perspective might stimulate a novel course of action; and (3) actually carrying out the novel course of action might provide evidence for deciding if the new perspective and associated new actions deserved to be included in future professional practice (p. 200).

In their report of a collaborative study on teacher education Korthagen, Loughran, and Russell (2006) address the issue of "how to connect theory and practice in such a way that teachers would be able to handle the problems of everyday teaching through theory-guided action" (p. 1021). To address this issue they conducted a meta-analysis that identified a number of core principles that they term "principles of practice" (p. 1024). What is particularly interesting is the way the research design applied the concept of reflective practice. From a number of case studies of teacher education programs they "extracted *seven fundamental principles for guiding program development and change*" and connected them with what is in the research literature. They explain that in this way they have extrapolated principles such as learning from experience and reflection, which are now central to much thinking about teachers' professional development, to our own development as teacher educators and researchers" (p. 1022). They describe how they developed rich description of contexts so that other could "draw analogies to their own situations" and to produce research that could "lead to transformations of practice". They describe as *dialogic validity* the process whereby "through exchanges of email, face-to-face meetings, and workshops and conference presentations, we challenged each other to sharpen

assumptions and present evidence for the principles that we derived” (p.1023). They explain that their approach thus “draws on notions of reflective practice” but also extend them to “purposefully attempting to push this knowledge base beyond the individual so that a shared language of practice is more accessible and more directly applicable across contexts” (p 1023).

Communities of practice and learning communities

As indicated earlier in this chapter, the processes involved in learning communities are not a new discovery. Brydon- Miller et al. (2011) argue that for centuries communities have sat under banyan trees (and elsewhere) to develop group understandings of their issues and to resolve problems. Learning communities are evident in the Nordic *study circles* and in the work of Freire and Boal. Rönnerman, Furu, and Salo (2008) describe a Nordic mid- twentieth century working-class movement by which communities explored and found solutions for political, social and religious challenges. The movement utilised the co-operative capacity of the group for discussion and for developing as well as sharing knowledge. Similarly Boal (1979), openly drawing on the work of Friere (1972), used the power for developing multiple perspectives and for analysis through dialogue of the peasant groups he worked with as a means ensuring that the knowledge being shared and the action that was planned would directly relate to how they community saw its needs and to outcomes that they considered valuable and achievable. The development of shared knowledge and shared language for discussions were key features of this work.

However, the term *communities of practice* became established in academic discourse on the basis of work by Lave and Wenger (1991). Lave and Wenger proposed a concept of situated learning that suggests learning depends on social interaction, and that communities in which participants share common goals and a group identity allow knowledge to be acquired as a social practice. People may participate at different levels in the community and new members, by learning from more experienced members can gradually move from the peripheries to full participation. In a community of practice, they write, “a person’s intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured thorough the process of becoming a full participant in a sociocultural practice. This social process includes, indeed it subsumes, the learning of knowledgeable skills” (p. 29). In his Forward to this work, Hanks (1991) explains that situated learning “takes as its focus the relationship between learning and the social conditions in which it occurs. Rather than defining it as the acquisition of knowledge, Lave and Wenger situate learning in certain forms of social coparticipation. Rather than asking what kinds of cognitive

processes and conceptual structures are involved, they ask what kinds of social engagements provide the proper context for learning to take place” (p.14).

The nature of *practice* is further discussed by Wenger (1998), who explains practice is not something “handed down from one generation to the next” but rather “a shared history of learning”, “an on-going social, interactional process”. “That members interact, do things together, negotiate new meanings, and learn from each other is already inherent in practice - that is how practices evolve,” he writes. “In other words, communities of practice reproduce their membership in the same way that they came about in the first place” (p. 102). He identifies three characteristics that define communities of practice: members are bound together by a sense of joint enterprise, members interact with one another and so create relationships of mutuality and trustfulness, communities of practice share a repertoire of common routines, language artefacts, tools and styles.

In later work (2000) Wenger writes “Communities of practice are the basic building blocks of a social learning system because they are the social ‘containers’ of the competencies that make up such a system. By participating in these communities, we define with each other what constitutes competence in a given field” (p229). He warns against the romanticising of communities of practice. He points out while “they are born of learning”, they can also “learn not to learn”. “They are the cradles of the human spirit,” he writes, “but they can also be its cages” (p230). The concepts of both the learning not to learn and learning are very relevant to my project.

The kind of learning that occurs within a community of practice, therefore, is not necessarily deliberate or agentic, and it may not be reflective. Wenger (2000) sees deliberate learning as a possible activity in a community of practice but not as a definition of its existence. He suggests that the mutual commitment in the community deepens when they take on “a learning agenda that pushes their practice further” (p. 232). While the concept of communities of practice, as proposed by Lave and Wenger, began as an organisational concept, more recent writers have applied the idea of a *learning community* directly to education, and reconceptualised it as a platform for deliberative, though to some extent improvisational, collaborative learning.

For example, Noble and Henderson (2008), reporting on their work with ‘at-risk’ teacher education students explore how learning agendas can be explored in a *learning circle* that enables teachers to come together and engage in critical reflection on their practice. They developed a learning circle to which the students brought images and stories about their university experiences. The development of relationships within the group and of connections

between the discourses of the university and those from their lives outside the university enabled the participants to develop a sense of agency and confidence in adapting their life skills to the university context. The learning circle became a safe non-judgemental space. “Initially, the ‘shut door’ metaphor, which they used to describe the calm they felt inside the meeting room, was their way of dealing with the disjuncture and discomfort that they felt between their lives inside and outside university,” Noble and Henderson write. “For these students, taking on the Discourse of university student was aided by their membership of the Learning Circle. They came to understand that they had individual rights as well as collective responsibilities, that they had a choice to participate (or not), and over time they developed a sense of belonging to the group” (p59).

Noble (2007) describes a project with early childhood education students and reports how a community of practice was *developed*, rather than occurred, with an agenda to engage students and staff in collaborative reflection in order to investigate practice and make connections with relevant theoretical frameworks. “Such an approach,” she writes, “is understood as *democracy in action*, as it encourages all views to be expressed and explores various merits. An effective learning circle can empower its members to act as they see fit, on the basis of the new knowledge that this process generates.” Because participants with different kinds of experience and knowledge are involved, and because the approach “allows opportunities to draw on the experiences and knowledge of all participants... the learning circle approach facilitates collaboration within the community and enhances student understanding of the importance of such community work” (p.136).

Riwai- Couch (2014) transposes the notion of learning communities to a Māori framework and reconfigures it as *puna kōrero*, springs of discussion and narrative. She studies sites of encounter between Māori and Ministry for the purposes of promoting Māori student success. She writes “A puna, as a living thing, is ever changing and a source of wellbeing for its community. Puna nurture life and are therefore full of potential, but also vulnerable to negative effects that require mitigation. Like the sites of investigation, the benefits of puna are often unknown, hidden or unappreciated in a wider context. The metaphor implies connection with people and place, including a spiritual connection with temporal and cultural applications. Puna korero as a concept builds on and provides a Māori paradigm that resonates with the Western paradigm of a community of practice” (p. 24). She constructs sites of the continuing negotiation as communities of practice because they reflect a complexity resulting from the different ways tribal groups will engage with schools for various purposes, and a relationship that “can only be determined over time, *kanohi-ki-te-kanohi* (face-to-face)” (p.25). Her findings are that a

community of practice approach is a viable way of achieving equity in education, because it caters to relationship building, it provides a forum for on-going discussion and shared planning, and it creates an opportunity for the development of a shared vision and monitoring of success.

She writes, “Evidence from the three puna kōrero highlight that educating a child in isolation from community is an antiquated belief that denies shared responsibilities. Communities of practice provide the opportunity for schools to increase [tribal and family] involvement in education. This allows for curricula to be enriched by local knowledge and histories, and students to receive an education more likely to affirm their identity, language and culture” (p.237-8).

Reflection on the review as a whole

This review of what I see as particularly relevant literature to my project pulls together a number of thematic strands: the findings of current research about education in Bangladesh, the premises on which I argue for a Bangladeshi and local community perspective for this research, and the range of conceptualisations of investigative approaches that speak to participatory learning, action research, reflective practice, praxis and learning communities. I acknowledge my review is illustrative rather than exhaustive. I also recognise that others might see other theorisations as useful. However, as stated in Chapter 1, I have made choices based on my current understanding of how best to privilege local Bangladeshi perspectives as well as to strategically select useful and compatible resources from international writings. As I finish reviewing this literature, I already begin to see other possibilities: this too is an aspect of action research.

Chapter 4: Context of the school and the community

Journey to the village of Gilabari

I would like to invite the reader to come with me on a bus trip returning to my village home from Dhaka to celebrate Eid with my parents, extended family, community people and relatives. Eid is one of the biggest festivals of the Muslim year. As a slightly privileged citizen I am travelling in a moderate intercity bus. When the bus is moving along the road I see many other people are returning home on bus roofs, on open trucks and on ox carts, holding their bags tightly in one hand and children in the other. As the bus moves I also see people are travelling in a train that is jam-packed inside the compartments as well as on the roof. Along with the general people, members of parliament, ministers and other influential people are also travelling, with special arrangements. The ministers and the members of parliament are returning home to celebrate Eid with their family and also to keep their public popularity alive for any upcoming election, while most of the general people are simply returning home to family and beloved community to celebrate Eid. This journey returning home reminds me how strongly people are still connected to their roots, to where they were born and grew up.

While we are all returning home, our parents are waiting at home with anxiety for our safe return, with excitement that they are going to meet their children after many months, and our school-going younger brothers and sisters are waiting with excitement to get their Eid gifts. When we reach home we forget the tiredness of our journey and become refreshed with the smile of our parents, brothers, sisters, and other community people. Of course there are many other complexities associated with this village and its community, originated from changing lifestyle, changing economy and changing social structure. There have been many changes shaped and structured by a capitalistic vision of life, imposed from above and moulding how people think, act, and speak. But this story of the journey home affirms that our relationship with our rural community is still defined by love and our moral and emotional attachment. It says that we still want to live with the happiness of our parents and community and we still want to live for each other. Besides looking forward the festivity of Eid, I was captivated during the journey by these underlying relationships. I want the reader to understand these relationships in order to understand the school where my project is set and the rural community that surrounds it.

Every community has its own history, culture, language, and traditions. In terms of history and culture and ways of being, every community is unique, different from the others, and situated in a specific context, but not separated from the outside world. Therefore, in my research I

understand the rural school where I worked with the teachers as a *place*, as something specific. It is situated in a specific context, but it is not separated or isolated from the rest of Bangladesh, or even the rest of the world. I relate the place of the rural school to its immediate community, people, belief, economy, history, aspirations and other social structures.

In explaining the context of this project I draw on my personal experience, interviews with local people and leaders of education development projects, documents defining national curriculum and constitution, as well as on national and international accounts of history and economy. I illustrate aspects of my description with photographs I have taken. I bring my own and other people's experience and thoughts as well as material from published sources to better explain the context.

The community

The Gilabari community is situated in the southern part of the northern district, Thakurgaon. The community is separated from the district town by an alpine river, locally known as Tangon, and the river passes by the community. The river becomes vibrant in the rainy season and dries up in winter. Gilabari is a low income rural community where agriculture is the life blood of the community. People's economic activity is heavily dependent on agriculture. It is really a big single community of around 500-600 people. If we consider the school catchment area, more than 30,000-50,000 people live in the greater community.

Most of the people in the community are Muslims, while 10-15% of the total population are Hindus. The people are culturally progressive and celebrate each other's religious festivals. In terms of agricultural activities the community is similar to many other rural communities. The people's oral language traditions make it different from others. The oral dialects of rural communities vary significantly from one district to another. A common feature of rural communities in the Thakurgaon district is that there is no hierarchy in the oral communicative language forms. Whereas Bangla has three different words for *you* depending on relationship, in the village we use only one: tui (তুই²¹-you). In the Gilabari community, people of the same age address each other by name, while how younger people address older people depends on relationship. Some common patterns are as follows: ma (mother), baba (father), chacha/kaka (uncle), chichi/kaki (auntie), dada/thakurda (grandfather), dadi/thakurma (grandmother), bhai (brother), bujan (sister) and so on. People welcome each other by saying assalamualykum

²¹ তুই -you

(আসলামুসালায়কুম²²) or adab (আদাব²³) or namaskar (নমস্কার²⁴) when they meet with each other. So the oral language tradition of the community sets a value system of mutual respect and love. I offer this detail of local dialect here to emphasise that while there are difference in religion and in some terms of speech, the community shares a common culture of strong intergenerational relationship.

The Gilabari community is connected with the rest of the region in terms of an agriculture based economy, and people come together to share agricultural knowledge, to sell agricultural products, to resolve community conflict and issues, to celebrate festivals and sometimes to discuss matters about the school and education. The community people go to the district town to buy specialised agricultural tools, for health care, and for shopping.

I heard from my grandmother that during 1940s people used to use banana leaves and bamboo made pens to write at school. This attests to the historical interest in education and literacy within the community. Considering this interest I want to look at the historical roots of teaching practices in Bangladesh. As Bangladesh was an integral part of a united India for many centuries, it is useful to look at the pedagogical principles of the ancient Indian education system preserved by cultural folklorists and later reported by Mookerji (1947).

According to Mookerji, ancient Indian educational tradition was completely informal and money had no place in the relationship between guru (teacher) and shisaya (student). The shisaya lived in the guru's house for a long time to discover and absorb the guru's secrets of efficiency and talent which cannot be taught in an artificial manner. In every way the shisaya was treated as a son. Therefore, the defining principle of teaching and learning in Indian educational culture was an intimate relationship. However, when I look into the tradition, I wonder how many ordinary Bangalis had the opportunity to become shiaya to a guru. Was this educational system accessible to all? Or was it an education system only for the privileged? I see two aspects to this ancient educational system. One is lore and another is fact. Perhaps the fact is that this education was favoured by the rich patrons. But the lore, the tradition that remains in the discourses of people, has the power of cultural value, and so could be significant for my project in terms of developing a learning community. Unfortunately this intimate relationship has evaporated from our

²² আসলামুসালায়কুম (Salam)-May ALLAH give you peace! It is an Islamic way of expressing greetings. It involves rising the right hand on the forehead with palm inwards.

²³ আদাব (Adab)-It's an Arabic word which means respect and politeness. In greater India Urdu speaking communities and Bangla speaking Muslims use the term to express greetings. But in Bangladesh mostly the Hindus use it to express greetings. It involves similar physical gesture as salam.

²⁴ নমস্কার (namaskar)-It is a traditional Indian gesture of greetings. It requires bringing the palms on chest and bowing when someone greets.

education system and a different culture has been introduced. Now we run behind money. It is an inevitable reality. We all need money to live a decent life. Now for better and higher education people send their children to the district town, divisional towns, and Dhaka. Educated people from the community either go to Dhaka or divisional towns to get jobs. Since 2000 there is a trend that after finishing school the younger generation go to Dhaka to get a job in the garments industry.

In Bangladesh the lowest unit of local government is the Union Council, which is an elected body. The Gilabari community is administered by such a union council. The body is responsible for different kinds of social and development work in the whole union²⁵. The head teacher of the school where I have worked is also the elected chairman of the union council. This is a rare occurrence and I appreciate how difficult it is for a single person to maintain both roles without compromising the moral and ethical responsibilities. It is not hard to understand how highly the community regards the head teacher, because of the way he balances both roles.

The teachers are the most respected persons in the community as they are seen to provide knowledge to the community children and create opportunity for a better future. People expect high moral and ethical character from the teachers, and expect economic advancement through the school and from education. I talked with a member of the community who has a grocery store in the local bazaar near the school. We started our discussion by exchanging salam and greetings and asking how agriculture and life were going. He told me that most of the agricultural products from the community sold in the wholesale market. A few of the local peasants sell different types of vegetables and cresses in the bazaar. Fish from the pond is available here throughout the year. Beef is available twice a week. In early morning and late afternoon the fisherman sell fish that they catch from the river. The quantity of river fish has decreased dramatically over the last two decades. He expressed his good opinion of the school, saying that it provides good education to the community children. He also said that since the establishment of the school people have become very conscious about their children's education. Now they send their children to school instead of sending them out to agricultural work. After finishing school over half of the students go to cities for further education. He wanted his children to be educated. He said that he encouraged his children to go to school but if his children would fail in education he would involve them in his grocery business.

I have never looked back into the community the way I am looking now. I have some thrilling memories from back in the 1980s regarding the area where the school is now situated. At that

²⁵ Union is a region which comprises several villages.

time there was no secondary school in the community. My own role in this community is shaped and informed by those early memories. I find myself revisiting my childhood to understand and connect the past to the present time's changing perspectives about life and education in the community.

History

The Gilabari community is part of the long historical legacy of Thakurgaon district. Though Thakurgaon is now a district of independent Bangladesh, as shown in Appendix 1-A, its historical location and its peoples' identity are rooted, as argued by Dey (2005), a local professor in Bangla literature in the greater historic Bengali territory of Pundravardhana²⁶. Dey urges us to understand who we, the people of Thakurgaon, are, through thousands years of connectedness to nature, soil and agriculture. Later through the influence of Islamic and British rule the people in the community lost much of their ancestral memories.

The immediate history of the community is rooted in the long standing struggle with agricultural production and in people's failure to receive fair value and respect for their sweat and labour. But the farmers never call a strike, *hortal*, in agricultural production. Along with thousands of rural communities they have become the animated slaves who supply food for the country. Through the on-going struggle with agricultural production the Gilabari community shapes and re-shapes its identity, life dreams and social and political aspirations.

The community is also part of many historical milestones in the political arena of Bangladesh. The key one is the liberation from 200 years of British rule and the division of united India into two separate countries: Pakistan and India. New-born Pakistan had two parts, West Pakistan and East Pakistan, geographically separated by 1300 miles. Considering language, history and culture, the moral and cultural distance between the two parts of Pakistan was much bigger than the geographic distance. Therefore, the joy of liberation lost its way in the political and social domination by the West Pakistani ruling class immediately afterwards. The West Pakistani ruling class tried to create a homogeneous national identity through language and tried to impose Urdu as a single state language for Pakistan. The East Pakistani people tried to resist the proposal and asked for Bangla to be declared as a main state language, though not the only one in order to

²⁶ Pundravardhana was a region located in north Bengal, what is now call Bangladesh. In ancient times the region was mentioned as home of the Pundra, a group of people had lived in the region who did not speak the languages of Indo-European family. But in some of the Vedic texts like Aitereya Aryanaka of 8th-7th century BC, the Pundra was explained as a group of non-Aryan people who lived east of the Sadanira River (Gandaki River). The Mahabharata also made a similar reference. In the 1st century AD, the land was mentioned as Pundravardhana for the first time in Ashokavadana.

respect the other languages of Pakistan such as Panjabi and Beluch. The proposal was rejected and the people started a language movement. Finally on 21st February, 1952, East Pakistani people achieved their language right after sacrificing many known and unknown lives. The situation then apparently became calm, but the seed of liberation from Pakistan was planted in the heart of the people through the language movement. Afterwards through many struggles and movements against social and political deprivation the people started the liberation war against the West Pakistani oppression in 1971, under the great leadership of Bongobondhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. After the nine month blood-shedding war our country became independent on 16 December, 1971, and new-born Bangladesh started its fresh journey. At the centre of the liberation war were people, and their key dreams were to liberate people from injustice, establishing equity and changing peoples' life condition.

Now, to understand peoples' on-going struggle, I invite the readers to travel with me again, on a bicycle from my village home to the school, Gilabari High.

Remembering the past and seeing the present

I was cycling slowly along a spiralling village road towards my research school. Sometimes the road passed through small villages and sometimes it passed across wide green glebe fields. This road connects people from different villages. It was also connecting me to my past memories. I was remembering my childhood stories. One layer of the stories is the scenic beauty and my personal excitement. But the dominant embodied stories are the timeless struggle of the people, living on all sides of the vast glebe lands, against poverty and the consequences of poverty. And the people did not give up fighting. In many occasions I passed through this road both at night and in broad daylight, walking or by bicycle. In the month of Ramadan I travelled across many villages in this area with some of my fellow villagers, both senior and junior, at midnight to wake people up for taking *sehri*, a late night meal, before fasting. We used to sing Islamic songs with a tin mini-mike to wake people up and collected money and rice. At the end of Ramadan we distributed those among poor people. We had learned that if we do this kind of welfare work, we might earn *neki*, Allah's blessings, and as a gift we might stay in heaven after death. We also enjoyed walking through the village together at night. Now I wonder how much change occurred in the lives of the poor with the amount of rice and money they got from the charity fund. Perhaps they just got one good meal. Afterwards starvation again became the reality in their lives. The prevalence and cruelty of poverty has reduced over time, but is still a considerable social phenomenon in the broader community.

Poverty is evident in the school, with its dirt floors and tin roofs that intensify the heat in classrooms. The heat is cruel to teachers and students, as an incident that occurred during the project illustrates.

It was examination time and one of the teachers came running out of a classroom where the examinations were in progress, shouting out in exasperation: “Oh! It is not possible to continue this profession in such a condition. I will quit teaching”.

He was sweating, and scratching his body. The day was scorching hot with high humidity; the tin shed of a classroom had become like an oven.

But the teacher did not give up. Nor did the students. After few minutes of exasperation, the teacher returned to his duty, continuing his invigilation. His exasperation and his return to the heat of the room exemplify both the hardship and people’s tenacity in a rural school.

As I mull over present day hardships I think back to other childhood memories. One early evening I came with some of my elderly village brothers to watch the surrender ceremony of some local robbers that had been arranged by the local police administration as part of a governmental rehabilitation programme. I can remember how excited and nervous I was! I was trying to make an image of the robbers as tall and brawny. All my speculations were tempered after seeing them in the flesh. They were neither tall nor brawny. A stage had been constructed for the ceremony and the field was brim full of local people. There was no electricity. The stage was lit up with a kerosene lantern. In the ceremony the gang leader explained why he and others in the gang became robbers. He said that poverty and unemployment pushed them to choose this path. When I look back, I understand the issue as a concern of good governance. I can remember how seriously the rural community was panicked by the robbers. I do not know whether those robbers came to a path of light from darkness, but robbery is now no longer a serious panic in the broader community. There are other much bigger concerns that hugely influence the future of living life. Another personal story will help to explain the complexity.

One winter morning I came to the river with my father for fishing. First we arrived at a village near the school where some of my father’s friends were waiting for us with a big net. We went together to the river and spent the whole day fishing and we caught a lot of fish. I still can remember the ample flow of water in the river in winter. In winter, spring and summer, river water was the main source of irrigation on both sides of the river bank. Now irrigation is heavily dependent on underground water and its use is increasing every year. Because of late or inadequate monsoon rain, even in the rainy season underground water is used for irrigation. And every year the water level is gradually going further down as suggested by news reports that I

heard and read. Now the river has almost dried up and fish have disappeared. This is not only the situation of this community but is repeated across the whole of Bangladesh. In the rainy season, if it rains heavily either in Bangladesh or in other side of Bangladesh's border, the river gets life only for few days. Another threat has evolved from the need for increased food supply for Bangladesh's growing population.

To meet the food demand, agricultural production has increased dramatically over the decades. At the same time, the use of hybrid seeds, chemical fertilisers, and chemical pesticides have also increased dramatically. As a result many insect and fish species have become extinct. The use of underground water for irrigation and use of chemical fertiliser and pesticides for higher crop yield have a sweeping effect on the ecology and on the social life of the community. The indigenous system of reserving seed has been replaced by importation from overseas. During the crop planting season and the harvesting season the price of seed, fertilizer, and produced crops are controlled by alliances of local and national big business partners. Therefore, the peasants, who live in a marginal economy, are trapped between production costs and the externally managed selling price of their crops. Very often unfavourable and unpredictable weather conditions hugely influence crop yields. And mostly, because of the unfavourable selling price of crops set by big business alliances, the marginally situated peasants lose capital, capacity, and interest for further investment in agriculture. As a result man of the the peasants have become agricultural day labours and the whole agricultural production system is controlled by local lenders. The great volume of production helps the lenders to cover any loss, and they have the ability to store crops until the price rises to a level from where they can make a significant profit.

Rural education is embedded in this situation, and the new form of feudalism in agriculture has influence on people's educational vision in the community. Of course we have to increase agricultural production, and it has indeed increased. And surely the wages of agricultural day labours have increased, but they are not adequate to live a good life. In such a complex situation many of the marginally situated peasants, agricultural day labours, and the local lenders send their children to school with a vision of bettering their lives.

I was thinking deeply about these things as I rode towards the school on my bicycle and trying to understand the changing condition that have already occurred in the community. I was thinking how we, as teachers, could make students insatiably curious about their classroom learning, so that they might become curious about their social life. But first it is important to know what students depict and dream about their education, school, learning and future.

In earlier times the road was rural and rustic. Now some part of the road is a kind of rural motorway and connected to the inter-district highway. The objective is to ensure faster marketing of rural agricultural products, and to enable people to travel fast. In my youth it was not in my wildest dream that a school would be established here, and that I would come to work in it with an aim of provoking change. The memories I have recounted come from 1980s. There was then a military regime in Bangladesh. Still the bucolic nature of the road has not been disrupted much. As I pedalled I was trying to make connections between past and present, and trying to locate myself in the present context. Who was I then? Who am I here, now? What am I going to do? And why I am going to do it? I was thinking excitedly about my project. Suddenly, I saw a framing tractor coming from the opposite direction. I stopped to give way because the road was narrow. Then I found two little school girls were coming behind me on bicycles. In my school days it was beyond imagination to ride a bicycle, because of poverty. Now it is a promising reality and a hope for better future, but the majority still come to school by walking. When the tractor passed away, I started moving again but slowly, so that the girls could come parallel to me and I started talking with one of them. It was a dialogue between two generations, and is further reported in Chapter 7.

Poetry and policy

As I think about how to bring change, I look back at what two great poets of Bangla literature, Rabindranath Thakur and Kazi Nazrul Islam, say. They urge us to rely on self-esteem and self-belief and to establish equity. The village is at the centre of Rabindranath's philosophy. In many of his writings he says that if we become able to awake our village, our country will awaken. And Rabindranath also argues that it is possible to awaken our country if we connect our children to the soil through education. The human being is at the centre of Nazrul's philosophy and he dreams to establish equity. In the poem *Nari* Nazrul considers the contribution of women in the progression of civilisation, so challenging his contemporary ideological norms:

বিশ্বের যা কিছু মহান সৃষ্টি চির কল্যাণকর (Whatever is great and everlastingly altruistic in this world), অর্ধেক তার করিয়াছে নারী , অর্ধেক তার নর। (half is accomplished by women, and half is by men). (Islam, 1925)

Both Rabindranath and Nazrul emphasise the need for collective participation in achieving self-belief and self-esteem and in establishing equity. But the question remains: is our education system supportive in manifesting self-esteem and self-belief? We need to look at the constitutional obligations regarding education as expressed in Articles 17, 28 and 41

(Bangladesh Government, 1999). These articles clearly reflect the very strong commitments of the state towards education. There is strong desire for inclusion, regardless of race, culture, gender and religion, and to produce motivated citizens who can meet the needs of society. In fact, the constitution says that schooling needs to include everybody and promotes everyone's equal participation in education, so that students from diverse backgrounds can feel that they belong to the country. These constitutional obligations are fully presented in appendix-1B.

National education policy and social aspiration

The national education policy of Bangladesh places strong emphasis on the development of a range of life skills (Bangladesh Ministry of Education, 2010). Policy documents ask for a range of life skills to be developed to achieve three broad categories of national educational goals. The first is that learners become aware of the principles of freedom, sovereignty, and integrity of Bangladesh and become rational and intellectually accomplished human beings with ethical perceptions. The second is valuing our own culture and history. The third is creating a strong position in the global market place that includes techno-scientific knowledge, creativity and innovation, skilled manpower for economic development.

Attainment of these national goals requires a high standard of literacy skills. These goals are also related to different kinds of citizenship skills, attitudes and competencies and thus consciously or unconsciously shape our aspirations and construct our society. So, according to the policy statements there is a connection between education and a deliberate process of social development. The aspirational terms of the policy underline a need for collective engagement and shared responsibility.

TQI, international monetarism, and teaching

In 2005 the Bangladesh Ministry of Education took an initiative to train secondary school teachers through the Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Project (TQI-SEP). The key goal of the project was to ensure quality secondary education by developing teachers' professional efficiency in classroom teaching. One of the main activities of the project was to provide Continuous Professional Development (CPD) training to more than two hundred thousand secondary school teachers. The main objective of TQI's CPD programme was to replace the *traditional way of teaching-learning* by introducing a *participatory approach*, which is also stated in the project document (Bangladesh Ministry of Education, 2005) as *student-centred teaching-learning*. The project was financed by the Government of Bangladesh, the

Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The project implementation period spanned April 2005 to 2012.

To promote a participatory teaching approach, a pool of around fifteen international consultants from Denmark, England, Finland, Sweden, New Zealand, Australia and Canada was deployed to develop CPD training manuals and a strategic plan for training activities. Fifteen national educational consultants were also partnered with the international educational experts in developing the training plan. The training project supposedly started a transition from a view that saw teachers as sole keepers of knowledge to one sees them as learning partners of their students. But the question is: how does such a vision align with teachers' own values? How much opportunity had been given in CPD training to enable teachers to create a space where they can negotiate, agree, disagree, translate, align and critique participatory teaching-learning in their localised context, and create something useful? To understand the background better I talked with two leaders in the TQI project and two teacher educators who had been involved in the TQI's professional development programmes.

Mr Islam had been working in the TQI project since its inception and continued till the end of 2011, and Mr Rahim joined the project team mid-way. Mr Islam is a professional administrator while Mr Rahim is an Associate Professor in Political Science, so they are indicative of the two different communities of practice who compose the leadership of TQI. As a result of being involved in the implementation process of the TQI project for a long time they have developed a passion for teacher education especially for a participatory approach to teaching and learning. I also talked with Mr Rahman, a retired Professor in Education at the Institute of Education and Research, University of Dhaka, and with Mr Riyad, an Assistant Professor in Education at the Government Teachers Training College, Dhaka, Bangladesh. The professional area of interest of both was curriculum and teaching and learning. Moreover, Mr Rahman was the chairman of recent Bangladesh Secondary School Curriculum Review Committee.

Because these four people had prolonged and nationwide experience in working with teacher development, I wanted their views on the process of change. I asked Mr Rahim to what extent, in his experience we can change in how teachers enact their roles. I especially asked him how he saw teachers' role in terms of openness to students and care for their learning needs. I talked about the love that had traditionally been seen as part of the teacher-student relationship. He paused, and then said, "What you are saying is not perfectly possible now. Now it may not be possible to impose those values in the same way." I asked why not.

He argued, with a sense of regret that commercialism had come into education in the same way as it had into other aspects of society. He recalled his own schooling and the deep engagement he had seen in some of his own teachers with the success of their students, and the resulting devotion of the students. He was concerned that students now look on their teachers more “commercially”, expecting to be given specific content to memorise for the examinations that they need to pass in order to further their education or gain employment. He saw this as a loss as he believed teachers’ responsibility was not limited to teaching what was in the textbooks. “There’s much to learn from outside books,” he said. “It’s not possible without intimacy.” When I asked what he thought research could contribute to developing a participatory relationship between teachers and students, he suggested that it needs to focus on developing teachers’ awareness of the difference they can make to learning. He talked about the current national interest in multimedia-enabled classrooms, and argued that “there is no greater multimedia in the world than a teacher’s intellect, volition, or brain” and that, while some use of multimedia can be useful, the physical presence and action of a teacher is the most effective classroom tool. “Students learn from teachers’ body language, dress, style of speech, waving of hands, walking, and from everything,” he said. “Students follow these.” He affirmed the need for research that would examine teachers’ understandings of how their work can empower student learning.

Mr Islam discussed the need for strong institutional support systems to maintain teachers’ motivation and to ensure that the interventions created by the training programmes would be sustainable. He argued that, as well as training directives, more interaction and dialogue were needed. He also saw need to introduce processes of supportive monitoring or supervision from professionals. He explained that the TQI project, with the professional help from Teachers Training Colleges had started supportive monitoring and mentoring at school level, but there was still need to consolidate this process and expand the systems of supportive mentoring so that they operated throughout the DSHE²⁷’s field level education offices. Parallel to the professional support systems he emphasised the importance of attracting good teachers into the profession, and argued for increases in salary and other facilities that would make teaching a career of choice.

Both Mr Rahman and Mr Riyad emphasised the need for continuous negotiation with the practical realities within which teachers work and develop their roles and values. Mr Rahman talked about the need to continuously evaluate the relevance of textbooks and curriculum documents. “Formulating new curriculum and sending textbooks to schools is not enough,” he said. He stressed the need to know how teachers dealt with implementing the curriculum, and

²⁷ DSHE is the Department of Secondary and Higher Education

suggested research could examine their practices and their needs. In this way the curriculum designers and textbook writers could identify what was not working and what they needed to revise or change. Only in this way could useful intervention be designed for schools and teachers. “I understand curriculum as planning (*porikolpona*, in Bangla) of education,” he said. “Between planning and implementation, *pori* (plan) will fly away and only *kolpona* (imagination) will remain as it is, if we do not reflect carefully in each step of curriculum implementation.”

The points made by these four educational leaders highlight national aspirations of improving teaching as well as recognising some of the gaps between aspiration and current practice. The following sections further examine aspects of current educational conditions and practices in Bangladesh.

The national educational context

National statistics reveal that in 2014 there were 19684 secondary institutions in Bangladesh, with 9.16 million students. The numbers involved make school improvement a massive task, particularly in a country that is placed among the poorer countries of the world and that has been dependent on international loans and international consultants. 77% of these institutions were located in rural areas, 69% of teachers were working in the rural institutions, and 71% of students were studying in rural institutions (BANBEIS 2015). Therefore it is clear that what happens in rural schools is significant to education within the country as a whole.

While most education takes place in rural contexts, there is a worrying gap in achievement in between rural and urban schools. Alamgir’s report (2015) on 2015 secondary school certificate (SSC) exam results suggests that only 5 rural secondary schools found their places in the list of top 80 schools nationwide. Three of the significant selection criteria for top ranked schools were pass rate, number of highest grade point 5 scores, and average GPA²⁸. Habib’s report (2011) on 2011 SSC exam results reveals the similar trend in gap between urban and rural students. In 2011 most of the students who failed in the SSC exam were from the rural areas. According to BANBEIS (2012) report, in 2009 drop out from secondary education in urban areas was 38.37% and in rural areas it was 60.58%. Another BANBAIS (2015) report suggests that over the years the dropout rate has decreased but the average dropout-41.59% in 2014 is still a big concern for Bangladesh secondary education.

²⁸ GPA-grade point average

A survey conducted in 2011 (BANBEIS, 2012) revealed that 62.5% students go for private tutoring to develop better subject knowledge and 56.8% students spent 3000 to 6000 taka per month for private tutoring. The key thing to consider from the report is that there is a parallel system of rote learning outside the school. Earlier (Alam, 2011) I have explored how the main aim of private coaching is to enable the students to be able to do well in examinations. But in a rural context most of the students' families cannot afford to buy knowledge from private coaching. School is the only place for many of them to learn and achieve the skills needed for passing the examination. This situation is creating an urban-rural gap in educational achievement. In most cases teachers are involved in private coaching. This involvement impacts the teacher-student relationship in the classroom. Why are the teachers involved in private coaching when they are expected to be fully engaged in their professional responsibility? Part of the answer is that the salary they get is not adequate to live a decent life. Therefore, they are forced to sacrifice part of their ethical responsibility to meet the cost of living. And the other part of the answer may in some cases be an expectation of getting an affluent lifestyle, based on what the current economic structure offers many others in the society. Teachers might question why only they should live with deprivation. So all these factors are shaping and reshaping the teachers' professional identity, and teachers' sense of the pride of teaching is becoming threatened.

The honourable Education Minister has expressed his deep concern regarding the dangers of private tuition in the National Education Policy-2010 (Bangladesh Ministry of Education, 2010) document which has been approved in the national parliament, noting:

Classroom teaching-learning needs to be completely successful. We have to liberate students from the unexpected danger of note-booklet and private tuition (p.6).

However, the honourable Minister did not indicate a way to make classroom teaching and learning successful.

I used the term *buy knowledge* in describing the prevalence of private tutoring, suggesting that families can purchase units of knowledge that are needed for students' educational success. This kind of thinking relates to two problematic issues in Bangladeshi education: the dominance of the examination system and the pervasiveness of transmission modes of teaching with resulting practices of memorisation by students.

Secondary education revolves around achievement in national examinations. School results are widely published in newspapers, electronic media and government reports, and school reputations are almost entirely founded on examination results, as is evidenced in a teachers'

discussion that I report in Chapter 5. Top grades in examinations are essential for progress into higher education and for gaining employment so inevitably parents and students, as well as teachers, regard examination success as a principal goal of schooling. However, the nature of the examinations is also problematic. As is detailed in the UNESCO report (2011), cited in the previous chapter, there is little match between the curriculum goals and advocated student-centred approaches and the questions in the examination. What is tested is mainly the ability to memorise and recall facts and information. In recent years a so-called *creative question* has been introduced into examinations but teachers nationwide report confusion about what is expected and instead of a chance in teaching practice there is a visible increase in the sale of commercial guidebooks that offer a series of alternative, memorisable and slightly variable, answers to the creative question. The gap between examination success and ability to reason and interpret is shown by the fact that over three-quarters of those who gain the top grade in the national school examination fail to attain the required minimum marks in tests for university admission (Prothom Alo, 2014).

The reliance on memorisation that is rewarded in examinations is also the dominant learning strategy in classrooms and it is matched by an approach to teaching that relies on transmission of the material in the textbook, particularly that which is expected to be examined. The result, as also indicated in the UNESCO report is a lack of processes to develop interpretive, questioning and reasoning skills. While there is considerable criticism in the literature, as reported in the previous chapter, of failure to teach English in a way that leads to the development of effective communication skills, there is also perhaps reason to question whether these skills are taught in Bangla. National statistics show the yearly increase in literacy (BANBAIS, 2015). However, literacy in these statistics is considered in terms of decoding and encoding of text, and ability to retrieve and write down information. It is an observation widely expressed by my Bangladeshi colleagues in education, and my colleagues in doctoral study, that as a country we are still failing to teach the more complex skills of literacy: the ability to express ideas in writing, to construct consecutive narratives, to develop a logical progression of ideas, to extract key ideas, to synthesise, to compare and to critique. I do not want to suggest that this failure is absolute or that it occurs in every school or in the practice of every teacher. I want to acknowledge, however, that this is the educational background in which my study takes place. It is also the situation that national policy seeks to change and that the TQI project has addressed in its training programmes.

The following two images illustrate the dominant teaching style and the initiatives taken to change it.



Images4.1 &4.2: Teaching-learning in urban schools, Source: TQI photo gallery

The first photo shows a class attentively listening to a teacher who holds up a flower to illustrate a point. The students are expected to develop knowledge by listening to what the teacher says and seeing what she shows. This is transmission teaching. In the second photo the students are exploring a science concept by doing something in groups and seem to be actively engaged. Perhaps the teacher, outside the focus of the photo, gave an initial instruction and then the students had the opportunity to explore something themselves. It is likely that this kind of learning can make the students curious. While the practice in the first photo is still the dominant one, teachers are being encouraged and to some extent trained to try out the kind of teaching strategies illustrated in the second photo. However, perhaps such little shifts are more apparent in urban than in rural schools.

The following two photos show how different rural classrooms are.



Images4.3 & 4.4: Teaching-learning in a rural school. Source: My collection, 2009

Unlike the first photo the classrooms are small, bare and poorly equipped. Like the first photo the students are looking to the teacher for instruction. In both cases teaching and learning is dominated by transmission. The difference between the two settings is that the only resource in

the rural classroom is the teacher and the government issued textbooks. Furthermore, in the urban areas there is a strong network of private coaching, while in the rural schools the classroom is the only place where most of the students can learn.

Thus rural schools operate within the same curriculum and examination context as urban schools with similar habits of instruction, but with fewer resources. The community of the school I worked in has been described earlier and the macro-context has been explained in that section. The school itself with its teachers and students are described next.

Visit to a head teachers' cluster meeting

At the end of my first meeting with the head teacher of my research school he invited me to attend the local cluster meeting his school would be hosting. In a cluster meeting a number of head teachers sit together once in a month and discuss different school issues in the presence of a district education officer, an academic supervisor and some other officers. The head teacher told me I would get an opportunity to talk in person with eighteen different head teachers. He suggested that would enrich my understanding of the rural context.

Accordingly I arrived on 4th April and saw almost all the head teachers of the cluster had arrived. The head teacher of my research school introduced me to the other head teachers and the district educational officers. The academic supervisor started the meeting. She asked the head teachers: "Do you maintain the head teacher register"? The head teacher register is a kind of diary where records of whole school's academic and administrative activities are to be kept in various prescribed formats. The register is supplied to each head teacher by the Secondary Education Sector Development Project. Head teachers are asked to observe classroom teaching and keep records of teachers' performance according to various indicators. The academic supervisor's role is to monitor and assist the head teachers to maintain the register. Her second question was: "Did you monitor whether your teachers maintained their teachers' diaries"? The teacher's diary is a book where the teachers are asked to write down their lesson plan. Most of the head teachers were not listening to her attentively. One head teacher replied, "We and our teachers are a bit reluctant to keep records in the register and diary. If you give us an administrative order and visit the school regularly then we can force our teachers to keep records." Another of her questions was: "Did you observe your teachers during teaching-learning"? All became silent. One head teacher broke the silence and said: "Yes, I observed. When I found any problem I visited that class again on the following day". At this point I asked the head teacher: "Did you give any

feedback to that teacher”? He replied: “No, the teacher can be offended and I cannot give feedback publicly”. The above exchange indicates cursory engagement between different educational bodies and the perfunctory nature of monitoring. To me it confirmed what Mr Islam had said about the need to develop supportive professional monitoring at the field level as well as in training programmes.

As the discussion continued I asked what the main challenge in each school was right now. Replies included comments like the following:

The salary we get is not enough to run a family. We try to earn extra money from agriculture or from business. That is why we fail to concentrate on our role as a head teacher.

We fail to recruit quality teachers because of the school managing committee. When we try to do something new, the SMC restrict us and create political pressure.

In my school the main problem is lack of infrastructure. When I divide the science and arts group students, I fail to provide any classroom to one group. My teachers take classes in the open air.

Surprisingly, I found that the meeting was proceeding without any specific agenda. The participants in the meeting were just describing what had been happening. The hosting head teacher expressed his aspiration for development and change. But there was no discussion on a clear strategy to create change. None of them brought any academic experience from the last month to share and to debate.

The school

The school with which I worked is a relatively new secondary school, established in 1994. Although in Bangladesh this type of school is known as private, the full amount of the teachers’ and the other staff’s salaries are given by the government after every three months through a pay order. Besides salary, the government develops the basic infrastructure, provides free textbooks for all students, resources, professional development training, and a stipend for the girl students.

The school is situated in the richly beautiful natural environment of a rural village. A curving village road passes by the west boundary wall of the school. Different kinds of evergreen forest and fruit trees are seen on both sides of the road. And beyond these roadside trees the whole west side is spread out in green paddy fields until vision stops at the horizon. There are some small village cottages, a husking mill, a government primary school and a village bazaar to the south,

south-west and south-east sides of the school. The alpine river, Tangon, flows from north to south on the east of the school. A wide passage in the middle of the west boundary wall welcomes visitors, teachers and students to enter the school ground. The school grounds are covered by green grasses. There are two school buildings: one north-facing tin shed academic building at the south end and another south-facing academic and administrative building at the north end of the school grounds. Next to the east wall of this building there is a cycle stand for the teachers, and a tube-well (manual water pump). At the east corner of the school ground there is an open tin-roofed cycle stand for the students. The following photos, from my own collection, show the physical aspect of the school.



Image 4.5: The school grounds.



Image 4.6: The surrounding fields

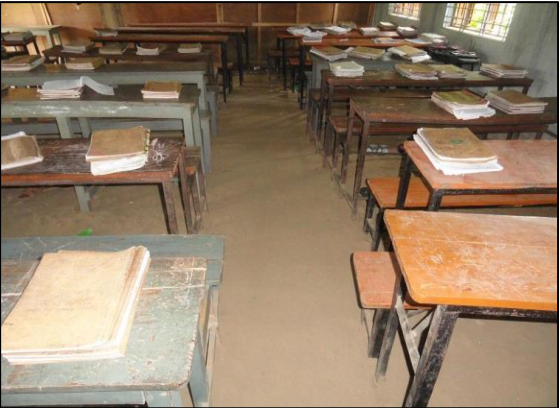


Image 4.7 & 4.8: Two classrooms in the tin shed building.

There are three rooms in the combined academic-administrative building. Two rooms are used for teaching and the room on the east side is used as the teachers' common room and the head teacher's office. All rooms are equal in size but inadequate to accommodate more than thirty students for teaching and learning. The room on the east side is divided by three wooden cupboards, to create the head teacher's office and a very small space for the administrative support officer. The rest of the room is used as the teachers' common room. There is a big wooden round table at the centre of the room at which every teacher has a fixed space to sit. In front of every teacher I saw pile of textbooks and guide books in their respective subject areas. After accommodating file cabinets and an almirah very small apace is left for natural movement by the teachers, but this is quite normal in a rural school. So this is the space where the teachers sit, talk and perhaps sometimes argue about what makes a school well reputed, and here I spent six months with the teachers.

The students come to learn Bangla, English, Social Science, History, Math, Science, and ICT. The school starts everyday with assembly where all the students and the teachers are gathered together. The students do some light exercises and afterwards they take the oath of allegiance and sing the national anthem together. After the assembly the students go to their respective classrooms. The following images show the assembly.



Image 4.9: Students are doing light physical exercise.



Image 4.10: Students are showing respect to the national flag



Image 4.11: Students are taking the oath.

The most encouraging thing for me about the school is the increasing number of female students in the school. It means that there is already a profound awareness in the community that our daughters need to be educated to be part of creating a peaceful and prosperous society. The increased girls' turnout in schooling is contributing to women's empowerment in our society. When I attended the assembly, the discipline and the humble behaviour of the students were another encouraging point to me. The school feels proud of the etiquette, manners and discipline of its students. But obviously in the classroom the school need to create a space where the students can go beyond humbleness in raising questions and to becoming curious of their immediate life and learning.

In terms of total students and teachers this is a medium size school. The table below shows the total number students in the school in 2013.

Grade/Class (Year)	Students Enrolment in 2013		Total number of Students
	Girls	Boys	
Grade-6 (Yr: 11-12)	31	50	81
Grade-7 (Yr: 12-13)	46	35	81
Grade-8 (Yr: 13-14)	30	32	62
Grade-9 (Science Group) (Yr: 14-15)	32	12	88
Grade-9 (Humanities Group) (Yr: 14-15)	29	15	
Grade-10 (Science Group) (Yr: 15-16)	06	12	48
Grade-10 (Humanities Group) (Yr: 15-16)	21	09	
Total	195	165	360

Table 4.1 School Register 2013

The table suggests that there are more students in the lower grades where much careful attention is needed to create a solid foundation for students' learning. From my own experience I can say that the higher student numbers in lower grades creates an unresolved pressure for the teachers. However, the average teacher-student ratio is around 1:29 which seems manageable for effective students' engagement in learning, especially in higher grade classes. The total number of staff in the school is 17.

Teachers' profiles and the school routine are given in appendices 1C & 1D. The school routine suggests that the total numbers of teaching sessions per week are manageable, but teachers need to have a differentiated focus when they teach different subjects in various classes. This changing focus perhaps makes it harder for the teachers to trial alternative teaching approaches. Besides teaching, most of the teachers also have the role of class teacher. As a class teacher they need to keep all the student records for the internal school examination and for registration in the

public examination. Sometimes the class teachers need to do volumes of paperwork. The teachers are also involved in different management committees, such as the examination operation committee, the sports committee, and the cultural activities committee. The extra roles put the teachers under pressure and may cause them to sacrifice their academic performance. The school routine indicates that the school administrator and the assistant librarian are also involved in teaching and learning, besides their designated roles. Since inception the school's approaches to curriculum have been heavily shaped by the high demand of passing examinations. The recent five years SSC examination results suggest that the school has already achieved good academic progress in achieving an above average pass rate, though there are some ups and downs. The table that shows the school's academic achievement in SSC examination is given in appendix-1E.

However, vulnerable economic conditions and the resultant impact of poverty in parts of the community mean that teachers have little energy left for shifting the focus from passing examinations to examining what else might be involved in academic excellence. From around 2006-2007, after getting professional development training on leadership and participatory teaching and learning from the government initiated TQI project, the school has just slowly started to think differently about its teaching approaches and about its approaches to the whole school curriculum. Even after getting training from the government project, the teachers were still struggling to apply theory from the training to their practice.

The teachers

The head teacher, most of the teachers, the school administrator, and the administration support staff in the school are from the community. Before 1994 there was no school in the community. During the 1990s many of the teachers either had graduated or were just about to do so. Those who had graduated were frustrated at not being able to get a job in either the public or private sector. Job opportunity was less than the number of graduates. At that time the head teacher took the initiative to establish a school in the community. The teachers responded to the head teacher's call and they together built the school. In the initial stage the teachers sacrificed their land, labour and money for the school. The motivation behind the sacrifices was to get a job in the school and contribute to the development of the community. After giving four years of free teaching service the teachers started to get a salary from the government in 1998. So they have a strong feeling for and pride in the school as they had built it with their own hands and had served for four years without any remuneration. This account suggests that the teachers initially joined

the teaching profession because they had little other option. Over the period of ten to fourteen years their salary has increased, though it is still not adequate in terms of life realities. They have received professional development training and converted what was a chance opportunity into a professional choice.

Almost all of the teachers have started living in the district town. The objective was twofold. The first was to give their children opportunity to get admission to the district government boys' or girls' high schools. The second was to earn some extra money by getting involved in private coaching after school hours. From my informal initial talks with the teachers I knew that the teachers were successful in achieving both objectives. Moreover, many of the teachers were also involved in seasonal agriculture as their base was still in the community. Apart from any personal life complexities, these big but different focuses in life shape the professional identity and ethics of the teachers. This shifting focus hugely impacts classroom teaching and learning and the on-going teacher-student relationship. In such a context there might be a very limited desire to work for change and to work for developing students' curiosity. At the end of first meeting, when I was returning home with him, a teacher told me about his frustration with the low salary.

Since nobody is with us, now I can tell you something. When the present government took leadership, the education minister promised to declare a separate pay scale for the teachers. After four and half years he is now saying that it's not possible to increase the salary. We, the teachers, remain in same position. My head teacher requests us to come to school every day with good dress and a clean shave. But no one wants to understand that we need money to buy shaving cream. I really appreciate your comment when you say that you will not impose anything on us, but rather you will adapt with us. I'm sorry if I hurt you, but this is reality.

The students

As a teacher, I have some knowledge about the student population in the schools of rural communities in Bangladesh. The students come mainly from peasant families and most of them cannot come to school in the peak time of crop seeding and reaping. Many of the students who have a very low socio-economic background enter high school with relatively weak literacy skills. School is a place where they come to learn liberal progressive ideas, math, science, as well as English language. Probably many of them do not get any chance to relate their learning from school to their daily experiences back home in their community. I first met the students in this

school in the school assembly. The school assembly had started when I first arrived. A student recited from the Holy Quran. Another student recited from the Holy Gita. After that a student prompted the oath. It said: "I will tell truth in all my life. I will involve myself in local and national development. I will maintain national unity and solidarity. Oh Provu (ALLAH/God) give me the courage and strength so that I become able to fulfil my oath." The oath contains a strong sense of nationalism, patriotism and citizenship. When the students took the oath together, the combined sound created a strong musical resonance that touched my mind and heart. I observed the bare feet of the students, their clothes, and thought that most probably many of them can hardly manage a school uniform and many of them have no capacity to buy footwear. I looked back to my school life when I was leading this kind of oath-taking session in assembly. After the oath the students sang the national anthem together. It was an amazing and emotional moment for me. I was hearing harmonics from the past. At the end the head teacher hoisted the national flag and the students saluted it. And then the assembly was over and the students returned to their respective classrooms.

I went to the school every day. One day early in the project I met a boy who also was going to the school. He was also riding a bicycle. I asked him to come parallel to me. We cycled slowly and talked.

Me: What is your future plan? What do you want to do in future after completing your education?

Student: I have not thought yet. Right now I am continuing with schooling, let's see what happens.

Me: Don't you have any thinking in your mind?

Student: Yes, I have.

Me: What is that?

Student: I want to make my parents happy after finishing my education.

Me: How do you want to do that?

Student: My parents want me to get involved in business after completing education.

Me: Do you want to do the same thing?

Student: Yes, I want to work according to the desire of my parents.

Me: Do you want to know about me?

Student: Yes sir, I have been observing that for few days you are coming to our school every day and going back after spending time with the teachers. But you did not come to our classroom.

Me: I will come soon.

Later I got an opportunity to talk with many students and found that the students have differing aspirations and perspectives about education and their future life. Many of them want to be a doctor, engineer, lawyer, or teacher. From my talking with the students one common trend I identified was that all of the students expressed a selfless dedication to make their parents, families and fellow community people happy. They expressed their deep concern about the condition of rural poverty and they wanted to make a difference after completing their education. Perhaps many of the students argue with their parents about their future life vision, but publicly they are obedient and submissive. At the same time the students have a natural curiosity towards something new. When the student with whom I talked was given the opportunity, he asked me why I had not visited their classroom yet. This natural curiosity has implications for the teachers' professional practice and for the project.

The school management committee

The Bangladesh Ministry of Education mandates School Management Committees (SMC) for secondary schools under the Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Board (Bangladesh Ministry of Education, 2009). The composition of the SMC is given in appendix-1F.

The tenure of a SMC is two years from the date of first meeting. In every three months one SMC meeting should be held. The roles and responsibilities of the SMC include leadership of the school, supervising financial and administrative management, taking appropriate initiatives and action to ensure quality of education, maintaining discipline, and maintenance of resources (Bangladesh Ministry of Education, 2009). As a member secretary of the SMC the head teacher is responsible to prepare an annual academic plan, school budget, teacher and staff recruitment proposal, promotion proposal, and a school development plan. Any recruitment proposal or development plan needs to be approved by the SMC before getting final approval from the MoE. The key objective of the SMC's roles and responsibilities is to lead the school to achieve academic excellence. While in some schools the relationship between the head teacher and the other SMC members is confrontational, in the school where I have worked the relationship was good.

In the second day of my work with the teachers one of the SMC members drew my attention from inside a tea stall. The tea stall was situated in the corner of a cross section of two village roads in the midst of vast agricultural lands full of green paddy plants. Rural people normally take rest in this kind of tea stalls and get refreshed with tea and cookies. In some cases local people just pass time there and discuss national and local politics, agriculture, local social issues, and many aspects of rural life that influence their lives. I stopped and went inside. I found that the SMC member was no one other than Mahin da²⁹. Mahin da was one year senior to me when we were studying in a same school, Madarganj High. We talked with each other in our local colloquial language. Mahin da offered me tea. He told me that he was happy that I had returned from overseas to work with a remote school in the greater community. He was happy with the overall performance of the school, but at the same time he also gently expressed his concern about the teachers' professional identity and professional development. As a senior brother, in our traditional way, he asked me to think about some aspects of teaching as a profession and helping students to relate learning with real life. In our discussion he expressed his vision about knowledge, teaching and learning:

When you give your treasures to the others it decreases but when you give your educational treasure to the others it becomes sharper and deeper. As a teacher I do not just do my job, I do teaching. Teaching is not just getting the salary. As a teacher I need to think how students can relate learning with their real life.

The head teacher

When I phoned to the head teacher to set a time and date for talking about my project, his first response was: "Hi Safayet, how are you and when did you come back from overseas?" I replied to his questions and understood that he knew about my overseas experience. After finishing initial greetings and when I had explained my intention to work in his school, he became very happy and said: "You are most welcome". After that, without giving me any chance to refuse, he invited me to his house after magreb prayer (7p.m.) to take dinner and discuss my project in person. I accepted his invitation and saw this as an opportunity to develop a respectful relationship and understand his educational vision.

I arrived at his home in due time and saw that he was in the middle of a meeting with some other people. I was welcomed warmly and requested to sit inside his drawing room until he finished. He then took me straight way to the dinner table where we started our conversation. I

²⁹ Da means brother

explained the purpose of my project clearly, saying: “I want to work with some of your teachers to develop teaching and learning approaches in the classroom”. He replied:

I have already talked to my teachers about your intention on the basis of our telephonic discussion and every teacher wants to work with you. You will become very happy when you start working with the teachers, because they are very keen to learn something new. They are young and energetic. You have taken a wise decision to work with my school, because we know you well. It’s my pleasure that you choose my school. My school is in a backward place. I want to develop my school as a best one in the district.

His response clearly indicated his pride about his teachers and school and also his level of expectation. I tried to make clear that I was not only the knowledgeable person. I also wanted to learn from the teachers. He said: “Safayet, imagine that they know nothing, but they have the thrust to learn and they will support you”. Promise of energy and intention of learning new ideas was a positive sign. Throughout the research process the head teacher, the teachers, the students, and I as a co-researcher tried to walk together to find some small cogs that helped us to evolve as family. In the following chapters I will discuss the experiences that enabled us to accomplish our journey.

After the dinner he requested me to watch a video of the sports and cultural festival of his school in 2012 and said firmly: “You will like it!” It was indeed amazing. He had invited almost all the head teachers of the schools in the locality, and local political leaders, a doctor, now famous in Bangladesh, who was from our greater community and who had achieved success through education. He acknowledged the academically successful graduates from his school, some of them are now studying in medical colleges and public universities. The school field was full of an audience from the local community. He had arranged a colourful cultural display with strong participation of both the boys and girls students of his school. The cultural display was a dance composition with folk songs that explain life in rural and hilly areas. The dance performance was an example of what students from a rural school can do, and it impressed me for two reasons. One reason is that it was evidence that a rural school can do things differently and represent itself positively if it gets chance. The second is that it made me think that with effort we could get more than dance from the students of this school. I believe that the Bangladeshi villages are still the unexplored places of our national advancement and solidarity. Perhaps those controlling policy, power and economy just need to listen to them with care and love.

In his speech at the festival the head teacher had said: “I want to educate my students in a way so that they can become doctors, engineers, agriculturists and teachers. I want to bring change in

my school and in the community. I want the school to be symbol of change and development for the community”. I thought this was a very good beginning. The most encouraging thing for me was his sense of pride about his school and his eagerness to bring positive change.

Throughout our discussion the head teacher increasingly showed his vision to create an interactive community in his school. His aim was to create a culture in which teachers and students could see themselves as each other’s learning friends. He explained:

When children enter the school boundary we need to accept them as our own children. Throughout the school period, we need to put our effort to change their conditions. We need to help them so that their enthusiasm and inspiration can evolve. It becomes easy when we do work collectively. If someone thinks alone, he or she may end up with nothing. This is not wise. We should share together to make our students courageous.

His desire for collective engagement opened the door to the project.

The project and place

Place has an important role in understanding the context of this study. The school and the community which I entered are situated in social and physical conditions, in history, values, and external influences. This chapter has sought to suggest the intricacy of relationships and imposed demands in which teachers carry out their practice. The experiential and interactional features of the context suggest that the people in the community have their own sense of respect, aspirations about education, and communal solidarity. As I described the context and recalled my own experiences I become appreciative of my own experiential situatedness and how I place myself between the university, the community, the school, and my early childhood memories in the community. As I ground my research in the context, I hope to help readers also understand the content and so challenge any expectation of homogeneity that might swirl down through external, globally accepted, discourses. As I draw together the elements of place and space that locate this project I place the local people’s understandings, those of students, teachers, SMC, head teacher and community, at the centre of this study. I also affirm the value of the community’s existing knowledges as the basis from which to explore students’ educational needs and to develop new knowledge. In this way I hope to acknowledge existing capacity and draw on it to build further capacity.

Chapter 5: Beginning the project

A move from the university into the field

Although I began my doctoral journey with the intention to work on teacher development in the rural Bangladeshi school in my own village community, my research started in an academic environment at the University of Canterbury, far away from the people and the context. My initial vision was to evolve the teaching team in the school as a learning community and so to bring change to teaching approaches in the school through collective participation of the teachers in the research process. But the vision partially fell apart as I was mapping the plan for change from outside and separated from the school context. Though I was part of my rural community, I was not fully conscious of people's changing perspectives about life and education. I had planned my project according to western theories of learning and western models of participatory action research, with advice that came from a predominantly western knowledge base that had been tempered by some knowledge on the part of student colleagues and academic staff about the Bangladesh education system and the rural context. I was nervous when I started working with the teachers in the real context. I knew that the teachers had to shape the direction of the project to achieve agency, but I found it hard to apply my theoretical knowledge in the real situation. What I perceived as the fundamental methodological principles of participatory action research made me feel vulnerable about my role and responsibility. I was worried about how to begin and how to ensure a collective start to the project. Lots of unrestrained thinking and questions came into my mind while I was travelling to the school to start work formally. I was worried about how I could explain my project focus, goal, and purpose simply to the teachers. How could I explain simply to the teachers how they should be involved in the project? How could I direct their enthusiasm and initial energy to the key focus of the research? Should I start with observations of teaching, or should I negotiate a starting point through the teachers' natural interest as it emerged from discussion? How could I ensure the teachers' engagement and how could I develop a sense of ownership within the project? How could I gain the teachers' trust and develop a good working relationship on the basis of mutual trust and respect?

I also worried about how to manage the balance between using participatory action research as an instrument for collecting data as well as considering the progress and shifts in the participatory process as an integral part of my data. I was still unsure about how to treat the participatory action research process as a form of data and how I could capture the changing perspectives of the teachers.

This chapter reports the beginning of the project in the school. It describes my own initial expectations and fears, the attitudes of the head teacher and the teachers, and the way I looked for a way to ground and initiate professional dialogues. It then reports two sets of dialogues, discussions about the participants' reasons for entering the teaching profession and the debrief after our first joint observation of a lesson. Both signpost the professional and contextual difficulties within which teachers worked, and their intrinsic motivation to be effective teachers and to explore what they could do to improve their practice. Finally the chapter recapitulates the issues that emerged, relates our progress to a model of participatory action research and to the concept of learning communities, and seeks to align what occurred in this first stage with a Bangladeshi conceptual framework.

My role at the beginning of the project

The head teacher, majority of the teachers and two of the administration staff of the school was known to me from my school life. The teachers knew that I had been working in the Teaching Quality Improvement Project (TQI) executed by the Ministry of Education, Bangladesh. They also knew that I had been studying in New Zealand and returning to the community to work with the teachers for my doctoral study. Therefore, I expected a trustworthy relationship with the teachers right from the beginning. My hope came true when I first met the teachers in the school. I found many of them were my former schoolmates. We became nostalgic for a while, recalling memories from our past school life and passing warm greetings to each other. Despite the initial warm greetings and respect, I wondered about the future relationship, as I knew that at some point of the process the teachers might have to leave their comfort zone and face some challenges in their approaches to teaching. Considering the emotional challenges that are inherent in the work of teachers, I worried that the challenges might impact on our relationship. I was also aware of my own capacity for becoming involved emotionally. My awareness made me feel vulnerable about my role and responsibility as well as making me cautious of my ability to facilitate.

Therefore, I was in the middle of anxiety and confidence when I actually started working with the teachers. I decided to let go of my previous planning and adapt to what might evolve in the process, rather than letting myself get stuck in something rigid or static. My careful attention was on how adapt to the thinking process of the teachers and whole culture of the school. Before entering the school I had talked with the head teacher and been told that every teacher wanted to work with me and that they regarded me as an expert in science and math. I did not argue with

the head teacher in this regard, but this was a first cultural shock to me because initially my plan was to work with five or six teachers only. I assured the head teacher that I would try to find a way to engage all the teachers in the research process. I was also very much aware of the issue of hierarchy, and did not want to choose particular teachers as co-researchers lest it gave others a sense of inferiority. I thought it was better to work through the existing enthusiasm. Therefore, in the first cycle of the project, my full attention was on how to develop a collectivist nature to our work.

The role of the head teacher

The head teacher showed his utmost enthusiasm about the project. He opened up the gate of the school for me and took the project as an opportunity for the growth of the school. He did not participate in most of the discussions, but from the background he provided support and monitored the teachers' feelings about the project activities. His absence probably allowed the teachers to speak more freely and to reveal their vulnerability, especially when we came to observing lessons and reflecting on what had taken place. However, his background support provided a safety net to both me and the teachers even though we did not consciously consider it during the project. In Chapter 4 I have described the head teacher's vision for the school. As I explained there, he was the founder of the school, and repeatedly stated that he wanted to make the school the best in the region and bring change in the community by providing good education. His vision seemed idealistic to me as he did not mention how he or the teachers could achieve the goals. In later discussions the head teacher explained his vision in terms of some practical indicators that helped me to orient my discussions with the teachers in setting the project goals and focus. First he acknowledged his on-going challenge in making balance between his role as a head teacher and as an elected public representative, and then he explained his understanding of good education. He said that by getting education the students could choose many different lucrative professions, but they could become a good human being in any profession. He said that it was important for the well-being of the community if the students became a good business men or a good farmer after getting education, and drew an image of good human being through the following principles: honesty, responsibility, discipline, and creative thinking. He then talked about teaching in terms of leadership:

If we think about our own family in terms of our responsibility, we all are leaders of our nation. We as individuals do the same thing either in family or in classroom as heads of state do.

He first acknowledged the tension between the state's economic condition and the teachers' life in the community, affirming the truth of financial challenges. He then asked me to give importance to the teachers' role and responsibility as a leader in classroom. He talked about the value of reflection:

Doing research on my own ability is the big point to me as a teacher. As a teacher when I enter classroom I need to bring empathy. I need to know without asking anything, if any of my students is hungry. Then we need to consider about pen, pencil, paper, books, surrounding environment, and our social conditions. Considering all these factors, we need to look into our achievements. I believe there must be little achievements. How these little achievements can be enlarged is a teacher's first responsibility.

At the stage when I was talking with the head teacher it still was not possible to map the full process of how we could try to understand students' thinking process or their hidden needs. I noted that in the next stages of the project the teachers and I would need to explore ways to understand how students made meaning. The head teacher's statement about teachers' need to identify students' hunger without asking anything pointed to a significant issue which impacts many students' classroom learning in a remote Bangladeshi village school.

Searching for a way to open up a communicative space

I started to settle my initial nervousness through the head teacher's and teachers' enthusiasm, and willingness to work with the project. I was aware that at the beginning the teachers said *yes* to future hope and wonderful ideas, perhaps without thinking much about where the project might go, so I actively searched for spontaneous discussions from which I could develop a common ground.

While I was handing out the formal information letters, one discussion arose about what makes a school highly regarded.

Aaron: My understanding is that if none of the students of Madarganj High School³⁰ get A+ in the SSC examination, the school will lose its fame.

Nandan: People review the number of A+s and all the results later. People think that Madarganj High is a good school because it is big and traditional.

³⁰ Madarganj M.B High is one of the oldest schools in the Thakurgaon district. The school had been established in 1945 and situated in the outskirts of Thakurgaon, 5 kilometres to the west of my research school. A local rich man named as -Mukundo Bihari had taken initiative to establish the school and donated land and money. The purpose of the school was to create educational opportunity for the entire region. Until independence of Bangladesh, it was the only secondary school for the greater community. The school has a long academic history and is famous for some of its students' educational achievements in higher level.

Aaron: Good, because Madarganj School also maintains a higher number of A+s in the SSC³¹ exam than our school. In terms of the total student turnout in the SSC exam our result is comparatively better than Madarganj High. Actually people look into the pass rate. Either we have to ensure a 100% pass rate or have to increase the total number of A+s in the SSC exam, ha Nandan da (to make this statement strong, he used the term ha and at the same time struck the table with his hand). Otherwise we will not be able to establish our superiority over Madarganj High.

Their discussions highlighted how pass rates and GPA5³² construct the dominant culture of schooling and define teachers' roles. It seemed like a gifted opening to explore the differences of meaning that we might be bringing to a learning community in the school, as it gave hints about the dominant social and cultural context of the classroom. So I entered the discussion.

Me: You give value to what is measured, but perhaps you do not measure what you actually like to value as a teacher. Perhaps, you want to enable students to learn how to think independently and differently and this could be a most important educational value. But in practice a significant amount of your professional energy is spent on ensuring 100% pass rate and more GPA5. Thus, we actually become subservient to others' thinking processes and intellectual ability when we value only what is measured. The irony is that if we focus heavily on greater educational values and disregard the pass rate completely, we might put the school into a vulnerable situation. We will have to think deeply how we can make balance between the two.

In fact, the polarities of working towards examination success and enabling students to learn to think were to become on-going matters for discussion. At this stage I was becoming aware of how they might offer a grounded base for exploring the concept of agency. However, I turned the conversation back to discussion of the project as a whole, and referred to the information letters.

The teachers' first reaction was: "Oh, it's written in English! But we are not so good at English." I understood that I had made a mistake. I became very aware that I needed to move away from the formal practices of the university and its ethics committee and make sure I was communicating at a real level with the teachers. I explained and orally translated the information letter into Bangla.

³¹SSC exam refers to the Secondary School Certificate examination in Bangladesh. It is a public examination and conducted as a final exam of secondary education. SSC exam is equivalent to General Certificate of Secondary Education in England or NCEA in New Zealand. SSC is the official secondary school qualification in Bangladesh.

³² GPA stands for Grade Point Average. For Secondary School Certificate examination the maximum grade point average is 5.

As we started discussing the project we started to talk about what we saw as important contemporary national issues. One issue that arose was the Rana Plaza tragedy. A few days previously a multi-storeyed building, Rana Plaza, had collapsed. More than two thousand garment workers were trapped and died in the incident. One or two days before the incident a fault had been identified in the building and the owner of the building, Rana, and the garment factory owners were notified to shut down the building. But the syndicate did not care and kept everything open for the sake of making money. The consequence was blood, tears, crippled bodies and death. This incident touched the emotion of the whole nation, including me and these teachers. They were shocked, angry, and feeling helpless. They expressed their emotion with furious language. We discussed how this accident was a predictable outcome of irresistible affection towards money. Our discussion recognised that the Rana Plaza tragedy was not an accident, and that it was caused by the capitalist ideology that governed the international garments trade. We had learned from newspapers and television talk shows that Rana was a multimillionaire and had illegally become owner of the building by using his political affiliation. Nobody within the system had challenged Rana. And we learned that he had left school after grade nine. Because I see Rana as a symbol of our national moral, political, and social disability, I tried to explore the implications of the incident for education in general, and for our collaborative project in particular. I tried to direct the group's emotional energy towards an awareness of our role as teachers.

Me: Definitely it is not our sole responsibility to stop another Rana, but we could consider what we as teachers can do, and cannot do.

Nahar: The whole society is responsible.

Me: We all are part of a same society. Rana, we as teachers, our national leaders who have got education from our schools. What is the role of schooling in shaping society?

Sodananda: How can it be possible through education? A student can pass the exam without study. I may know he is a bad student, but the education board compels us to give a pass mark. He then starts thinking he can easily achieve anything in this society.

Me: If we could give proper schooling to those kinds of students' right from the start that they could change their attitude. The example of assessment that Sodananda has given is an important part of our policy and relate to the quality of our education.

The discussion of the Rana Plaza was passionate, but we did not find a strong direction when it came to reflecting about how it might relate to education. However, what is important about the discussion is that it opened what Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) call a 'communicative space': a

space where all of us could share our emotions as well as our ideas and where we were beginning to find ways to agree, disagree, and search for more understanding together. The creation of this open space was a vital step in helping us become a learning community. Although we did not fully explore its implications at the time, the discussion about the Rana Plaza was also important because, as I will discuss later in this chapter and those that follow, it placed education in a relationship with social systems, history and our human aspiration for justice.

Throughout the first weeks in the school, at the same time as we collaboratively planned a way forward into the project, I deliberately tried to make connection between teachers' spontaneous dialogues and the main focus of the project.

Teachers' stories of why they teach

At one time we talked about understandings of teaching and motivations to enter the profession. We held these discussions in small clusters in the head teacher's room. It was a very tight space, but indeed enabled us to feel closer to each other. I report one of these discussions in detail, as it is illustrative of the conversations that took place and there was a strong alignment in the stories the teachers told and the views they expressed. Their stories constitute an important part of the context in which they worked and in which we explored ways to better meet student needs.

Nandan began the discussion by explaining how he came to be a teacher.

Nandan: I came into this profession because I did my studies through severe hardships. You (indicating me) know a little bit as we studied in the same school. I cannot stop crying when I remember those memories. I went to school in the morning just taking some rice pops and tea. When I returned from school in late afternoon, I bought rice pops from the shop for 25 paisa³³ and took it with water and sugar. This was a fact. Then I thought that life is full of variation and perhaps this situation would change one day. I also pay tribute to my teachers, especially Sotten sir and Husen sir. Husen sir used to encourage us to choose the teaching profession. I asked him, "Sir you have penury and we are also so poor. Why are you encouraging us to come into the teaching profession?" Sir replied, "If you do not come into teaching who will teach my subjects, Bangla and Geography?" Another fact is that Mukundo Bihari was my grandfather. You know he established the Madarganj M.B High School where we all studied. So my family is fond

³³ 25 paisa is a coin in Bangladesh and worth value one fourth of a taka. Taka is the name of Bangladeshi currency.

of education. As grandson of Mukundo Bihari, it was my dream to be a teacher. That's why I am in teaching.

Me: So family heritage, poverty, and your teacher's inspiration encouraged you to come into teaching?.

Nandan: (wavers, then add) There is another reason. I thought that I will be able to give many things to my students, which is not possible in any other profession. I tell them that even if you become prime minister, still I am your teacher.

Rojen then shared his story.

Rojen: I was in the middle of my study when this school was established, and I had no idea that I would join the teaching profession. My intention was to get a good certificate first and then to try for a job. One day I heard that our head teacher took the initiative to establish a school in our community. At that time the literacy rate was so poor in the area; you would have hardly found one or two people who passed the SSC exam. So I saw it as a good initiative. I thought if our children get education, it can help the well-being of our community. One day the head teacher came to my home and explained the goals, just as I had thought. I became emotional. Then I agreed to be a teacher. I took it as an opportunity to contribute to the development of the community and to earn a livelihood.

Aaron's story of entering teaching was similar to Rojen's, but he said that he started to enjoy his work after entering the teaching profession as he was earning a livelihood.

Me: You are enjoying teaching just because you earn income from teaching?

Aaron: (with a very affirmative voice) my first good feeling of teaching is to enable students to understand something. When I see that students understand my lesson, to me there is no bigger moment of joy than this one. This is the best feeling of teaching. Teaching is a place of respect, though we get a low salary. When we walk across the village roads, at least community people address us as *master saheb*³⁴. At the beginning I felt shy of this way of being addressed. Now it is quite normal to me.

Along with earning, Aaron identified further two key motivations for teaching. One is enabling the students to understand lesson and another is being acknowledged by the community people as respectable. This is the cultural norm of Bangladesh, that people see teachers as knowledgeable and respectable.

³⁴ Master-teacher, sahib is a local title of honour and respect. Saheb has a connotation of supremacy, as people started to use it during British colonial period.

Me: Is there any relationship between your own experience of school and your present teaching?

Aaron: Yes, of course. I always compare my teaching with the way I have been taught in school. I had no training. My first experience of teaching was how my teacher taught me. After joining this school, I asked my teacher how to teach. My teacher warned me, saying “Teach what you know, never try to say anything in front of the students that you do not know.”

This is the basic reality in the case of many teachers in Bangladesh. When someone becomes a teacher in Bangladesh they first reflect back to their school life and see how they had been taught. The way they had been taught shapes their mind set as a teacher and their orientation towards knowledge. While this is a widespread reality, Polash brought a quite different perspective in his conceptualisation of teaching, as follows:

Polash: From my school life I respect teachers. My dream was to be a teacher. My parents also wanted me to join the teaching profession after completing my own education. After finishing the graduation exam I heard that our head teacher took the initiative to build a school in the community. One day he requested me to contribute to the school. I agreed and started to contribute. Meanwhile I passed the bachelor degree and went to do masters. Because of poverty I could not continue my masters study and I returned to my village. Again the head teacher sought help from my father in building the school. Then my father imposed the decision on me to join the school again. He told me, “You have to stay in the community and I do not want you to leave.” Then I thought it was not possible for my father to provide financial support for my masters study. I started teaching again and I felt good. I had no cupidity for money. I just looked into my honour.

At this point I tried to stop Polash and take him onto a different issue, but instead he stopped me, and continued.

Polash: But we should not come into teaching with this kind of mentality. I mean that what we have learned is not enough for teaching. To be an ideal teacher and to offer even more to the students, we should have learned much more. There is a huge gap between outside reality and the environment in which we are doing teaching. Therefore, we are feeling pressure to make teaching acceptable. We have deficiencies, and we need to learn many things to fill up the gaps. For example, I teach social science and maths. I never tried to develop deeper understanding in these subjects when I was student in high school. At that time the culture was just to pass the exam and collect a certificate. But

exam passing is not enough, if you decide to come into the teaching profession. You need to do some research before entering teaching. That is why I am ready to make my class active.

Polash clearly identified the emotional challenges that teachers experience when they relate their professional work to life in the community. I reflected that this tension perhaps makes the teachers feel powerless about what they do, and that it could provide motivation to develop a professional ethic along the lines that Polash mentioned. Some teachers mentioned their feeling of joy when the students understand lessons. To make the joy occur more regularly there might need to be a shifting of role from position of expertise to one that creates opportunity for exploration. I was aware that this shift cannot happen in one jump; it would involve a process that helps the teachers to unfold their teaching moments and create scope for the students to participate in learning. Then the teachers might enjoy their teaching differently.

I picked up on one of the issues that had been latent in the earlier discussion, and that I knew from experience makes many teachers dissatisfied about their role creates a feeling of powerlessness.

Me: What amount of salary will give you the considerable sense of financial security so that you could concentrate fully on classroom teaching?

Sodananda: (starting with a hesitant voice and gradually becoming stronger in making his argument) There is no limit of necessity. If I refer to the salary structure of government school teachers, I find it much higher than ours. Though we implement the same curriculum and syllabus, still they are demanding more. But I just want an amount what helps me to maintain a socially decent life.

Me: Can you give example?

Sodananda: (becoming very straight forward) Right now I get 8000 taka³⁵ a month from the government. I earn extra a 6000-7000³⁶ a month from tuition. So I run my family expenses with the total amount of 14000-15000 taka³⁷ a month. If I demand more than this, I...

He did not finish his sentence but the connotation in his body language and tone was something like 'greed is not a virtue of teaching'.

Then Kusol entered the discussion with an emotional gesture, and said:

³⁵ 120-130NZD

³⁶ 100 NZD

³⁷ 230-250 NZD

Kusol: I want to share. You ask us a very hard and sensitive question. My colleague is now at the 8000 taka a month salary scale. He earns 6000-7000 taka from tuition and he is happy with 15000 taka a month. In my case, I get 11000³⁸ taka a month from the government. But I need 20000³⁹ taka a month to maintain a socially decent life. So it varies from man to man.

The low level of teachers' present salary in Bangladesh is a fact, and these teachers firmly recognised their struggle to survive on their salary. Moreover, teachers who teach little in the classroom or simply impose their ideas on students and expect them to just repeat their words get the same salary as those who listen to students and help them in their learning, and in all cases the salary at the end of the month is not enough. I reflected that the inadequacy of salary makes motivation in teaching problematic, but the teachers' own accounts of their pride in teaching reassured me.

However, discussion on salary, resources and motivation continued throughout the project. A few weeks later in a discussion after a social science lesson Kusol became emotionally charged about the lack of resources to support teaching.

Kusol: We can develop as a progressive nation through good schooling. To achieve that we need to invite people with talent into the teaching profession, but there are no incentives. In such a context, it becomes very annoying to read about patriotism, and then I think I will tear up the pages where it says about patriotism. How will we develop?

Arman: The government is wanting from us just to enable the students to pass the exam. And we are teaching accordingly.

Me: No this is wrong. You all have the potentials. We just need to trigger it and develop a collective environment. Because of your age and experience you are capable of understanding and implementing everything in your teaching. So, please do not destroy your pride as a teacher.

Kusol: No, I am not talking about my personal incapability. I am expressing my concerns about the overall situation.

Me: Yes I agree. If government increases the benefits and status, your productivity will definitely increase.

³⁸ 180-190 NZD

³⁹ 330-340 NZD

Kusol: No, I am not arguing to increase my benefits and facilities. I am arguing to create a context where we can develop.

When I reflected again in the conversation I found that I had not been listening to what Kusol was trying to say at the end, and I realised that, as a researcher, it was not good to be too certain about what the teachers were saying, but rather to listen interactively.

What these discussions highlighted was that teachers worked in conditions where they were poorly paid, had meagre resources for teaching and felt they received little professional development that they could utilise in developing their teaching. Nevertheless, there it was clear that they had a sincere desire for professional development and for a context where they could teach more effectively. In my field journal, I reflected: Who will create the context? Is it the government, the school, teachers, students, the community, the school managing committee, experts, or all together? At this stage I hoped our project might create some of the context for change, but I also recognised that the issue were national ones that could not be resolved in one school alone.

Opening up the classroom door

After we had talked through the main focus of project, the teachers agreed to start with observation of each other's teaching. There was initial divided opinion about the approach and that reflected both the energy the teachers were willing to put into the process and their concern that feedback should be practical and based on understanding of the curriculum areas. Finally we accepted a proposal by Nandan that observation teams could be made up of teachers who taught in the same areas along with others who were free and interested.

On behalf of the teachers Nandan made some final remarks and emphasised the importance of mutual respect and relationship for the best outcome of the project.

Nandan: We are not afraid of or overwhelmed by our affectionate younger brother Safayet. And at the same time, perhaps, we cannot even be exhilarated, because our education system, especially the condition of secondary education, is [not up to our expectations]. We have only two academic officers for the whole Upzila⁴⁰, while we need a continuous academic support network....I believe, if we can accept what Safayet has said and if Safayet can accept our views as important, our students will get benefit and we will get opportunity to develop. I request Safayet to be sincere with us and overlook

⁴⁰ In Bangladesh Upzila is sub unit of district

our faults. I respect his educational experiences, and I wish success to the project. Beside co-operation we will try our best to get something from him. I expect him to share with us. I want to finish now. We will talk more later on.

While I saw Nandan's speech as very affirming of our planned process, I was a little uncomfortable with the role he seemed to be assigning me. He was constructed my role as that of someone with greater educational experience who had knowledge to share. I had entered the field not wanting to impose my ideas, but I was realising that the teachers saw me as a resource in a context where they felt they received no other academic help, I realised I would need to juggle the roles of facilitator and contributor. I offered my response.

Me: Our observations will be academic, not administrative. As a teacher I want to know your feelings and problems. I am ensuring that I will not impose my teaching model or method on you, rather I want you to develop a model. So we want our observations to be direct and reflective. Please think me as your friend or younger brother.

The immediate outcome of the discussion was that Nuri opened up the classroom door for us to see and reflect on her teaching and the learning of her students.

Identifying the problems

Nuri taught a social science class to Grade 8. The lesson was on government and was based on a chapter of the official textbook. In the following section I discuss elements of the subsequent debrief in the teachers common room and report relevant portions of the lesson itself. I report the episode in detail because of the way it highlights assumptions, practices and problems that are in some ways typical of teaching in rural schools, and perhaps also in some urban schools.

First I want to invite the reader to quickly visit the physical environment of the classroom. It measured 25 by 18 feet, with two doors and big windows across the north and south wall of the classroom. The positioning of the windows was suitable for cross ventilation as Bangladesh is a tropical country. There was a blackboard on the middle of the east wall of the classroom. At the right corner of the blackboard I found a small square empty pin board. I did not find any student work anywhere in the classroom. There were no learning resources except the teacher, students, and the textbook. A small table was in front of the blackboard for chalk, duster and the textbook. Students were sitting in three columns. The right column was for boys and the middle and left columns were for girls. In each column students were sitting in rows on fixed wooden benches. They were sitting tightly shoulder to shoulder. In between the columns there very tiny spaces left

for movement. A penetrating sound from an irrigation pump was coming from the maize field just next to the north wall of the classroom. 47 students out of the roll of 62 were present.

The classroom was bare and identical to many classrooms throughout rural Bangladesh. Why could not its bareness be decorated and made welcoming by students' work and resources that would trigger imagination, creativity, motivation, desires, and common sharing? In my field journal I reflected that such change would depend on how our group of teachers would unpack their teaching in the debrief sessions.

Nuri started her teaching with a question. Then a pattern emerged in which students gave chorus answers, the teacher rejected them offering her own answer, and there was repetition by the students. The first few minutes are cited below.

Nuri: What specific thing do we require, if we want to do something or want to administer any activity?

Many students replied together and it was hard to understand their replies. Nuri was rejecting answers by waving her hand and head.

Nuri: We need a system. It can be for a machine as well as for a human being." Again she asked: "What is the machine of a man?"

Students: (six or seven together in a soft voice) Our head.

Nuri: What is the engine of a human?

A student: (strongly) Head of a man.

Nuri: (satisfied with the student's answer, and restating it) Head is the engine of a human. Can other organs of a human body function without a head?

Students: No, madam

Nuri: Cannot work. Who is the engine of a state?

Students: Government

Nuri: We will consider government as the engine. Government is one element of a state. What are the other three elements?

Students started answering together. Someone from the front bench was saying "democracy". Either Nuri did not listen to the answer or did not accept it. She was standing in front of the blackboard, counting the elements of state on the fingers of her right hand. In such a noisy situation most probably someone from the front benches was giving correct answers, and Nuri was restating the answers as: "territory, population". No one was offering the fourth element. Nuri was expecting an answer from a particular student who failed to give it.

Nuri: (finally) the fourth element is sovereignty.

It was a hot summer morning, and the teachers returned to the small teachers' common room to decide how to initiate discussion on Nuri's teaching. Kusol offered to begin.

Kusol: I think it will be better if first we say something what we have observed from Nuri madam's teaching. After our discussion you (pointing to me) will add your points to the discussion. At the end Nuri madam will reflect on our discussion.

Me: In between we can allow interaction. Here, we cannot set any fixed rule of discussion. But we can start discussion according to what Kusol has proposed. If questions arise when we talk, we will try to explore possible answers.

I was captivated by the way Kusol proposed a vision of common sharing, and as I looked around the room, I saw a keen interest and enthusiasm to listen to each other about their teaching had sparked. This seemed like a good beginning, I hoped that it would offer opportunity to follow teachers' interests and also allow them to grow as a community, and thus to construct their own sense of pedagogy.

Kusol opened the discussion on Nuri's teaching.

Kusol: Thanks for your bravery and allowing us to observe you during teaching. We are sitting here to discuss how we can do better. I have some suggestions. What you did in classroom was good. You initiated the learning topic, the state and government system of Bangladesh, by using the analogy of an engine, but students could not capture the relationship. You could have brought examples from family. In the case of a family the father holds the sovereign power and conducts daily activities.

Kusol focused on students' understanding and stressed the need to initiate a learning topic in terms of the students' conceptual proximity to the topic. In my field journal I reflected that perhaps he had not read Vygotsky's work, but what Kusol was suggesting, creating an analogy between family and state government, aligned with Vygotsky's explication of the zone of proximal development. I became aware that Kusol without having read theory had an intuitive sense of what makes a learning progression.

Nuri and Nandan joined the discussion, arguing with the idea of power and sovereignty that Kusol had put on the table.

Nandan: Power and sovereignty is not the similar thing.

Nuri: A father cannot possess sovereign power.

Kusol: I might be wrong. But I am suggesting that the idea of government could have been emerged from the concept of family.

However, no one in the group challenged his point of introducing and relating the learning about state and government with students' family experiences.

While the other teachers accepted Nuri's introduction to the learning topic as good, there was concern was that the students were responding together. It was very hard to detect who was responding from their own understanding and who was responding by listening to others. Therefore, Kusol's reflection on making a robust connection between the learning topic and students' experience and existing knowledge and so making the concepts less abstract was important for the other teachers to think about.

Next Arman and Polash drew attention to the use of blackboard, and the merit of drawing diagrams and on-going assessment.

Arman: Students have just listened to you. Would it have been better, if you could have drawn a chart on the blackboard and then each type of government could have been discussed sequentially?

Polash: Presentation of the main idea of government was good. But different types of government could have been discussed by drawing a chart on the black board. If it could have been done, students could have understood well. Afterwards you could have assessed students' learning.

I reflected that the points brought up by Ashush and Polash were important, but a greater concern was elsewhere: from the perspective of students' learning, the most important factors were how a teacher engages the students to examine the basic concept that there are different types of government, and how students make meaning of those concepts. I let the discussion continue, waiting to see what else the teachers might raise.

Sodananda drew our attention to the use of questions to gain students' engagement.

Sodananda: Students could have been asked a question, such as *Can you define or describe what government is?* Students could also have been asked to write a characteristic of government. And thus students could have learned from each other.

I reflected that Sodananda's point was good, especially in the context where teachers often say that it is very hard for them to manage a big classroom, assess students' learning and finish the syllabus within a fixed timeframe. In such a context asking the students a question and involving someone in writing parts of the answer on the blackboard would be useful for students' learning. I was hoping that someone support Sodananda's argument. But meanwhile Aaron brought a different perspective into the discussion.

Aaron: She had confidence. If students do not understand, she has nothing to do. She has tried her best. But I support Arman. Students could have got benefit if a chart on different types of government could have been drawn on the black board.

As I listened, I felt so uncomfortable with the notion that a teacher has nothing to do if students do not understand. My subsequent field journal entry stated that I was detecting a dangerous side of the pride of teaching, and that the sense of pride of teaching in a rural context of Bangladesh sometimes makes a teacher blind to their role and purpose as a teacher. However, I also noted that Aaron's argument was part of an open discussion and such discussion could create

opportunity for learning in this small rural teachers' community. Nuri began by justifying her teaching.

Nuri: Students were responding orally to my questions, so I did not use the blackboard.

Kusol: This is not actually a proper response. We are just discussing here. If we only give a lecture and students listen, 10% of the lecture will exist. When we write something on the blackboard students can memorise more because they can listen and see.

Nandan: Many students cannot listen properly. When something is written on the blackboard students can see it.

The teachers then invited me to reflect on Nuri's teaching. I felt that the interaction so far had been good as they were arguing with each other at the same time as they were criticising very softly. But I wanted to draw attention to some incidents that I had noted in my observation diary. First I said that I would not repeat what had already been discussed. I started with a warm appreciation of Nuri's sharing her teaching. Then I asked if we could open up the discussion further.

Me: Shall we bind ourselves within Nuri's teaching? Or shall we try to move further?

Several teachers: We want to do better.

Me: In that case we can exchange ideas on how we can improve teaching. In the textbook there is a diagram of the government system of Bangladesh. After discussing different types of government you could have asked the students to explain Bangladesh as a democratic state by two examples. Throughout the lesson you did not address this point.

The whole common room became quiet and I was expecting a reflection from Nuri. She replied with a very sad voice.

Nuri: Actually I took the class without preparation. Here we are participating in an open discussion. I will try to apply in next class what I am learning from here.

I saw Nuri started to feel vulnerable. I reflected that unfortunately it is not at all uncommon for teachers to walk into a class without preparation. What was really important in this discussion is that Nuri admitted her lack of preparation. Such honesty was a very important contribution to the development of the group as a trustingly communicative community. In making the admission Nuri allowed herself to become very vulnerable, and it became clear to all of us that honesty would involve emotional risk. I reflected that this risk could either strengthen our collaborative learning, or threaten it.

To ground the discussion back into the lesson, I referred to a good question that she had asked the students at the end of her teaching. She had asked, “Can you differentiate between democratic and autocratic government?” We then moved to discussion of how she dealt with students’ answers. First, I report the moment from the classroom.

Nuri: Think first. What is the difference between peoples’ republic government and monarchy government? (To a student from last bench) Fuad stand up and tell us.

Fuad: Peoples’ republic government means... um... it is by the people... um... it is elected by the people and runs the country. This is peoples’ republic government.

Nuri: (looking at Fuad vacantly and silent for a moment) anybody else?

Laboni: (first bench, middle row): Sovereign power of a state possesses to her hand or administered.

Nuri: What is that?

Laboni: (in an unsure voice) Peoples’ republic government.

Nuri: What do people possess?

Laboni: Right of sovereignty

Nuri: People possess the absolute power. And that is?

Laboni: Peoples’ republic government.

Nuri: What is another? Monarchy?

Laboni: Part of a peoples’ republic government

Nuri: Part of a peoples’ republic government? (with a very cold voice) Sit down! (pointing to another student) tell us what is monarchy?

Ruma: Madam... um... actually prince will become king.

Teacher: Again.

Ruma: Prince will become king and his son will be king again

Nuri: (waving her head) No, it is not correct. Sit down. Who possesses the absolute power?

Many students: (together, very loudly) In the hand of a king.

Nuri: And that is?

Many students: (Together, very loudly) Monarchy government.

I had wondered how the teacher’s statement about peoples’ republic and monarchy government was different from the students’ answers. The students’ answers had reflected the fundamental principles of peoples’ republic government and of monarchy government. Then why was Nuri rejecting the answers? Was it a notion that nothing is right other than what was stored in her memory? In our debrief I decided to take the risk of exposing Nuri and the other teachers to these vivid but hidden realities.

Me: Somehow students’ answers about peoples’ republic and monarchy government were correct. Students explored the grounded meaning. You could have appreciated first. You could have said, yes, you are right. I request you to think about the way that nothing is absolute in social science. Meaning making and perspectives are different here.

I took a pause here before moving forward with some other incidents. The teachers were looking exhausted and quiet. I was expecting reflection from the teachers and very little came onto the table. I waited for a moment.

Arman: (breaking the silence) Yes these are right, we never thought about these things before. We have just observed teaching from a surface level. We want to know the other aspects.

I recognised Arman's comment as very important for the group. His acknowledgement also involved emotional risk: he was moving from a position as an informed co-analyst of the Nuri's teaching to someone who admitted that there was a lot more for him, as well as others, to learn. His openness encouraged me to keep taking risks.

I then referred to the discussion that had taken place about autocratic government. The classroom moment is reported below.

Nuri: Is there any autocratic government in Bangladesh?

Many Students: (with a very soft voice) No madam.

Nuri: Was there any before?

Mridul (from the middle of right column): Yes madam. It was before but not now.

Teacher: Who was?

Mridul: Madam... yeh actually [name of a former president]

Nuri: He was autocratic government? (shaking head) No, it was not.

Students: (two or three from the back bench together) Madam, [name of a chief advisor]

Nuri: Was that government elected by the people?

Students (together strongly): No, madam.

Nuri: Then what type of government it was?

Student (from back bench of right column): Caretaker government.

Nuri: Yes, caretaker government. We cannot term that government as autocratic. So what is autocratic government?

Referring to this incident, I made the following suggestion to Nuri.

Me: First you could have appreciated the students' examples. Then you could have asked the students to explain why they were thinking that a particular president or a chief advisor were examples of autocratic government. The students created an opportunity for you to make a different meaning for autocratic government. We have to think how we can utilise this kind of opportunity. Perhaps the activities of those governments revealed them as autocratic to the students. A new theorisation of autocratic government could have emerged from the students' examples, and that should not necessarily be equated with the definition written in the textbook. The theorisation could have had a contextual

value. And it does not by any means conflict with the national assessment policy, and your goal of ensuring a 100% pass rate. Students could learn, and pass the exam.

Nandan: Students could have got an opportunity to think differently. That particular government was in power in 2008. The students who mentioned that government as autocratic were in Grade 3 then. After five years they still can remember it. It is really fascinating.

The relationship between the caretaker government⁴¹ and an autocratic one is itself complex, and that some students referred to figures in a particular caretaker government seemed to indicate that there were hidden questions in the students' minds, perhaps ones that came from conversations at home. I could not blame Nuri for not discussing these, as they were politically charged, but after listening to the students, she could have concluded with a very simple explanation of the facts.

Nuri spent four to five minutes in the incident that is described above. Because Nuri's classroom lesson went on a seriously confusing end, I continued my discussion on the issue and drew the careful attention of all the teachers. The classroom moment had been very uncomfortable for me. Nuri had asked the students some ambiguous questions about autocratic government. I had noted the whole discussion in my diary, and I could not help but to share my thoughts with Nuri and other teachers.

The classroom lesson is reported first.

Nuri: What is an autocratic government?

Farjana: Power possessed by one man or party. It is in his boundary. No basis for people's opinion. This is autocracy.

Nuri: I have understood. Run the state according to his wish. But tell me what ruled government is that government? Like there are two types of democratic government. Similarly autocratic government has different types. What type of government is autocracy?

Farjana seems seriously confused and looks in different directions.

Nuri: Sit down. Is it a ministerial government or a government ruled government?

Students (four or five together): Ministerial government.

Students (another four or five together): Government ruled government.

Nuri: Government ruled government. Government ruled government. This is not ministerial government. So what is it?

⁴¹ The provision of Caretaker Government is a special constitutional arrangement in Bangladesh. The bill approving caretaker government was passed in the national parliament of Bangladesh by an elected government. The main purpose of the caretaker government Bill was to conduct national parliament elections at the end of the tenure of an elected government. According to the provision of the bill the elected government must hand over power to the caretaker government at the end of its tenure. The structure, tenure, responsibility, and rules of business of the caretaker government were specified in the bill. And in fact there were some violations both in tenure and in executing state activities. The violations mainly came about because of a complex chaotic situation related to a power game between the political parties and partly because of the hidden intention of the government. From outside we can never know the origin of the intentions that led the caretaker government to violate terms and conditions. Whatever the origins, we as citizens, have just read about many activities of the caretaker government as violations of responsibility.

Students (many together): Government ruled government.

Nuri: All power reserved in the hand of government, not in the hand of ministers. And that is autocracy government ruled government. There are two types of autocratic government. One is...

A girl student (middle column, middle bench): Concentric.

I had noted during my observation that here was evident the danger of inadequate content knowledge or lack of preparation for the lesson. But either could have been encountered by awareness of pedagogy. It is better to teach nothing than to create confusion. Students' knowledge can also have been be utilised. I was thinking about Nuri's dignity. At the same time I was trying to create a foundation from which teachers can see their daily practices. In fact, both the concept of concentric and federal government might exist in constitutional or regular monarchy and in a people's republic. Kusol also identified confusion in the lesson. When I raised the point in the debrief, the teachers also asked for clarifications from Nuri.

Me: To describe the concept of autocratic government, you said government ruled government. What did you mean by the phrase government ruled government?

Kusol: Yes, you said government ruled government. Can we look into the textbook to have the basic concept? What is written there?

Me: Let us first listen to what Nuri says.

Nuri: Concentric government means that - ruled by concentric government is that the whole power of the state is concentrated in the hand of one man.

Me: But you have said it as government ruled.

Nandan: Concentric government and autocratic government are not similar. In an autocratic government system power is centralised in the hand of one man. But in a concentric government system a state is governed from one place.

Nuri accepted Nandan's explanation.

Me: When you were explaining federal government, you mentioned that power is exercised and shared inside and outside the country and communication is established between two states. Is it the basic concept of federal government? In the lesson a student explained federal government (reading from my observation diary) as 'In federal government system, according to the constitution, power is shared and decentralised between central government and provincial government.'

Again Arman asked for clarification.

I suggested a stop to the discussion, saying that it was not necessary for Nuri to answer all of our questions right away. To conclude the discussion I gave an example of how we can help students to develop conceptual understanding on different learning topics. I used the analogy of a pen.

Me: If you just tell me something about pen, I can forget quickly. If you show me the pen first and then tell me something, I still might forget after two or three days. But if you involve me in exploring how I can write or draw picture with the pen, I can understand the function of a pen. So please think about students' active engagement within the scope of your teaching.

Then I brought the concept of questioning onto the table, saying it was very important for a teacher to think about *what*, *how* and *why* questions before teaching any subject or topic.

Me: We all know that Rabindranath Thakur is a famous poet. It is all right that Rabindranath is famous. But it is most important for the students and for all of us to know is *why* Rabindranath famous and *how* he became famous.

Aaron: I want to say something. A teacher must think what he or she will teach before entering the classroom. Then he or she has to ask himself or herself: Who are my students? Am I going to teach in Grade 1 or 2 or 4? Finally a teacher needs to think how to teach.

Aaron's reflection was encouraging because at the beginning of this discussion he had seemed to be confident in his identity as an authoritative teacher. His reflection does not necessarily mean that he changed dramatically, but there was a shift.

Me: To think about *why* I will teach is most important: *why* the concept of government is important for the students. Student awareness is another important point that you can think about. Have you ever thought about students' needs when they ask questions?

Finally the teachers requested Nuri to give final comment on the whole discussion. She was looking depressed and tired. She said very little about the whole discussion but what she said was important for the teacher community, and for me. She spoke with a very frustrated voice.

Nuri: What will I say? It is very hard and true talk for me. I understand my shortcomings. I will try my best to develop.

While it felt we were moving into increasingly honest and rigorous reflection on the processes of teaching, it was not without pain. Because she had volunteered her lesson, Nuri had become the most vulnerable of us. At this stage I wondered if we might not have pushed her too far. The other teachers had been respectful, but it was her teaching that we had critiqued and she clearly

felt somewhat crushed at this point. I was afraid she might become discouraged and withdraw from the group. However, as her contribution at the end of following chapter will show, she was ready to face the challenge.

The debrief we shared cannot be said to indicate a cohesive shift in teachers’ belief in themselves as learners, nor to reflect real progress in understanding students’ educational needs. Rather this account represents how teachers started to discuss and critique each other’s practice and began to find the confidence to give each other feedback, and to receive it. The account also shows how I was finding my way in leading, and sometimes provoking, the discussion. I had started by being determined not to be directive. However, the teachers continuously encouraged me to share my point of view with them, and I began to realise that if I was to be an honest, and vulnerable, member of the learning community I had to share what I thought as well as asking them what they thought. Looking back at the work of Kemmis and McTaggart (2005), I find they also question the usefulness of a facilitator’s neutrality. They suggest (p. 569) that neutrality might in fact be part of a process of *othering*, and that it may deny the responsibility of the facilitator to assist in making change.

Emerging issues

A number of issues became apparent in this first stage of the project, and framed our emerging concerns in the next phases of the project. Some of these issues have already been examined in Chapter 4, and will be further explored in following chapters. They are tabulated in the figure below.

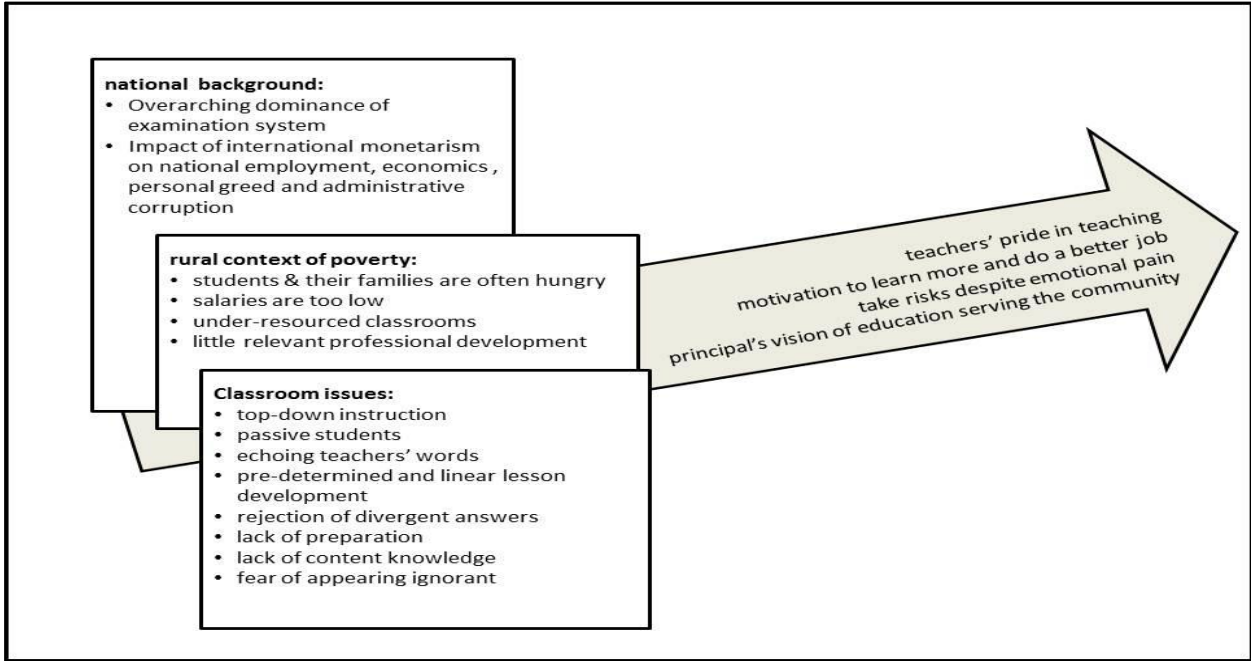


Fig 5.1: issues that framed the beginning of the project

Based not only on our first observation, but also on comments by the teachers, classroom teaching was characterised by top-down instruction on the part of the teacher, with students being predominantly passive and often echoing the teacher's words. Lesson planning tended to be based on segments of the official textbook with immediate rejection of divergent answers if they occurred. Teachers explained they modelled their work on the ways they themselves had been taught. Teachers also acknowledged that because of the pressures of time they often went into the classroom underprepared and that they lacked subject knowledge in some of the areas they taught. At the same time they presented an authoritative stance, perhaps from fear of appearing inadequate.

Teachers' stories, and my own knowledge of the community, indicated that these pedagogical problems were embedded in context of rural poverty. Students and their families were often hungry. Teachers' salaries were inadequate to support their families, and they needed to supplement their income by private after school tuition or by working on the land. Classrooms and schools were under-resourced, in classroom space and in teaching materials. What professional development had been offered was not seen as relevant or useful. Initial career choice had been limited by opportunity. These are problems shared with most rural and some urban schools in Bangladesh.

The teachers also felt the effect of factors beyond their rural community. One of the most influential was the overarching dominance of the examination system, and its impact on their practice and on parents' and students' expectations. Another that was articulated during our discussion about Rana Plaza was the impact on Bangladesh's economy and policies of international monetarism, and the way these shaped employment, and led to systemic corruption that allowed, and even seemed to encourage, personal greed.

Alongside and despite these problems there were a number of important positive factors that became apparent. The teachers all expressed a pride in teaching. They and the head teacher saw teaching as a way of making a difference to individual students and to the community. While they had modelled their practice on that of their former teachers, some of the teachers were already acknowledging that the models of the past were now longer enough. They recognised they needed to learn more and break out of the old mould. Several of the teachers expressed concern about the gap between what they believe they should teach according to the curriculum and the realities of life in a remote rural community. They expressed awareness that they needed, somehow, to be sensitive to students' needs and to their moral growth. Most significantly, to my mind, they were willing to take the risks that would be involved in exploring their practice,

despite already having seen elements of the vulnerability and emotional pain they might encounter.

I realised that as we moved forward into the next stages of this collaborative project we would need to be mindful of both the constraints of the context as well the teachers’ motivation to improve their practice and build on what already existed rather than on abstract idealism. As I reflect now, I am mindful that this need to develop capacity on what already exists is in keeping with Kemmis and Smith’s (2008) discussion of the way teachers can have agency in developing their praxis but that their agency is nevertheless constrained by the legacies of history, and by Smith’s (2014) call to researchers to consider themselves as guests in a place where people are already engaged in striving for their own well-being.

Participatory action research and the start of a learning community

Despite my initial nervousness and fears, when I looked back at the beginning of the project I realised that our search for common ground did in fact constitute a first cycle of a participatory action research process, as is illustrated in the figure below.

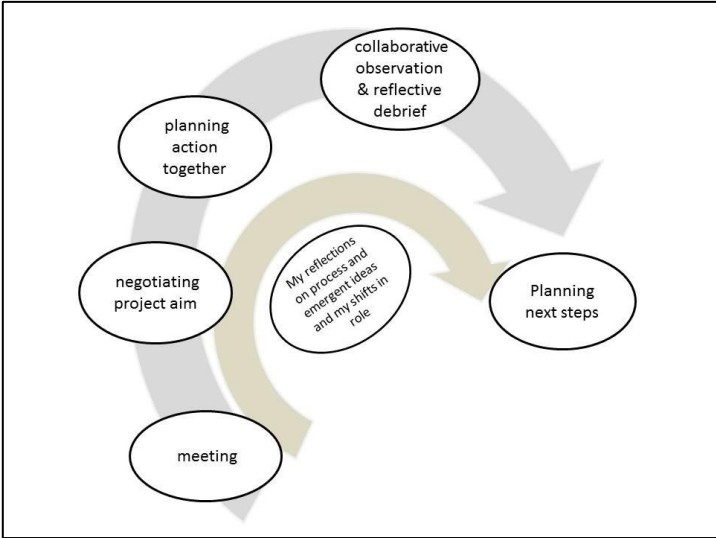


Fig 5.2: First stage of our PAR project

The traditional PAR model consists of cycles of planning, action, reflection and revised planning. Almost spontaneously, we followed that model as a group, as I did in my own reflections about the progress of the project, about my unexpected shifts in role and about the problems and ideas that emerged through the work. We had begun with a series of formal and informal meetings where I sought to explain the project to the teachers and engage their interest and commitment, and they tried to find out what I really wanted and how I would contribute to the work they were already doing. Some of those meetings involved active planning, such as

setting up the observation scheme, while others simply involved talking about teaching, career choices and what we saw as the challenging issues in our country. In the process of talking we began to develop a shared space in which we could share opinions and suggestions. In this way we were moving towards operating as a learning community.

Before my arrival, the teachers in the school could already be regarded as a community of practice. In terms of Wenger's (1998) definition they had mutual interest and engagement in a particular domain, that of teaching in this particular community, and so were involved in the joint enterprise of making the school function, and they shared a repertoire of teaching strategies. I entered the field with my own project of research and professional development that planned to turn the existing community of practice into one in which the members actively reflected on their practice and learned from each other as they sought to better understand their purpose and explore new possibilities to meet students' needs. In this I was supported by the head teacher's vision of developing his school into an effective place for learning and improving the well-being of the community. As the figure below suggests, at this stage the development of a functioning learning community was still my aspiration, although I could see it beginning to evolve. We had all spent a lot of energy and good will in searching for common ground, and our primary achievement at this stage was the creation of a space where we could talk relatively freely and trustfully with each other.

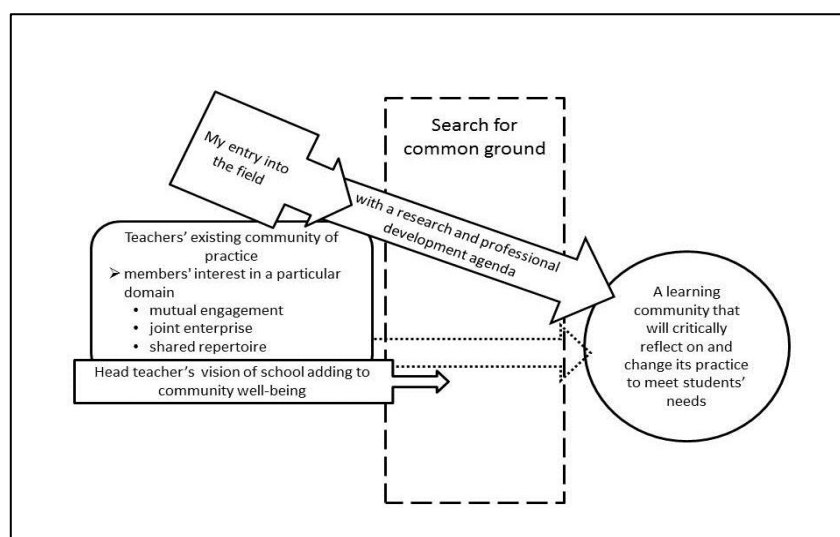


Fig 5.3: Towards a learning community

I had entered the field worried that my research concepts were western ones and might not sit comfortably with the rural Bangladeshi context of this school. However, in reconnecting with my former school-mates I remembered a proverb we had been taught in our school days:

দশে মিলে করি কাজ
হারি জিতি নাই লাজ।

It applauds the merit of ten hands undertaking a task, and says regardless of the final outcome of the venture, the process of collaboration makes it more possible to succeed. Indeed, my experience of village life is that it is founded on principles of collaboration and reciprocal obligation and while these may possibly be slowly eroded by global influences, community, collaboration, and social responsibility are still powerful in shaping people's attitudes. Looking back at the work of Rabindranath (1908), I recognise he also provokes us to utilise local values and knowledge in understanding students' needs. When he established his own, alternative, education centre he grounded learning in practical experience and local values and he brought together scholars to develop a "common fellowship of study" (p.22), to further develop an indigenous conceptual framework as a basis for global interaction. He suggests (p.42) that while we must think about what we should teach that what is more important is how we can win the students' minds during teaching and learning. Our first stage of the project thus also made me more confident that we could develop a learning community in our village school in terms that were compatible with local values and needs. In the following chapter I report how we proceeded.

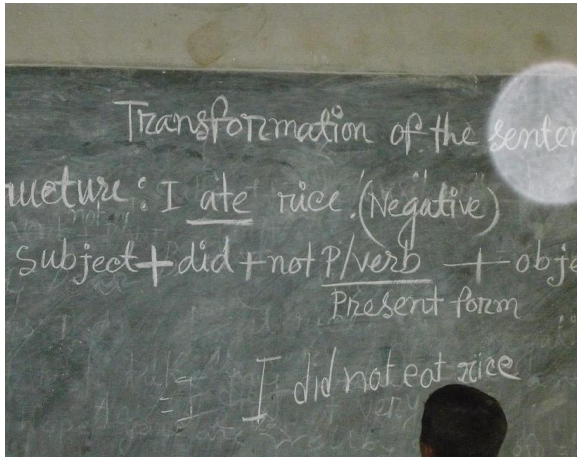
Chapter 6: Searching for an *akshi*

The previous chapter described how both I and teachers, albeit with somewhat different intentions, searched for common ground on which we could begin to develop the project. It also described how I sought to understand and initiate the processes of participatory action research within the context of the rural school, and how I grappled with the different expectations of what my role would be. This chapter describes how we began to operate in the shared space in the weeks that followed. In the first month of the project we undertook a number of activities. Following the start made by Nuri all the teachers opened their classrooms for an observation and a reflective follow-up discussion. In addition, as a different ways of observing and reflecting on practice I invited teachers to capture photographic images of moments of one another's work which they considered showed active student engagement, and to briefly explain their selection.

In this chapter I have selected a number of those images and linked them with accounts of our observations and debriefs. The chapter begins with a montage of the photographs together with their accompanying captions and explanations. Next it selects several of debriefs that followed the observed lessons and reports them. It also reports my reflections on the gaps that appeared between the idealistic representations of practice within the images and the potential, but often lost, opportunities in what actually took place. It then reports a full group workshop exploring the national curriculum's statements about learning and teaching. In this discussion the concept of *akshi* was proposed. Finally it draws together the issues that emerged in this stage, the ways I conceptualised our progress in terms of participatory action research and learning communities, and how I made sense of my changing role.

Photos: Capturing moments of practice

The montage below contains six of the photographs that were taken, together with their captions and the photographers' explanatory statements.



1. English grammar teaching in classroom

The teacher is teaching how to transform English sentences by giving structure on the blackboard so that the students can understand easily.



2. A student is expressing interest to know

Because of not understanding the topic, a student was expressing her interest to know and asking a question during teaching-learning.



3. The teacher is writing formula on the blackboard to draw the students' attention

As part of supportive role in giving the students a lesson, the teacher is writing some important information on the blackboard and the students are watching attentively.



4. Evaluation by a student in classroom

The teacher involved a student to show his understanding of the biography of the author of a short story *Boi pora* [book reading]. The other students were observing and hearing attentively. The teacher was also observing the student's work.



5. Student evaluation on blackboard

After finishing teaching the rules of factor analysis the teacher involved a student to analyse a factor. The purpose was to assess the students. Both the teacher and students were looking at the blackboard attentively.



6. What a nice monitoring!

The teacher was strongly monitoring the classroom. The students were given a task by the teacher. They were trying their best to cope with the answers. After that the students replied. And the teacher heard four or five students answer. Lastly he also gave his opinion on that topic.

Fig 6.1: Montage of teachers' photographs

In initial discussions of the images, the photographers emphasised how their images had captured good teaching practices and positive learning outcomes. The students were described as attentive, the teachers as thorough in their blackboard demonstrations and in monitoring their students' work. Individual images show detailed blackboard exemplars, students carefully listening, diligently writing, standing to ask a question and demonstrating their understanding by writing answers on the blackboard. Captions affirmed teachers' work in sharing information, setting tasks, giving clear instructions and evaluating students' understanding.

The initial purpose for taking photographs was to invite the teachers to show what they considered important in teaching. As I read the teachers' explanations I appreciated that they had identified a number of important elements of good practice, as they currently understood it. Further conversation revealed that these ideals came from what they had been taught in TQI training sessions and from the models they had received from other teachers. In my journal I reflected that these ideals affirmed the value of clear presentation and of attentiveness by both students and teachers, and also that they seemed to focus on surface behaviours. After observing Nuri's lesson previously I wondered about how much a gap there was between these ideals and some of the classroom teaching that was taking place. I also wondered whether the teachers were aware of the gaps and whether they would be willing to challenge them when we carried out the rest of our collaborative observations. As explained previously we had decided to carry out the

observations in clusters. At the invitation of the teachers I observed all the classes. Here I report six of the debriefs that we held following observation.

Transforming the English sentence

The first image in the montage had been taken by Aaron. Aaron first acknowledged that the first image captured positive learning outcomes and a good teaching approach by Shisupal. Later in the discussion he used a Bangla phrase, শিক্ষার্থীরা কিন্তু ফেল মেরেছে স্যার, to explain the need to think beyond the initial surface impression. The literal and figurative meaning of the Bangla phrase denotes students' disconnection from the lesson.

Aaron: The students were inactive. I can understand that it was a first session. For example: I eat rice. I do not eat rice. He reads book. He does not read book. Then you have brought the past form and used did in an interrogative sentence. I have seen that most of the students could not understand. What policy will you apply in that situation? You need to think. But your approach was good. When the students said *no* or *I do not know*, you said *Okay, all right, sit down*.

As the picture shows, the students were given a structure with an example sentence so that they could transform sentences as required. After discussing the structure Shisupal gave the students a task to transform four sentences into a negative form: *She was very good girl (Neg)*. *They help us (Neg)*. *We cook rice (Neg)*. *Mother reads a book (Neg)*. While the students were trying to do the task, those of us observing talked with some students. I present one conversation here as an example:

- S6: I cannot convert any one of the sentences.
S7: I can convert all, but I won't tell you now. (Actually she did none.)
S8: I cannot convert any one of the four.
S9: I can convert three, but I cannot do the last one. (Finally, she also did none.)
Me: Can you tell us why you can't do the last one so that we can help you?
S9: No sir, I do not know why. I can't do it.
S10: I can do the first one only.
Me: Can you show me what you have written?
S10: Yes. (She shows what she wrote: *We see very good*.)
Me: Okay, good, but the main sentence is: *She was very good girl (Neg)*.
S10: (Silent.)
Me: Okay, can you tell me first why you have written *we* instead of *she*?
S10: Sir, negative form of *she* is *we*.

The lesson had been a very painful experience for me. I had written in my journal that because no support system had been developed and no useful resource provided, the classroom, in the name of English learning, was just torturing the young innocent students' power of imagination. Aaron identified this as a disconnection of the students from the lesson. I wrote in my field journal that, first, the thinking process of the students is important. We need to know why a student thought that negative form of *she* is *we* and why she changed the meaning of whole sentence when she was trying to convert it into negative form. Second, some of the students were consciously trying to accomplish the task as they thought it was given by the teacher. Third, some students were very clear that they did not know how to make the conversion and some were unconscious about their ignorance. So there seemed to be misconceptions in the students' thinking processes, and fear in learning English. I wondered about the extent to which we could address the problems involved at school level.

However, I also noted in my research journal that it might help students if we as teachers could become aware of the difference between conscious ignorance, that we know that we do not know, and unconscious ignorance, when we do not know that we do not know. Developing understanding of the difference between the two might help teachers to deconstruct their attitudes towards students' ability and right to think in order to learn. This seemed like an important goal for evolving our group understandings.

However, Shisupal was confused by the students' difficulties with the task.

Shisupal: I am worried. Why is that? I taught this lesson before and it was a revision. Actually the students come to high school with inadequate knowledge in English from primary school.

Shisul's response showed he was aware of the students' inactivity in the lesson. However, I wondered why he had chosen a lesson that he had taught before for our observation. Was it perhaps fear? I was already aware that this process of becoming open to observation by other teachers involved risk, and that at this early stage of the project many of the teachers were very cautious about how much risk they would take. My deeper concern was that he tried to justify the students' inactivity by pointing a finger to inadequate knowledge from primary school. The *blame game* is a common scenario in Bangladesh.

I asked him to think about he could now reflect on his two repeats of this lesson. He said, "Yes, I need to go deeper. First, I need to teach gender, number and tense in details." It is encouraging that he wanted to start with the basics, although exactly what the basics are might need to be further explored. There is a complexity embedded in the national curriculum prescription. On

the one hand this grammar-based approach to teaching English grammar is in conflict with the curriculum commitment to a communicative language teaching approach. Nevertheless, such questions do occur in the examination. Teachers throughout Bangladesh are grappling with the conflicting demands of the curriculum strategy and the examination content (Podder, 2013; Rasheed, 2013). I reflected that the contradiction needs to be resolved at national level, as well as addressing the students' learning difficulties in this small rural school.

Considering salary, and number of students (more than 80) in the class, as well as the contradictions between what is stated in the national curriculum and what still appears in examinations, it would be inhumane to expect more from the teachers than their active thinking about how to facilitate learning. At the school level, the teachers cannot resolve the national dilemma. They just need to find ways of teaching what the examination requires in ways that they themselves understand and that the students can understand.

The third image in the montage was also taken during an English class, this time Aaron was the teacher, with 75 out of 88 students present in the classroom. Aaron was teaching how to convert a simple sentence into complex and compound sentences. He wrote *we eat rice to live*, and started to explain, in Bangla, how to convert it into a complex sentence. He asked the students to say if any one did not understand, and a student stood up and said that she did not understand. This is the moment the photographer captured in the image. Aaron explained again, slightly differently, stressing how *so that* needed to be used after the main clause. He wrote another sentence, *we read book to gain knowledge*, and asked her to convert it into a complex one. She started well but stopped after *so that*. She tried again, and again stopped. Aaron tried to encourage her by waving his hand, but eventually she gave up.

In our debrief I asked Aaron why he thought the girl had stopped. He acknowledged that students could not become fully engaged by just listening. He stated that the students needed to be given a task, monitored, and be able to discuss what they found challenging without being identified as making mistakes so that they could feel safe to learn.

Nandan challenged Aaron to present the basic ideas more clearly. He also stressed to the need to encourage the students' sense of confidence, allow them to make mistakes first and then give them opportunity to think. His challenge indicates how the teachers were gradually becoming confident and constructive in reflecting on each other's teaching. I wrote in my reflection journal that the concerns identified by Nandan cannot be taught by external experts. Rather, the teachers can learn by exploring these together through dialogue, and that can have more impact on their professional development.

Considering the rural context, Rojen suggested Aaron should think about explaining some English words in Bangla. His suggestion was a mild argument with government policy which directs that there should be no Bangla instruction in English classes. However, teachers in most rural schools find full English immersion too hard, both for themselves and for the students. Aaron was already mixing Bangla explanations with English exercises, and when he identified his own lack of fluency in English as a difficulty, he was pointing to a long-standing problem in the Bangladeshi education system:

Aaron: Problem lies in the teacher. I am taking about myself. We cannot conduct an English lesson fluently in English. Therefore students' English listening power is very poor. They listen to nothing in English. How will they speak? If we could have asked questions in English, students would have listened and begun to answer and their listening and speaking ability would have developed simultaneously. So, I think, we need to use more English in English lessons.

At the time I noted two questions in my field journal. Why is it possible for an English graduate who has been teaching English for a long time to not be good at English? And why is English compulsory for our students? As I indicated in my reflection on Shisupal's lesson above, questions such these suggest the need for further research and exploration at national policy level. This is not a personal problem of a particular teacher. This problem is indicative of systemic flaws that I believe are ingrained in Bangladesh. The lack of apparent solutions, and of resources for change, has fed a sense of frustration on the part of teachers as well as discouraging their students. Nevertheless, within the scope of our project we focused on the smaller partial solutions we might find despite the constraints. Aaron's next words were indicative of his desire to be a good teacher and the way he was burning in the fire of his incapacity.

Aaron: It's English language and my horizon is very short in length and width. I am short in capacity (বহর তো নিজেরই খাটেনা।). I have the desire, but no ability (সাধ আছে কিন্তু সাধ্য নাই).

Aaron used two colloquial Bangla phrases to express the tension between his sense of inadequacy and his desire to do better. I reflected that I could see this sincere tension in almost every teacher in the school. At the end of our session, however, Aaron responded enthusiastically to a practical suggestion that he could use students' own sentences as the basis for conversion, and he called for help from his colleagues.

Aaron: We need to encourage the students to learn English and all English teachers need to do that. If we do not work together, it will not work. We need to extend our hands to

each other for help, and it need to be ensured after seeking. This is my ultimate request to the assistant head sir. We need to think about practice.

I saw what Aaron articulated as a key element in developing a teachers' learning community. Outsiders will seldom come to a rural school in Bangladesh and help the teachers to develop their skill. Despite the systemic obstacles, teachers need to develop a support system within the school itself to help each other explore different options and to learn.

The Physics lesson about *work*

The second picture suggests that Arman is deeply engaged in teaching as he writes on the blackboard. He was teaching the concept of *work* in physics⁴². He started the discussion by asking a student to push a wall. He also used other practical examples including asking a student to move a book from one place to another, and discussed the rowing of a boat in a river. Then by asking the students small questions he tried to develop the concept of *work*. Gradually Arman became deeply engaged in his teaching and tried to make the topic clear to the students. I admired his honest and sincere efforts. He did all the writing and calculations on the blackboard for the students.

After the end of the class Arman had requested me to sit with him and the other physics teacher to further discuss the key concept. The three of us had a comprehensive discussion on the topic. I prompted the physics teachers to consider small and doable developments. Arman then shared his experience of how on the previous day he had helped his young son to understand how a solid substance occupies space in a liquid. And from there our discussions led on ways of using easily available materials in teaching physics. In the debrief session I began by asking Arman if he thought there was scope for development in his teaching.

Arman: Yes, of course. After the class I sat with Safayet bhai and discussed how to draw a picture that would clarify the concept. We explored the idea that when people climb a mountain peak they might travel different distances but the displacement remains the same. We also explored why it is important to know the exact displacement against a force in calculating the magnitude of work. In this particular example, the force is gravitational and it always works in a vertical straight line towards the centre of the earth. I also explored that in any case of motion in physics, displacement is always the minimum linear distance between the starting and finishing point of motion. This is the

⁴² "When a force acts upon an object to cause a displacement of the object, it is said that *work* was done upon the object." <http://www.physicsclassroom.com/class/energy/Lesson-1/Definition-and-Mathematics-of-Work>

very basic concept. Then he also showed me some more complex calculations where gravitational and other external forces might act simultaneously. That is not relevant for Grade 9 students, but as a teacher I need to have some ideas. I never thought about displacement this way. Actually, I was little bit ignorant of the concept, or even if I knew a bit, I never taught it clearly.

It was not in my intention in this project to teach the teachers. I wanted to stay within the boundaries of encouraging a process of thinking differently and learning together. However, when the teachers directly asked me for examples, I hesitantly gave some. Then Kusol challenged me.

Kusol: You were going to avoid it. Within a moment of Arman sir's question, you explained the concepts clearly. Now everything is clear. Therefore, I tried to mention several times that we need training where we will get practical demonstration on how to do things.

I tried to return to the concept of developing an effective support system in the school.

Me: It is not possible to teach you everything in training. You need to develop a support system here so that you can explore and learn together. Therefore, we are working through this project to develop a support system. I am just trying to give some examples, but you are the masters of the textbooks and the subjects that you teach. I am sure, if you start thinking together and differently, you will get the joy of exploration.

Kusol: We expect from you something like what you have explained in the concept of *work*.

These sequences of discussions highlight a number of issues that were evident at this stage of the project. Firstly, most of the group began by wanting to affirm the professionalism of their colleagues and wanted to present themselves as competent professionals. Perhaps it indicated was a reliance on the technical competencies that had been coached in the national in-service training sessions. However, their willingness to move from their original positioning suggests that it was less a confident affirmation of their competence than an initial defence against the risk of criticism. Secondly even though many of the teachers became increasingly willing to receive criticism of their teaching, they wanted clear direction about what to improve. This suggests that they were indeed developing a degree of openness to explore ways to develop their teaching and their understanding of students' needs. It suggests they were developing some trust in me, but they still had not found ground to believe they themselves, individually or as a group, could find ways to improve their knowledge or their practice. If this was an end point for the project, it

would have been unsatisfactory as I would simply have created a new dependency. However, on reflection, I accepted it as transitional stage: a communicative space was developing; now was needed to move into a collaboratively exploratory space. The next chapter will report some aspects of such a move.

Moreover, my sense of a role as a non-directive facilitator was being seriously challenged. I was being asked to give explicit guidance. This created a dilemma for me. I wanted to avoid an authoritative role. At the same time, if I was genuinely asking for trustful sharing and collaboration, I felt I had no right, and no reason, to withhold my opinion or my knowledge. If I asked the teachers to be willing to share, I had to share too. I relate this sharing to what Linda Smith (2014, p.15) explores as the shift in power that can occur when the researcher recognises that participants are already actively engaged in their own well-being to which the researcher has the opportunity to contribute. She argues that the sharing between researcher and researched should not be merely a reflection on past activities, rather it should be sharing based on the researched community's beliefs and on-going life experiences, and controlled by them. I as researcher felt I had to acknowledge the teachers' desire to make their lives and their community's lives better and to share my knowledge. I also knew it was important to continue to try and find ways to develop a learning community that could carry on after I left.

Attentiveness, engagement, and learning

Several of the images in the montage show a class watching attentively as the teacher or a student writes on the board. The captions suggest a high level of engagement in the class. However, when we discussed our observation of the classes that they depicted, we examined how accurate attentiveness was in indicating engagement.

Nandan taught the biography of Pramatha Chaudhuri⁴³, an eminent writer of the Bengal Renaissance period. In our debrief, two different opinions emerged. Rojen and Sodaranda questioned whether the students had really been engaged during the lesson. Nuri and Shriti expressed their satisfaction with Nandan's teaching, saying "Sir's teaching technique was so accurate that we cannot identify any mistake."

I noted the phrase in my reflection journal and added a big question mark. I now see the issue as representing a fundamental difference between two approaches to teaching. Teaching can be merely instruction or, at its worst, indoctrination. Unfortunately, that is the mode of teaching that has become far too widespread in Bangladesh (Alam 2011). But teaching can also be a social

⁴³ 7August1868- 2 September 1946

practice that enables the students to think, and to explore knowledge, and that can help the teachers to grow as agentic in developing their own practice.

In one sense, it was good that the teachers avoided unnecessary fault finding. At the same time I found their easy praise of Nandan's teaching approach a barrier to developing inquiry. I saw a need for the teachers to gain confidence in exploring useful and worthy questions about their teaching. Such confidence might lead them to achieve *strategic artistry* in developing greater awareness of their practice and their potential for agency. The phrase *strategic artistry* is used by Greenwood (2012) in explaining the need for teachers to combine deliberate tactical planning with creative interventions. I use the phrase here to describe the development of considered and well-aimed strategies to build confidence at the same time as they provoke awareness. So I picked up the point raised by Rojen.

Me: You have said that discussion on Pramatha Chaudhuri could have been enhanced. Can you tell us what he missed?

Rojen: The discussion could have been enhanced on his literary work, academic and education life, and professional life. Very little information, half a sentence, is given in the textbook about his professional life. Discussion on it could have been enhanced.

Nandan started his reflection by showing respect to his colleague's comments. He also was strongly justifying his teaching against the comments. He explained that because of new syllabus and textbook, he was not fully aware of the all learning topics. He said that he was also learning beside the students. Because of short time, he found it difficult to have a comprehensive discussion on Pramatha Chaudhuri's contribution to Bangla literature. To move the discussion towards the ideas that Rojen had suggested, I posed the following scenario:

Me: The Bangladesh government is going to build a bridge over Padma River. I can ask two questions here. What will be the length of the Padma Bridge? What social, political, and economic changes will occur nationally, and especially in the south-west region of Bangladesh? Which one is the important question to you?

Nandan said that both questions were important but considering the situation he identified the latter as more worthy to explore.

Me: What skills and knowledge were you actually providing the students by teaching Pramatha Chaudhuri's biography? If I ask you to look into the national curriculum goals how can you relate it? After this school either they will go to higher study or will start

work in garments, agriculture, or office admin support job in the government or private offices. So what skills they might carry from this lesson?

Many of the teachers, like many others throughout Bangladesh, frequently talked about how time was very short, and that was why they failed to cover everything comprehensively. But Nandan had spent 35 minutes in lecturing about Pramatha Chaudhuri's biography. We discussed how an outline structure might instead be given to the students so they could search the textbook for the information and so become more fully engaged. We discussed how such a biography structure could promote further learning opportunities. Perhaps after developing the format Nandan can give it as a home task and on the following day he can have a discussion on it for a maximum of ten minutes. Rojen suggested that the students could adapt or change the format for different writers. I suggested Nandan could offer students a provocation like: *Pramatha Chaudhuri was a writer of the Bangla Renaissance period and his nationality was British Indian. Now we are Bangladeshi.* Just these words might well be enough to make the students think. As teachers we need to be constantly aware of creating scope for students' thinking. We do not need to teach everything, and practically it is not possible. We just need to plant the little green thinking seeds that may grow into trees. After the discussion the whole lounge became very silent.

Nandan (with a very deep and firm voice): I did not know these. Without knowing how can I teach this way? Thank you very much for sharing these ideas. Nobody told me these in the CPD⁴⁴ trainings. I never thought this way. And I also will keep talking with the other Bangla teachers. I want to be a good teacher.

Nandan did not make any big promise immediately after the discussion. Rather he made a reasonable and realisable commitment that he would keep talking with his colleagues.

The contrast between the teachers' captions to their photos and the developments in the discussion show that a sense of self-confidence was growing in challenging complacency about teaching. I then turned the discussion to engagement, opinions were divided and an argument arose.

Me: What are you thinking about students' engagement in learning?

Nandan: When I look into the innocent faces of the students, I see and understand that they want to know the answer to their questions from the teachers. But we are failing to meet even one fourth of their expectations.

⁴⁴ Continuing Professional Development

Rojen: Perhaps, you are right according to your own perspective. But I want to disagree gently with your opinion that we are miserably failing to meet the students' expectations. We need to consider the local context. In this rural area there is no private coaching business. Many of the parents are not aware of education. I know the indigent family condition of one of the girls who got an A+ from our school this year. She is my neighbour. From my experience, I can claim that she got 80-90% support from school for her good result.

Nandan: We talk much about quality. Disease will not be cured if we pour bad quality medicine in a bottle with precious cover. We are getting the result. So I am talking about the quality. We are meeting one fourth of expectations but we are failing to meet the rest of the need. We have some weaknesses. We have to overcome them.

I noted down the point Nandan made about quality, and brought up again in the workshop we held later in the project, as is reported in Chapter 8. Now I asked Nandan to explain what he meant about the students' expectations.

Nandan: I do not know what kind of meal our students take at home, and at the same time they do not know what kind of meal the teachers take at home. I need to know that what kind of food a student is interested in. I am just giving an example with food.

By using the metaphor of food, Nandan was raising a key element in learning and teaching, the need to develop a genuine relationship between teacher and student. This relationship can then enable teachers and students to explore their expectations together, and thus a composite community could evolve and learning could occur as a matter of pleasure and exploration. The next chapter reports initiatives in developing such a relationship.

Wrong answers and their usefulness

The fifth photograph came from a Math lesson in which Arman was teaching factor analysis. What made the debrief discussion particularly interesting was that Arman had made an unconscious slip in writing one of the problems on the blackboard.

Arman introduced the learning topic with a clear example. Then he discussed four formulas for algebraic factor analysis. After discussing the formulas he wrote a mathematical problem on the blackboard and asked a student to solve the problem. The student offered a solution. Arman asked another student to justify the answer and the student said, "Sir, incorrect answer." Then Arman asked the most talented student to solve the problem. With Arman's help the student completed the math. Arman asked the class "Do you understand now?" Some said *yes* and some said *no*. Arman asked one student who said *no* to point out specifically where she was getting a problem. The student stood up and smartly said, "Sir, here is minus sign, but I could not understand how she applied the $(a+b)$ whole square formula." Arman

acknowledged the issue, saying: "You have identified a very good point." Then he looked into textbook and identified that he made a mistake in transcribing the problem.

The debrief discussion centred around the students' reactions to the problem, and the missed opportunity to play with unexpected answer.

Nandan: Initially the students did not identify your mistake. The problem you gave the students to solve was hard to begin with, and, therefore, they perhaps failed to give attention fully.

Arman: I gave the problem on the basis of the formula that I discussed at the beginning of the lesson.

Nandan: Okay but it was too hard, I think. Just think about what S1 did at first.

Arman: That was right. She was solving the problem as a subtraction of two squares.

Nandan: But she did not take that technique.

Arman: Yes, I also identified that.

Nandan: S1 tried to solve the problem one way and S2 tried to solve it in an alternative way. So, what I am suggesting is that after discussing formula we can involve the students in starting to apply formula on easy and simple problems. They will then start to understand, and their confidence will grow. On the basis of this confidence, gradually you can engage them to solve more complex problems.

Kusol: I have noted down the same point that Nandan sir has already discussed. There was another technical issue that I strongly want you to think about. The problem could have been solved with the minus sign. And later you could have asked the students to solve it with the plus sign.

I entered the discussion at this point and recalled the moment in the lesson when Arman had exclaimed:

Did none of you understand? This is so anguishing. I could not understand where I made a mistake. During discussion on the formulas, I asked whether you had understood or not. You said yes. But now you are not responding. Why is that? I have to think.

His reaction had seemed remarkable to me and very encouraging, as it indicated that Arman was really noticing students' reactions. Arman did resolve the immediate problem himself, but knowing that many students had apathy towards algebra, I asked Arman to consider why such apathy arose and how such apathy could be overcome.

Again Arman asked if I could suggest any alternative approaches.

Me: Many students might not be able to learn and apply all the techniques together in solving problems. So for the slower learners you can think about one technique and one problem. When they start applying formula to solve problems, students start to gather hidden experiences that you cannot teach them. They learn it through engagement. Thus they start learning to apply the second formula, building on their experience with the first formula. But if you teach all the techniques together and ask them to apply them all, I believe, 5% students would cope and 95% could not.

Arman: Actually, my beginning was so hard for the students. I thought that immediately in classroom. I asked myself: did I fail to make the students understand? Now I can understand the issue. After teaching the four formulas, I gave a problem to solve based on the second formula. The beginning was too hard for them.

Arman's inadvertent mistake with the minus prompted us to further explore the purpose of teaching maths. His slip made the process of solving the problem more complex. The students, and their teacher, started feeling very vulnerable because of not getting the expected answer. The point was made that in our daily life business dealings, we do need to have accurate balancing of accounts. But it was also argued that mathematics is not just for balancing accounts, that mathematics, especially algebra, can be a tool for developing logical argument, analytical ability, and for explaining abstract scientific innovations and concepts. I suggested it may be good to sometimes get wrong answers or unexpected answers.

Later I reflected that perhaps the way that math textbooks have answer keys for every chapter which both teachers and students can see increases the development of a rigid sense of rightness or wrongness. A mistake in the classroom can offer opportunity to explore whether things can be done otherwise than we usually think. A wrong answer to a mathematical problem might have a valuable significance. If we want our students to be reflective and thoughtful, there is a need to be deliberative in judging why they give particular reactions. We can develop a sense that getting wrong answer to a mathematical problem is not problematic.

I also reflected that prestige is involved, and makes both teachers and students vulnerable. Teachers feel the pressure to be right always, and so students miss the opportunity for open learning and pride in their own work. Moreover, a positive approach to the value of mistakes would face a challenge from the dominant examination culture in education: students who fail to produce the expected and official answer just get zero marks.

More questions than answers

The sixth photo shows students with their heads down, engaged in the task given by the teacher. They are actively writing. Aaron began the debrief discussion with the same delight as he had expressed in his caption.

Aaron: Fantastic teaching! We can debate on the learning topic, but Polash tried to deliver the lesson according to the receiving capacity of the students. They do not need more than that. I was little bit confused at the beginning. After his discussion it became clear to me.

Me: You said that he delivers the lesson according to the students' capacity. What do you mean by that?

Aaron: The way he described the definition of citizen and gave the examples was good for the students. He gave an example of the birth of a child on an aeroplane to describe the concept of citizenship by birth. The students could have asked a question, but they did not.

Me: But is it important to enable the students to learn to ask questions?

Aaron: Yes, of course. As I have observed the class, it seemed good to me.

Me: I agree Polash's teaching was good, but I wonder how we could be sure that the students have no ability to learn more than what we teach?

I asked the group to look back on a moment in the observation. In the class Polash had discussed different policies defining citizenship. He then posed a scenario.

Polash: A pregnant woman was flying from Bangladesh to Saudi Arabia. The woman gave birth to a child when the flight was flying over Indian Territory. What will be the new born child's citizenship?

S1: Citizen of Bangladesh

Polash: (Gives a questioning look)

Students (several): Citizen of Bangladesh, sir.

Polash: (waves his hand to signal to Arif to stand up) What will be the citizenship identity of the child? Bangladeshi, Indian, or Saudi Arabian?

S2: Sir, Indian.

Polash: According to what principle?

S2: Sir, parents' nationality.

Polash: What?

Students (several): Sir, birth place rule.

Polash: Yes, because the child is born in Indian Territory.

I now referred to students' different and perhaps confused responses.

Me: You gave the example of birth in aeroplane to discuss reasons for citizenship. It could have been both. The students could have been invited into a discussion to decide why the child was Bangladeshi, and why Indian? What was the difference between the two policies of citizenship, namely citizen by birth and citizen according to birthplace? Why are these two policies different? They could have had discussion for three or four minutes. And does it conflict with syllabus completion in due time and exam passing?

Polash: Actually, bhai, there is many things to learn. We teach in a rural school. Environment impacts on discussion. We come to school and go back home customarily. I never think this way, but it is do-able. Because we were doing observations, I took a little preparation. We need to look into the basics. Yes, I need to think about it, especially about questioning skills. They will ask me questions only if I give them something interesting. And I can also learn from their questions.

Polash addressed me as *bhai*. I had been so afraid of my challenge being taken negatively. But when he addressed me as *bhai*, it gave me relief and courage, because the connotation of the word in our context is respect, reliability and mutual faith. I did not want to be negative about his teaching. I just wanted to challenge Aaron's complacency in putting a limit on students' learning ability. At the same time I wanted to point out how the teachers were creating beautiful learning opportunities, but because they were unaware of the possibilities, they were missing out. Polash created a great opportunity for the students to examine their understanding of citizenship in a context different than what was written in the textbook. But somehow the opportunity got lost in the middle. Both S1 and S2's answer were plausible, but it could have been more encouraging and exciting for them to have been given the chance to explain how they understood the principles of gaining citizenship in the given context. If *reflection-in-action* is a valuable tool of an evolving learning community, then recognition of these kinds of opportunities is really necessary. Such opportunities cannot be created with pre-planning. They need to be recognised when they happen. What we can learn through this kind of recognition is more valuable than what we learn through theory, because the recognition happens in the actual context of practice. It seemed to me that this kind of learning could not occur in the formal training sessions that the government currently provides. It requires a continuous process of discussion. I see this as the value of the participatory action research process, where participants invest time, labour and have dialogue about their daily practice.

Engagement and reproduction

When we had observed all the classes, I looked back and reflected on the difference between the photographs the teachers had selected with their affirmative statements about good practices and the challenges and suggestions that arose in our debriefs. I felt very positive about the good will and courage each of the clusters had shown in being prepared to look through other eyes at their practice and then to self-reflect. I began to hope our project could be useful. At the same time I was depressed about the way the process and the content of almost all the lessons involved reproduction and replication. From my own experience I knew this trait could be seen in schools throughout Bangladesh.

Teachers cannot carry the sole blame as they are the product of a bigger system. For a long period the national examination assessment policy has been heavily dominated by the principles of memorisation and reproduction. This approach transferred to classroom processes. These aspects of education and schooling form the dominant culture of education, and are more or less evident everywhere in Bangladesh. Very recently, the government changed the assessment policy to introduce a *creative questioning system*. However, many teachers are confused about what creative questioning means in actual practice (Al Amin, in preparation). The legacy of reproductive learning is still predominant in classrooms. Therefore, teachers' understanding of students' active engagement stresses attentive hearing, observing and reproducing. As a nation we need to think about how to redirect teachers' focus and enable them to understand the complexities of *active engagement*.

As a citizen of Bangladesh and as a member of the local community, when I criticise teaching practices in this thesis, I criticise knowing that there are global forces and historical legacies that have created problems. However, while it is valid to identify the external causes, such identification cannot make the problems go away. As I criticise, I consciously stand in the midst of the problems, acknowledging that I, like the teachers work within this project, need to play my part in working towards ways of creating better education despite external forces.

Making it accessible

After the full round of observations and debriefs, we sat together to review our understandings of what had happened and what we could develop from our shared experience. We decided to read a small section of the Bangladesh secondary school curriculum document where directives on teaching and learning are given (Bangladesh NCTB, 2012). We encouraged each other to relate

our discussion with our daily teaching and life experiences and with our understanding of last two weeks working together.

Kusol: Teaching and learning involves two different words. On the other side, teacher - students also involves two different words. But, for teaching and learning, the teacher's role is important. The teacher's own preparation and convincing and simple presentation in front of students is important. What I mean is that explaining complex learning topics simply for the students is the top most priority for a teacher, and it needs innovation.

Me: Can you give an illustration of your idea of innovation? An example for our better understanding?

Kusol: If I want to climb a tree without any help I have to do very hard labour and I might get hurt. If I use a ladder I can climb the tree easily. But, for using ladder, I need to think and utilise my talent.

Aaron: I can remember one of my teachers' comments. He asked us to write an essay on *cow*. We wrote many things about cow. One important point that we wrote about cow was that we use cow for cultivating land. One student said: *Sir, now we have tractor. We do not need cow for farming.* The teacher asked how many tractors we have. So my question is: how many ladders do the students need to make to climb a tree?

Me: I do not understand you, Aaron. What do you mean?

Aaron: All students will not be able to make a ladder and teachers needed to teach the students technique.

Kusol: I also mentioned that. By utilising our talent we can make a complex task easy.

Arman: I want to add a little bit. You have talked about cultivation with a tractor. Then students will not be able to understand the hardship of cultivation with a cow. Let them climb the tree first without anything. Let them fail first. Let them understand that picking a mango from a tree is not easy. If they use a ladder first to get mangos, they will not understand the hardship. First allow them to climb and get hurt. Then they can try differently and get the mango, but again might get some pain. Thus they will be able to explore the hidden small steps.

Nuri then gave the group a totally different perspective.

Nuri: We can pick mango without climbing tree. We need to think that way also. We can use *akshi* [a special kind long bamboo stick with a net at the end]. Even if I climb the tree, I cannot pick mangoes from all branches. Some branches are narrow. If we shake

the narrow branch, the mango will fall down and get ruptured. It will then be useless. So sometimes we need to use an *akshi*.

The discussion became so interesting at that moment. I requested Nuri to explain what she meant by mangoes in unreachable branches, why she could not pick mangoes from narrow branches even after climbing the tree, and what did she mean by *akshi* in educational terms. Her replies were very provocative. She said that she meant the weak students by the phrase *mangoes in narrow branches*. Then she spoke about the heart of her and other teachers' dilemma.

Nuri: We got education in our school life in a traditional method. That was based on memorisation. Now the government is telling us to teach differently. If we could have learned differently, we would have taught differently. But we are struggling.

Again I asked Nuri to say about what she meant by *akshi* in educational terms. She said that an *akshi* could be a way to introduce the practical aspects of learning to the students. She said that perhaps she could ask the students good questions. What Nuri was saying had magnificent implications for about teaching and learning, and for teachers' development. According to her metaphor, teaching involves emotional labour, intention, technique, and making connection with the students. I identified *akshi* as teachers' invisible extended hand to reach the students' educational needs.

In our discussion, and in my subsequent thinking, *akshi* acquired the power of a symbol that could represent the tools and developmental processes needed to create open, enabling and provocative teaching. On the one hand, it symbolises the extended arm with which teachers could reach out to students. On the other it symbolises the tool teachers could use to reach for their own professional development. It came to represent a search for artistry in teaching and in creating situations for learning.

More ideas about engagement

We continued the discussion.

Arman: Yes we need an *akshi*, but how can we be sure about the students' learning? I can remember from my own student life. It became monotonous, when our teachers used to give continuous lectures. We understood nothing and started larking. So, perhaps we can bring change occasionally. Again I have to talk about use of learning materials and group work. I can refer to Kusol sir's Bangla teaching in Grade 8. He asked the students to write five sentences on *women* after discussing the poem. I saw the students become

attentive at that moment. So we can ensure learning in this way. This could be a kind of attraction for the students. I do not know what other ways we can try.

Kusol: I can remember one teacher from Rangpur Teachers' Training College. He discussed a lot about how to ask questions. We were surprised. After three days' discussion we concluded that asking question is harder than answering. If I ask a student *what is the capital of Bangladesh?* There is one single answer: *Dhaka*. But, if I ask: *What is Dhaka?* Different answers might come. So in case of teaching, we need to think about the students' physical and mental needs. If we ask them easy and spontaneous questions, they will be able to answer. If I ask a clumsy question, they become puzzled.

Arman: There is another point in the curriculum, and that is about mental torture. We often say the students that *you are not capable* or *you cannot do it*, when they fail to answer our question. They become hopeless and do not come to school the next day. Even if they come to school, they become afraid and mentally weak and lose courage. I learned a technique through our on-going discussion. If a student says something wrong, we need to say *fine* first and then we can help to elaborate the answer differently by giving a clue. Thus we can help the students to understand.

Gradually the teachers were developing a range of understandings of the concept of *akshi* in their thinking about their teaching.

Polash: We can explain it differently. Every day we teach same way. We can think about applying a different method. We can say to the students: *let us start today by singing a song together*. It might change the atmosphere. Then we can utilise that atmosphere in teaching and learning

Sodananda: The training also says about arranging a debate and drawing pictures. We can ask a student to say the name of any of his classmates. We do not come to the classroom just to read from books. By saying each other's names they will be able to come closer to each other. We can ask one who is good at drawing to draw a picture and ask one to write on blackboard whose handwriting is good. Thus the students will get courage.

Though at this stage the whole discussion was based at the level of intention and of developing understanding, it had practical action implications for the next stage of the project. It created a basis on which I could invite the teachers to meet with the students outside the classroom. This meeting is reported in the next chapter, Meanwhile, the teachers' focus on developing students' skill in asking questions, provided an opportunity for an achievable plan. Furthermore we had the metaphor of an *akshi*: a means for reaching for fruit on apparently inaccessible branches.

Emerging issues

At this stage of the project we were all beginning to see that there was a gap between the idealism of the ways teachers wanted to serve their students and what was actually happening in classrooms. As can be seen from the preceding discussions each of the teachers was finding their own way of identifying the gap and searching for what might repair it. At the same time I was developing my own understandings. One of the tensions I was wrestling with was the relationship between national issues and the ones in the school. My thoughts at this stage of the project are summarised in the figure below.

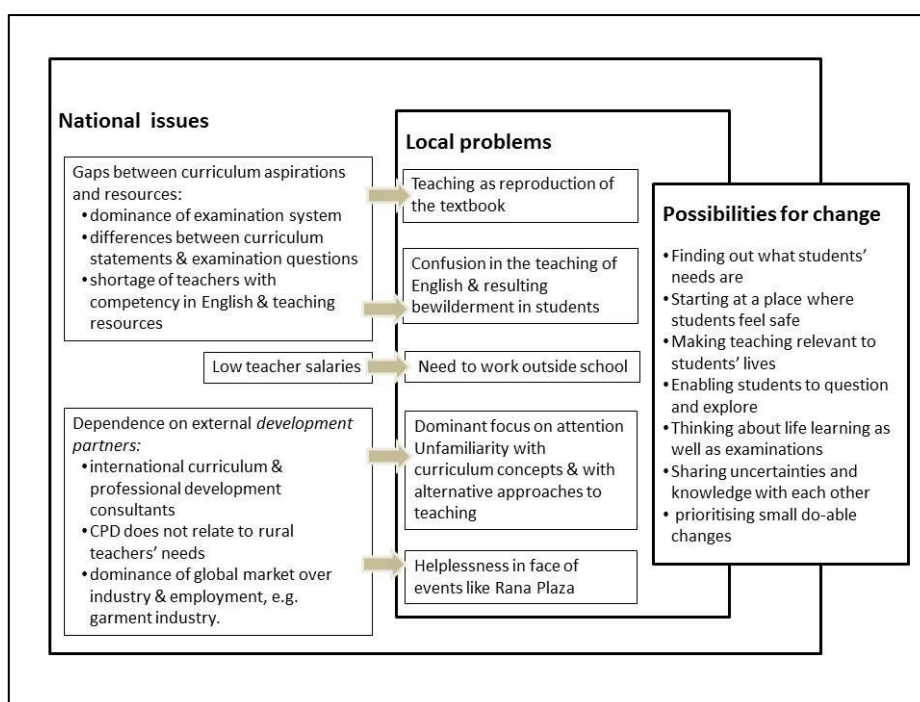


Fig 6.2: National, local and possibility for change

Many of the limitations that were becoming apparent in the local school context have roots in more wide-reaching national issues. The gaps between curriculum statements and examination content are a national problem, as are the shortfalls of translating curriculum vision into teaching resources and professional development for teachers. As I discussed earlier, the problems in the teaching of English seen in this school are all too common throughout Bangladesh. Low teacher salaries are a national problem and to some extent force teachers to undertake after-school coaching. The constrained dependence of Bangladesh, a developing country, on global 'development partners' for educational consultancy and the development of industry creates a situation where, even at national level, there is limited power to resolve problems. Analysis and description of the impact of the global market on education in Bangladesh and elsewhere is beyond the scope of this study, and already reported by others (for instance Kabir, 2012; Anwaruddin, 2014). What I see as important in terms of my project is the acknowledgement that

some problems cannot be resolved at the local level, and the consequent identification of and attention to what can be done at local level.

In this chapter a number of areas were identified as spaces where teachers could initiate change at local level. Some involved classroom interaction with students: finding out what their needs are, starting a lesson at a clear simple level where they feel confident and safe, making teaching relevant to their lives, and creating a learning environment where they can ask question and explore knowledge rather than passively receiving it. Others involved teachers re-evaluating what kinds of knowledge are most important, and without neglecting the pressure of examinations, thinking about how students can learn the values like justice and fairness, and skills they need for life. A key space was developing personal willingness and group strategies to share uncertainties and knowledge with each other. Since all the injustices of society and all the educational problems of Bangladesh cannot be solved at local level, the focus need to be on prioritising small, do-able changes.

A communicative space that allows exploration

At this stage of the project we were beginning to identify some of the problems and talk about them from different points of view. I see this as working within a communicative space that allows exploration of problems, of what causes them and of what might be done about them. The figure below encapsulates the way the communicative space was evolving.

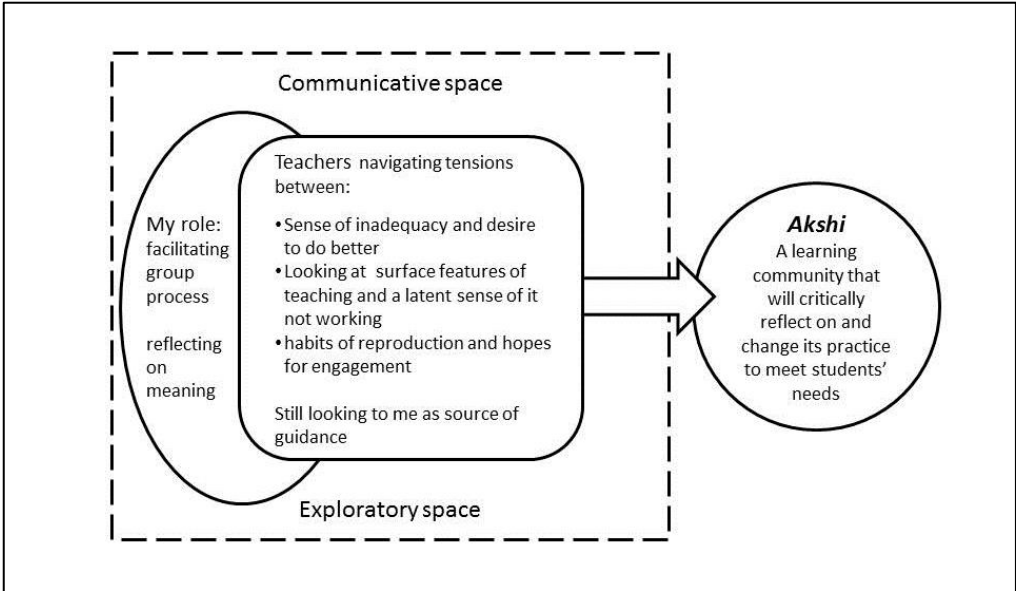


Fig 6.3: Exploring in the communicative space

As the teachers observed each other’s lessons and listened and responded to each other’s feedback, they were beginning to see themselves as learners and the group discussions as

collaborative support structure of their learning. In the discussions, as well as identifying specific elements in teaching practice that they thought needed attention and that have been discussed above, the teachers also wrestled with a number of conceptual and attitudinal issues. In particular, it seemed that as a group they wrestled with the tension between a sense of inadequacy and a desire to do better, between habits of looking at surface features of teaching and a latent awareness that the learning they hoped for was not occurring, habits of reproduction and hopes for engagement, and, as the discussions progressed a growing awareness that attention was not the same as engagement, and that for engagement to occur both teachers and students needed to find ways to move beyond reproduction of knowledge.

At this stage the teachers still continuously turned to me as a mentor. I had entered the field with a concept of my role in the participatory action research process as one of non-directive facilitation. As reported above, Kusol firmly stated a different expectation, and one that seemed to be held by most of the teachers. *We expect from you, he said, something like what you have explained in the concept of work.* In the field I was already aware I could not push too many changes at once, and that I had to think about reciprocity. I was asking the teachers to work together to examine their practice and they were asking me to freely give my advice. If I was asking them to speak freely, they had the right to ask the same from me. Since coming back from the field I come to realise that their expectations were an important transition stage in our development as a learning community. Wenger (2000) explains that communities of practice depend on an internal leadership that allows the community to develop, and that this leadership may be concentrated on one person or widely distributed and that it will change over time. At this stage of the project a communicative space was being developed and it was one that allowed us all to explore ideas about practice, and I see that as a strong step towards establishing a learning community.

Nuri had introduced metaphor of an *akshi* as a way of describing the strategies that needed to be developed to help students learn. As we had talked further it also came to represent a search for a professional self-development. In my own reflection on this stage of the project I saw it as a symbol for the learning community we were developing, one where the teachers could collaboratively reflect on and change their practices to meet student needs. The next chapter describes how the teachers met with students to explore those needs.

Chapter 7: Listening to the students' voices

On my way to the school one day, Tuhin, an eleven year old student told me a story from her Bangla textbook. She said:

I like the story of Shova. Shova is a little girl and she is deaf. Both of her parents have died. She lives with her paternal auntie. She becomes very upset when she thinks of her father. And then she goes to the roof. Her auntie says that if a yellow bird sits on the tree branch beside the roof, her father would come. She goes on the roof again. The yellow bird arrives. Then the father from next door comes home, but Shova's father does not come home. She becomes very upset.

Tuhin acknowledged Bangla was her favourite subject. When I asked her if she could tell me any story from her English textbook, she remained silent for a while and then finally said: "Sir, I can't remember."

Tuhin's retelling of Shova's story captures both the student's rural simplicity and the way her imagination could be fired by what she met in her textbooks. My conversation with her was one I hoped to see reflected in future dialogues between teachers and students. In the previous chapter I reported how the teachers started to think about developing an *akshi* to reach students' educational needs and imaginations. But before the *akshi* discussion students were on the backstage of our project. In our initial discussions, the students were presented from the teachers' points of view. Through the *akshi* discussion the need to listen to students evolved as a strong focus for action. This chapter reports the hesitations and fears the teachers initially expressed about initiating dialogue with the students, the way the dialogue did develop, the students' articulations of their learning needs, the ways students and teachers variously saw the challenges for the school, and my own evolving understandings of both the process of our exploration and of the educational needs of Bangladesh. I report my personal conversation with Tuhin, a meeting with the teachers in which we explored the possibility of dialogue with students, the dialogue that eventuated between the teachers and the students, and the students' voicing of their perceptions of the school through photos and commentary.

Tuhin's story and the importance of students' voices

As I mentioned in Chapter 4 I was cycling towards the school and thinking how we as a team could explore and understand the students' hidden dreams, and aspirations. Suddenly, I saw a

farming tractor coming from the opposite direction. I stopped to give way because the road was narrow. Then I found Tuhin was coming behind me on a bicycle. When the tractor passed, I started moving again, but slowly so that Tuhin could come parallel to me, and I started talking to her. It was an intergenerational conversation - between the old and new Bangladesh.

I asked if she would talk to me while she was cycling. She said *yes* without any hesitation. I thrilled with her *yes* because this was an unmapped conversation. Very quickly I thought through a structure for the conversation. I planned to ask a few questions about herself and her family, a few questions to know her general feelings about the school, and few specific questions about her subject preferences. Thus I wanted to understand her educational aspirations, needs and life expectations. I started with where she was from. She raised her right hand to indicate her village, saying that she was from west Gilabari. She was the only and younger sister of her four brothers. She told me that one of her brothers would sit for the Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSC) in the following year and another brother was a garments worker in Dhaka. Two of her other elder brothers were married and agricultural day labourers. I was careful to ask her the sort of questions that she need not think hard about. Very quickly our conversation took a natural flow.

She told me that she came to school every day. Because of the cleanliness and good teaching of her sirs (in Bangladesh students address teachers as sir), she was impressed with the school. Then I asked Tuhin what subject she liked to read most. She told me that Bangla and English are her most favourite subjects. I asked her to tell me if she liked to read poems or stories. She said that she liked stories. I asked her if she could tell me one of her favourite stories from the Bangla textbook. She responded very quickly as if she was waiting for this question, saying, “Yes sir, I will,” and, with a note of enthusiasm in her voice, started telling me the story that I quoted above.

She told the story convincingly as if she was explaining her own life experience. I was really impressed by the natural flow and simplicity. I said, “You have much sympathy for Shova, haven’t you? Her voice became mournful and deep. She replied with a single Bangla word: *Ji*, a very polite and formal way to say yes. I asked her why. “She is deaf and she has no father,” Tuhin replied. I tried to take her out from the lachrymose situation and asked her what she wanted to be in the future. She said that she wanted to be a doctor because she wished to serve people and give medical treatment without cost. Very politely I challenged her philanthropic notion, asking, “How will you live your life if you give free treatment to all?” “Will everybody ask for free treatment, sir?” she asked in return. Her thinking resonated for me as a challenge for the teachers to give attention to the space from where students like Tuhin were talking.

I asked her if she could tell any story from the English textbook. She remained silent for a while. I did not interrupt her silence. She said, “Sir, I can’t remember.” Her silence was significant. By that time we were just approaching the school gate. I asked Tuhin if she wanted to ask me any question. She asked, “Why are you coming to our school?” What I said in response is less important than her ability to ask a *why* question. To me, her question denotes children’s innate urge to learn. Knowing when those urges get momentum and when they dry up was a really big challenge for the teachers with whom I was working.

I shared Tuhin’s story with the teachers during tiffin period on the following day. After listening to me all the teachers started laughing. I asked the reason. Kusol said that it was an unbiased recognition of their teaching from a student. Nuri felt proud of Tuhin as she taught Bangla in Grade 6. She became enthusiastic and explained how she had taught the story in the classroom. We joined in the celebration and gave thanks to Nuri. I requested the teachers if they could find anything encouraging and challenging for them to think about from Tuhin’s story. Shishupal said, “Tuhin has a good power of imagination and a good heart also. Perhaps other students have a similar quality. We need to encourage them.” The other teachers agreed with Shishupal. Then I tried to draw teachers’ attention to Tuhin’s compassion to Shova and her philanthropic notion about life. I suggested that perhaps the other students might, or might not, have similar kinds of tendencies.

As a facilitator, the sharing of Tuhin’s story helped me to unpack some on-going concerns about students’ learning that often occur in Bangladeshi classrooms. I asked the teachers to pay sincere attention to the following issues. First, Tuhin told me fearlessly and firmly that she could not remember any story from the English textbook. I suggested to the teachers that perhaps it was the beginning of Tuhin’s disconnection from the conversation. I requested the teachers to think about the reasons of these kinds of instances during teaching. Second, she asked me that why I was coming to her school every day. I told the teachers that her question denoted a student’s natural urge to know and learn. I requested the teachers to think about a context where students could become interested in asking questions.

Teachers’ fears about dialogue with students

After talking about Tuhin’s story, we discussed whether we should sit with parents and students to better understand their life goals, educational needs, and thoughts. Some of the teachers agreed that they could talk with the parents but it seemed too early to them. I, as facilitator, also did not want to bring in any negative perspectives about teachers’ professional role and the

research process at that early stage of the project. We agreed that we might talk to the parents in the following cycles if we felt ready to do so. I continued negotiating that we should sit with the students. Except the science teachers, the teachers agreed to listen to the students. Kusol, one of the science teachers, said, “If we say *yes*, our students will do so, and if we say *no* they will say *no*. They are just students. Why will we then sit with them?” The other science teachers reacted with a similar kind of caution.

In the debrief sessions Kusol and other teachers had said that they could learn from their students and that students’ engagement should be seen as a necessary part of teaching and learning. I suggested that what Kusol said now was contradictory to what they discussed in the debrief sessions.

At first I interpreted Kusol’s reluctance to meet with the students as a holding on to the power that he saw as part of his identity as a teacher, and it seemed a denial of the understandings that had developed in the debrief sessions. Then I reminded myself that it might simply indicate that they were still processing the tensions between existing practices and new understandings. I waited if anyone in the group would challenge Kusol. None did. I requested them to think about the teacher-student relationship, asking “*Is teacher-student relationship* just a phrase, or can it be developed through continuous practice?”

Then Arman, a physics teacher, said, “A teacher-student relationship should be deep.” I asked, “What do you mean by that? Is it just a saying?” Then Sodananda and Kusol said that very often they talked with the students. I asked what they shared with them. They said that besides teaching textbooks, they asked students why they did not come to school regularly, and why they did not study at home. They also urged the students “to develop many things” and to read a lot.

I was disappointed by the suggestion that simply giving instructions was sharing, but it did not entirely surprise me. I recognised this approach is a deep-rooted, pervasive, institutionalised feature of a system where directions always come from above and are expected to be executed. To the extent that it is not challenged, the system functions, but it involves projection of one’s own understandings onto others, such as colleagues and students, and it reduces education to instruction. Rabindranath (1908) warns that giving instruction is in conflict with our national vision of empowering students to reach their learning potential. He asserts (p.43) that when we just instruct students to do something we put them in the dock as if they are being accused. In that case, Rabindranath argues, instruction fails to attract the students’ attention and thus teachers’ efforts fail to achieve results.

I was aware that if I imposed instructions about meeting the students, it could not bring any real change. If the meeting was to be effective, it would have to initiate a continuous process of engagement with the students' questions and concerns. I reminded myself that this discussion allowed us to clearly see each other's opinions and concerns, and so was helping us to understand one another's perspectives. I wanted to find a way to extend this to create a context from where we could also understand students' perspectives and not see the students as just reflections of ourselves. I needed to clarify the teachers' point of resistance.

Me: I am trying to understand why you do not want to sit with the students. What might we lose if we do sit? And what might we gain if we do not sit?

Kusol: Who will talk with the students? Do you, or do we?

Me: Of course you will talk with the students, and I will be with you.

Sodananda: We need to be clear what we will ask the students. Will you ask the students what kind of teaching facilitates better learning?

Me: We cannot ask this directly. Rather we can try to unpack their educational challenges and we can try to explore what the students might achieve if we create a free and friendly environment.

Arman: I had understood differently. We have thought you will ask them about how we are teaching now. We have taught before in a particular style. Now the teaching style has changed. The students will surely know that because of your presence and guidance we are teaching in a changing style. They will think that though we knew the different teaching style before, we did not apply it. We have to think about it. Of course we have weaknesses, but we do not want our students to know that. On behalf of the group I am making it open.

This was an honest acknowledgement by the teachers of their vulnerability and fear. I now understood that the teachers were afraid that I might ask questions or call for demonstrations that might put the teachers in a negative light, and this threatened the trust we had begun to build as a learning community. However, the confusion about agendas was good to work through, and its immediate consequence was to develop a clear cut objective for the discussion with the students, and thus to strengthen group ownership of the project.

Arman had acknowledged that they were also afraid of their weaknesses being exposed to the students. I recognised this as a key point in their willingness to explore their sense of identity. I reflected that they had perhaps underestimated students' ability to judge their teachers. Is it really possible to mask teachers' weakness in front of students? An expectation of being always right in

the eyes of students puts teachers under professional pressure. Or perhaps the school context that forces students to be obedient and polite also forces teachers to project an ideal image. It does not necessarily mean that students have no questions in their mind or have nothing to share with the teachers. However, the fear of exposure for not knowing something can be experienced by students as well as teachers.

We agreed to work through the confusions and fears. We decided on a suitable date and time, and we developed a framework for our discussion. We decided to focus on exploring students' personal learning challenges as well as their future life goals. We also agreed that we would give the students cameras and allow them to take pictures of whatever they liked during the school period. The teachers were satisfied that this framework would not impede examination success; rather it would involve fun and adventure. They became excited to see how the students would react. Later I reflected on my naivety as a researcher: I had read the situation wrongly. When I was challenged from the science teachers, I learned that I needed to listen carefully to what the teachers said, and to what they wanted.

Dialogue between teachers and students

In actuality the dialogue between the teachers and the students unfolded with natural ease. In reporting the dialogue, I will first outline the whole process and then examine the ideas that emerged.

In the following week, according to our decision, we and the students sat together during tiffin period. Three students from each grade, all the teachers and I participated in the conversation. We sat in a classroom next to the teachers' lounge. The students sat according to their preferences but in two separate groups, boys and girls. When we entered the classroom the students stood up and give salam to us. Nandan asked the students to sit down. Though it was a summer day, the weather was not exhaustingly hot; a gentle breeze was passing through the windows. The students seemed a little more casual than I observed in formal classes. The overall environment was congenial for having a dialogue in the middle of the day. The teachers and I took our seats facing the students.

Nandan welcomed the students and asked if any one of them could say why we were sitting together. Frajana, a grade eight student, said, "Ji⁴⁵ sir, for talking about school and pora-lekha⁴⁶."

⁴⁵ Yes.

⁴⁶ The simplest and direct translation of pora is reading and lekha is writing. But in Bangladesh when we say pora-lekha in educational conversation we mean education and learning.

It was good to know that the students were aware of the purpose of our conversation. I was also excited to see how Nandan could create a space for the students to participate. He gave a short opening speech:

Thanks to my beloved colleagues and cherished students. At the beginning I want to welcome my students. At the beginning I want to mention that we are a single family in this school. We have 400 family members. It's not possible to talk with everyone separately. You fifteen will participate in the dialogue as representatives of your classmates. I am expressing my hope that you will be able to spread the light of education across the nation and world by developing your education. Today we will discuss about your future plans and your education. Your dreams are not similar. Perhaps some of you want to be a doctor while others might have a range of different preferences such as engineer, educationist, lawyer, professor. I want to finish here by asking you a question.

Nandan's speech was encouraging because he acknowledged the teachers and students as members of a single family. He recognised the students as representatives who could talk with their teachers. Finally, he expressed his hope for students' futures. It created a context from which a constructive discussion between the teachers and the students could evolve. I believed the discussion that was about to take place was very important for the overall direction of the project. We were working in a context where students are mostly expected to execute their teachers' orders. If developing agency was to be the goal of the project, listening to the students was a first step to achieve that goal. Therefore, the beginning was like a sparkling morning fog. Whether that morning fog would dry up quickly or acquire a crystal shape was a question we still had to explore.

Poverty and education

Nandan's question turned out to be a complicated one. He said that both teachers and the students did their education in a context of fighting against poverty. He asked, "Do you think that along with the fight against poverty education in school is possible?"

The students started looking to each other with wondering faces. Kusol asked the students if any of them could stand up and explain what Nandan asked. I was getting a fear that the conversation which had begun wonderfully might be steering towards a dead end. I proposed that we could explore answering Nandan's question by asking the students a different but simple question. The teachers' facial expressions suggested that they were becoming confused by the proposed change of direction. I took a risk in the hope of developing a more participatory process of dialogue. I

asked the students, “Do you come to school every day?” The students altogether said that they came to school every day. Afterwards the teachers and the students gradually started to participate in the conversation.

Rojen: Do you know who of your classmates miss school and why?”

Monir: A very few of our classmates sometimes do not come to school for one or two days.

Tapan: Some students miss school because they struggle with poverty or suffer from sickness. In some cases some parents cannot bear the education expenses.

Nuri: Do you enjoy your schooling?

Students: (together, and strongly) Yes madam.

Me: What do you enjoy?

Shirin: We enjoy everything in our school.

Me: Tell little bit more about what most attracts you in the classroom.

Sharin: Our sirs give lessons properly, tell us stories and try to make us laugh when they teach. And thus we become attentive.

Sayham: Sir, many of us come to school with financial difficulties and we cannot pay the exam fee and monthly tuition fee in due time. In that case if school creates pressure to pay the fees we become depressed. Then we cannot concentrate. We disconnect fully from the learning process and understand nothing.

Although it felt awkward at the beginning, Nandan’s question provoked reflection about the relationship between education and poverty. While the goal of our project was not to work for poverty alleviation, we did need to work through the complexities in schooling caused by rural poverty. When I revisit the discussion I see Shirin and Sayham offered two opposing perspectives. Shirin’s words suggest that despite rural poverty the teachers help students to laugh and to be attentive in the classroom. In contrast Sayham’s statement suggests that although rural poverty did not entirely stop students coming to school regularly, it did influence concentration, and so learning, in the classroom.

While low salary and vulnerable social status are disincentives for teachers, students’ appreciation of their teachers’ role could be a motivation. However, if students’ expressions of admiration become unconditional, it may also reduce teachers’ motivation to further develop their professional practice. The general trend in Bangladesh is that the students respect their teachers, but students’ admiration may impede developmental opportunities for both teachers

and students. When I look at Rabindranath's work, I find a strong resonance to Sayham's contribution to the discussion. Rabindranath (1908, p.49) asserts that if students fail to raise their demands freely, teachers have failed to activate the full potential of students' energy. Sayham had the courage to interrupt the so far unquestioning admiration in the discussion to state a problem, and in doing so he generated energy in the discussion. His contribution gave us the opportunity to focus deeply on various aspects of teaching and learning. We then opened the floor and invited the students to explain what moments and situations helped them to become attentive in lessons and what distracted them.

What makes students attentive? What makes them disconnect?

Monir first stood up to share his experience of when he felt motivated to be focused in classroom learning. He said that he became more attentive when teachers taught any important topic. We asked Monir to explain little bit more about what he meant by an important topic. Monir said, "Sir, during teaching when teachers say you can get questions in the exam hall from this topic, we become very attentive to that topic."

Perhaps Monir was trying to please the teachers, but what he said is a widespread belief among both guardians and students. Hearing the words from the mouth of a student reminded me again of the way the all-encompassing belief in the importance of examination success defines the perceived purpose of schooling and the teacher's role in the classroom. The learning topics that have no importance for examinations are seen as outside the focus of the teaching and learning agenda. However, marginalisation of a learning topic in the classroom does not mean that it has no value in life experiences. This is an issue that has implications for national education policy, especially assessment policy, teachers' professional development, and secondary teacher education. At the level of our local project, by listening to the students, we were trying to understand the purpose of teaching and learning and how we could balance the importance of examinations and wider educational purposes.

However, other students did not fully agree with Monir.

Shoaib: Attentiveness increases when teachers teach with pleasure. We may fail to concentrate when someone sitting beside us made strange sounds or speaks during teaching. Most of the students are attentive, but a few always remain inattentive.

Farhana: Perhaps some students make a noise when they fail to understand a learning topic. Perhaps if the teachers could identify the problem earlier, they could help students to understand the topic.

Farhana and Shoaib continued arguing. I was looking at the teachers and saw them listening to the students, a little cautiously. It seemed the students were provoking the teachers to think differently about teaching and learning. Then Tapan asked permission to add his opinion. All the teachers said “Yes! Yes!” together, and with exclamation. It seemed they had been waiting for Tapan, who appeared to be regarded as a special student, to say something.

Tapan: If our teachers tell us: *Listen this lesson carefully. After this lesson I will give you a writing task or I will ask you a question*, we then listen attentively. After that, if we are given a task, we will be able to respond and this way we become more attentive.

If our teachers teach us with pleasure or tell us something different than what is written in the textbooks, we become curious and those who have already been distracted from the classroom return with attentiveness. When our teachers just read out from textbooks, we lose our attention from the text. We learn step by step. If we fail to understand in a particular segment, we cannot understand anything in the successive process of learning. Then we get lost, our brain stops, and we lose interest in learning. If we get opportunity to understand clearly in each stage of our learning in class, we gradually start to be more engaged. Both the teachers and students have responsibility to be attentive in classroom.

I was happily surprised that Tapan had identified several of the ideas that had emerged through the first stages of the teachers’ own reflections on their teaching and I looked forward to seeing how the teachers would later respond to this reinforcement. Their reactions are reported in the next chapter.

Students’ personal learning challenges

As the discussion progressed, Arman invited Nilima to participate in the discussion.

Nilima: Sir, my concern is in mathematics. I am weak at trigonometry. When my teacher teaches trigonometry in class I become fully attentive and I feel I have understood. But afterwards I can’t remember and I forget when I go home.

I reflected that Nilima was opening up an important issue: understanding in the classroom and forgetting at home. Later I learned that Nilima was one of the brilliant students in grade nine and she had gained a talent pool scholarship in grade five and grade eight. After Nilima other

students spontaneously shared their learning challenges, and ventured to suggest what they expected from their teachers.

Farhana said that she also forgot maths. She suggested that it would have been good for their learning if teachers could arrange a test examination after finishing each chapter. I asked Farhana if they could do it by themselves. She said that they got more inspiration if teachers could arrange it for the whole class. Arman then told her that she needed to go for private coaching. Farhana became silent and said, “Sir, I do not want to say anything.” She sat down.

Arman’s comment perhaps came because of his sense of overwhelming workload, but it brought Farhana to a halt and brought a sudden death to the natural flow and enthusiasm of the students’ comments.

After a moment Sodananda came forward and picked up the dialogue and suggested Nilima needed to try to understand the formula clearly and then practise. Shoaib, another student, suggested it might be helpful if Nilima could talk regularly with some of her friends who were good at trigonometry. Although Sodananda and Shoaib offered simplistic solutions to the problem, they helped the discussion to regain momentum. The issues raised still needed to be further explored, but the discussion was creating opportunity for the students to openly express their learning challenges and at least the concerns were being listened to collectively by the teachers.

Then Tapan followed up the dialogue.

Taipan: I want to raise another concern and that is memorisation. The information in the textbook on how to write an English composition is inadequate. How will we write? Therefore, we have to memorise English compositions. Some of our friends are afraid of asking questions. If teachers can help us freely or if we can freely ask questions, we will be able to learn many things. And thus teachers will also be able to understand our weaknesses. Moreover, if a textbook topic is discussed in many different ways, we will be able to focus deeply on our learning and we can understand.

I reflected that what Tapan said was crucial for the teachers’ community in the school. His statement includes four ideas that cut to the root of the problem Nilima had raised: textbook information is not always adequate, students need freer access to teachers, such access will help teachers understand students’ weaknesses, and teachers need to try out with different approaches. If the students cannot ask questions during class, they are forced to memorise without understanding clearly. Then when they need to apply knowledge to solve a problem, they have forgotten. This would have been a problem of many students in different subjects. Tapan opened

up a window, challenging us to consider what needs to be done differently. In professional development training teachers are often asked to promote student-centred teaching and learning, without getting the opportunity to reflect on the issues mentioned by Nilima and Tapan. Training occurs in a context that is disconnected and distant from the real classroom situation. Through the on-going discussion of our project we tried to understand the meaning of student-centred teaching and learning on the basis of students' stated concerns.

Students variously shared other learning needs:

Shirin; Sir, actually I am weak at English writing. I am in fear of English writing. I can't remember the meaning of words. After being told the word meaning, I read and then I understand. But later I forget those word meanings.

Kajol: Often we get foreign words in Bangla texts and we expect teachers to explain the meaning. Another example is general science. For general science, if the teacher draws a picture on the blackboard and then explains, it helps us to understand clearly. English is another problem for me. I do not understand English grammar. I do not understand tense.

Tamanna: I do not understand geometry. I cannot prove geometric hypotheses, for example when it says to prove BC equals BA. I have also problems in science. My teacher explains but I cannot understand. Some words seem very hard to me. For example, *cytoplasm* is a very hard word.

Sufia: I also cannot understand hard scientific words.

Mahin: Sir, I have problems in English grammar. I feel that I have understood when my teacher teaches in class, but I cannot remember and apply it when I go home.

Samanta: Sir, I am weak at solving geometrical problems. I understand when my teacher teaches in class, but I forget when I go home. I request my teacher to explain again and he explains and I forget again when I go home and finally I forget in the exam hall.

Subir: Sir, I am weak at English grammar. Particularly I make mistakes in putting proper articles in a sentence. Though I can pronounce many words, I do not know the meaning of all.

Sayham: Sir, I cannot solve geometrical problems.

When I was listening to Samanta and Sayham I returned back to my school days. I remember how scaring it was for me to solve geometrical problems. It felt so unpleasant when the teacher taught geometry. I understood nothing and fully disconnected from the class. I spent many nights trying to overcome the problem. I failed. I never got any chance to say, "Sir, I do not understand.

I cannot do it.” The reason was partly because I felt shy, and partly there was a fear of asking question. I asked both Sayham and Samanta whether they understood the basic geometrical principles or not. They said that they understood, but they would have understood much more clearly if teachers drew diagrams first and then explained. Arman interrupted.

Arman: I want to say something here. Does the teacher teach you geometry without drawing pictures?

Sayham: No sir, I do not mean that. I mean that we need to learn geometry in such a way so that *we* can draw pictures, and we can practise at home. Normally we cannot draw geometric shapes when we go home.

Sayham’s answer challenged us to look beyond the surface of drawing diagrams and at the relationship between teacher and students. In our educational policies and planning in Bangladesh we repeatedly talk about developing teacher-student relationships, but in practice we often expect that instruction can take the place of understanding students’ experiences. Sayham’s answer to Arman was significant because he was requesting the teachers to be careful about how students constructed meaning in learning moments. He strongly and politely suggested that our understandings as teachers cannot absolutely determine students’ learning process. We need to consider students’ personal and sometimes partly hidden experiences. While Sayham has not read authors such as Rabindranath or Todd, what he said resonates with concepts they express. Rabindranath (1908, p.49) emphasises the importance of directing teachers’ mental and emotional energy fully towards students in order to understand their ways of learning. He argues that if teachers can understand the limits of their own ability, they can inspire students’ devotion towards learning. Todd (2014, p.243) explains the development of teacher-student relationship as a liminal process. She argues for the need to recognise that the limits of both teachers’ and students’ conscious understandings do not determine the limits of what happens during teaching and learning; rather she emphasises the effect of embodiment and emotional reactions.

What is created by fear of asking questions and of not knowing?

When the students shared their personal learning concerns, we asked the students why they did not ask questions when they failed to understand or disconnected from the lesson. The students pointed out many reasons that included the following.

Farjana: When teachers gave us something to read and we do not understand, we become disinterested.

Nayan: Do you then ask any question?

Farjana: Sometimes we ask. Sometimes we do not.

Nayan: Can you explain the reasons?

Farjana: No reason. Actually if I ask a word meaning that I don't know and see that others know the meaning, then I am afraid that others might laugh at me.

Earlier I reported how Tamanna had difficulties in understanding geometry and Sufia had difficulties in understanding hard scientific words. We asked both Tamanna and Sufia if they asked questions in geometry or science classes. Both said *no*. They said that they felt panic about being laughed at by the others. Many students feel shy asking questions and perhaps their learning opportunities and urges gradually die and later they become completely disconnected from the learning context. However, shyness was not identified as the only reason that discouraged the students from asking questions.

Tapan: Some students are afraid of some teachers. Because of a fear of telling off by a teacher, students do not ask questions. If teachers become free and kind to the students, they can ask questions. When the students see that asking question is not a problem but makes teachers happy, they get inspiration to ask questions and to be attentive.

Just as the teachers in the science cluster had expressed fear of having their weaknesses exposed in front of the students, so students also expressed their fear of being told off by teachers if they asked a question. At the same time Tapan said that they would ask questions in a free environment.

Farhana: We get intimidated to ask teachers questions when we do not understand.

I found this very challenging for both the students and the teachers.

Me: Can you explain why you get intimidated?

Farhana: If sir says anything.

At that moment Rojen, and Polash, defended their position.

Rojen: There is no moment in my class when students can't ask questions. I encourage them to ask any questions not only in class but also outside the classroom.

Polash: I also want to add something. I allow the students to ask questions without any hindrance when I teach.

I became aware that it would be better to explore the source of intimidation with the teachers separately, instead of the teachers needing to justify their position in front of the students. Therefore, I steered the discussion to a more general exploration of what students felt they needed.

Before continuing to report the discussion, I want to trace the shifts in what the students said at the beginning and later stages of our conversation. Initially the students recognised the teachers' pride, and they said that they loved their teachers and loved everything in the school. The reasons they mentioned were because the teachers taught nicely and tried to make them laugh, assembly started on time, and the school environment was clean. As the dialogue progressed, the students started to bring up other important issues about their learning processes. They said that they disconnected from lessons when they listened continuously to lectures and when they failed to understand something. They wanted to listen to something different from what was written in the textbook. They forgot what they had learned in the classroom when they got home, and so failed to apply their classroom learning in further contexts. And most importantly they said that they wanted to ask questions, but they felt shy and afraid and too intimidated to ask questions.

Students learn by doing

As the discussion progressed I found I was enjoying how deeply the teachers and especially the students were engaged in the dialogue. Each individual student was explaining their personal learning experiences and challenges and the reasons why they did not ask questions. Across the different threads of the discussion the teachers also asked students questions. These included:

Could you give us any idea about what else we could do so that you can gradually overcome the challenge of English writing and learn the meaning of words?

What can we do to make you more attentive?

What can your teacher do for your understanding of geometry?

What can your teacher do so that you can understand English grammar and apply it properly when you go home?

What is your expectation in the classroom?

What can we do so that you can draw geometric shapes at home?

The students' responses included:

Shirin: According to each day's lesson I can make a list of unknown words at home. On the following day I can give it to my sir. It would be better if sir explains the meaning of those unknown word nicely.

Tapan: We feel very good when we know the exact composition of a material, know ways of doing things, and we enjoy the excitement of doing something practical.

Tamanna: If sir explains thoroughly and nicely.

Mahin: If sir gives precise explanation and several examples, and if I can get opportunity to practice more in class, it would be good for me.

Samanta: It would be good for us if sir closely monitors students who are weak at geometry and gives some more time for clearer understanding. Or we can get help from our classmates who understand geometry well.

The students' responses led the teachers to ask more questions:

What do you mean by *when sirs teach nicely*? Can you explain it by example?

What do you mean by *thoroughly and nicely*?

The students responded:

Frahana: We lose interest in reading when we fail to understand. So we have to get clear understanding from our teachers and then we can be attentive. If we just memorise without understanding, we can't remember. For example, in science class, the teacher has shown us chalk and then explained part by part what substances make chalk. Then we become able to understand what chalk actually is.

Tapan: For example, the teacher has done a practical experiment in science class. But first he explained the experiment orally and we understood very little. After doing the experiment we understood it much more clearly. If we are asked to explain the experiment we will be able to write the answer in the exam hall. We will be able to remember it as we had fun through the practical exploration, and understood it. And now we will read about it.

Mahin: Teaching by example. For example, there is a rural winnowing-fan in our classroom. Let us consider it as our learning topic. If teacher gives it in our hand, we will be able look at its size, formation, and structure, and how to use it and thus we will be able to understand what is a rural winnowing-fan.

Tapan: We are weak at different subjects. It might be helpful for students if they can freely say to their respective teacher *Sir I did not understand. Can you please explain it precisely and differently for me?* Most of us can understand a learning topic in a particular way, but some might not understand. So the teacher can try an alternative way and they might then understand and remember.

Tamanna: For example, a teacher can ask us to prove a geometric hypothesis on the blackboard. If we make any mistake, the teacher can explain it again.

At this stage of the discussion the teachers were not just passively listening; they were asking questions throughout and calling for further explanation from the students when they needed it. Their questions indicated their engagement and desire to understand the students' learning needs. I identified it as a significant shift in teachers' willingness to understand their students' learning needs and desires and in recognising how the students could contribute to the process of teaching and learning. The significant thing was that the willingness and understanding evolved through the exchange of questions. Both teachers and students sat together in a single classroom and simply started to explore a common space where they could share views about teaching and learning. What would this sharing mean for the future teacher-student relationship? The students' explanations presented a number of challenging ideas for us to consider in the next stage of our work. Their explanations of how the teachers could make difference had many implications we would later explore in further investigating the teacher-student relationship, students' curiosity, and the concept of agency.

Students needed a context where they could freely say, *Sir, I do not understand*. Tuhin had told me the same thing when she said, *Sir I cannot remember any English story*. When students can freely say in classroom that they do not understand and they cannot remember it may give them a sense of security and allow them to know that expressing ignorance in class is not a problem.

Students wanted to ask teachers: *Can you explain it precisely and differently for me?* The students wanted precise and alternative explanations of learning topics from their teachers, and thus they were requesting teachers to address students' diversity. They suggested some possible ways to do so. They wanted their teachers to create opportunity for more practice in class and to pay special attention to the weak students. They wanted to develop a community where they could get help from each other. They also wanted to accomplish difficult and challenging tasks on the blackboard and to receive re-direction if they made mistakes.

Students wanted to develop clearer understanding and feel the excitement of learning in science classes, and so wanted detailed and accurate information.

Students wanted to enjoy the excitement of doing practical things. They said that they had fun when they went through practical explorations, and thus they could understand, learn, and get inspiration to read at home.

The students' questions and explanations opened up many windows for the teachers who responded by inviting suggestions about what they could do to help them learn. However, these initial discussions only served to give students courage to ask questions. Enhancement of this courage would depend on how the teachers would reflect, collectively and individually, on students' educational needs and suggestions and try to map ways to address them, and on how the teachers would translate their planning into practice.

Students' life aspirations

In the last stage of the discussion with the students we asked them about their aim in life. Several wanted to be doctors, emphasising their desire to give the poor better treatment without any cost. Likewise Sufia wanted to be a nurse because she had seen nurses provide service and care for sick people.

Farjana wanted to be a lawyer because she wanted to ensure fair trials for people. She said that many people got unjust verdicts from the court. I asked Farjana if she had seen any unfair trials. She said that she had seen unfair trials in the cinema, and then acknowledged those might not be exactly like actual life situations.

Some wanted to be teachers. Sayham said that teaching was a profession of honour and that if he became a teacher he would be able to educate students. Mahin said that he wanted to increase students' knowledge so that the students could help others when they grew up. Tamanna believed that by teaching she would be able to serve society.

Tapan said that he had not set his aim in life yet, but he wanted to do something unique and different for society, work in different places in Bangladesh, and make people feel proud of his work. He mentioned that he had no idea if there was any such kind of profession, but definitely he would search for one when he grew up.

Farhana's dream was somewhat different from the others. She wanted to be well-educated and wealthy. She said that because of poverty many people did not get proper education in her village and she wanted to make them aware of the value of education and help them to get education.

As I reflect on the students' desires to be doctors, nurses or lawyers, I acknowledge that these are urban dreams in the rural context. The reasons the students gave are indicative of their awareness of their context, and suggest they felt a moral and emotional engagement with the wound that has been left in their experiences by rural poverty. A few students wanted to be teachers as they saw teaching as a profession of prestige. Their explanations suggest they wanted to enjoy the pleasure of generating knowledge, and saw teaching as a way to serve society. So a sense of being the conscience of society was evident in their comments.

Though the students' aims in life were different in detail, greater good for the community was a common source of motivation. I found it significant to note that, while agriculture was the core activity of rural life, none of the fifteen students mentioned farming as an aim in life. Looking back I see this silence about farming as possibly signalling a kind of alienation from the local context and the influence of imported cinematic dreams. Or the silence can also be a hope to reject poverty. Rabindranath explains (pp.48-49) such alienation as an ignorance of what gives us life that has developed through many thousand years. He urges us to value our own living environment. I see that there is a tension between accepting and valuing the realities of one's own context and daring to be idealistic in dreaming for a better and perhaps more productive life. Perhaps what Rabundranath is really arguing against is being mesmerised by dreams based on things that do not really exist in the way they pretend to.

It can be argued that it is important for students to keep their courage, holding onto their idealism and to re-shape their aims in life according to their experiences, and that helping them to do so is crucial for the teachers' community in the rural school. How long the rural students can hold onto and strategically develop their dreams in the face of the impact of monetarism and urban values will depend on their education process. Then it might be asked what keeping this courage alive means to the teachers' community in the school. Certainly it is not the teachers' role to find professions for the students. Rather teachers can help the students to remain curious about their aims in life.

Moreover, if teachers make their students curious, students' curiosity can help to promote the teachers' own sense of agency. Otherwise what teachers would hope to be empowerment of their students might simply be reproduction of existing limitations.

How students understood the anthem and the oath

As the discussion drew to a close, I looked for a way the students could show us more of their thoughts in writing. We are all from different classes, I said, and so we have no shared

textbooks; what activity do we have in common that could be a subject to write about? We all go to assembly, was an answer that came from several students. So we asked them to write their thoughts about the oath they recited at assembly or the anthem they sang. Some of what they wrote is collated below.

- Monir: The oath states, “I am promising to provide service for human goodness.” What I have understood from this sentence is: we will work for our country and express love to native people. “We will remain devoted to our country.” The meaning of this sentence to me is: we will do work for the country’s welfare and love the country.
- Farhana: It is our responsibility to be loyal to the country and to maintain solidarity and to be organised for the country. Millions of people sacrificed their lives to achieve the independence of our country. We have got this country at the cost of the blood of 30 million people. Would we have got this golden and fertile Bangladesh, if they had not worked hard as a united force? So my opinion is that we need to serve this country with deep affection, love, and solidarity. An enthusiasm to serve the country has to be generated in us.
- Farjana: The national flag is a symbol of our country's highest honour. We honour and respect it. It is flown in each government institution during official working hours. It consists of a red circle in the middle of a green base. We have gained this flag by sacrificing a lot of blood. It is a symbol of extreme pride to us. We all need to understand that it has been achieved through a lot of sacrifice. So, we must show respect for our flag.
- Tamanna: We can express our emotions to our country through the national anthem. In Fagun⁴⁷ mango trees blossom and whole nature looks good. That is why I love my country very much. I was born in this country and I want to die here. Amazing beauty of nature has been described in the national anthem.
- Nilima: The national anthem talks about our country. Our country is full of crops and green. Therefore we love Bangladesh. We want to live in Bangladesh forever. I pray and hope that I can live under this free sky. We all live here freely in green fertile fields.. We can live here as a people of the soil. We will be able to do many things for our country. Therefore, we all love our golden Bengal.

The teachers and I looked at these passages and the photographs taken by the students in the workshop reported in the next chapter. What struck me was the passion with which the students wrote about topics that would not be examined. I felt great hope that, despite the dominance of the examination system on classwork, passing examinations was not the only source of motivating students’ thinking.

⁴⁷ Fagun is a month in the Bangladesh calendar and is part of spring.

Teachers' immediate reflections on the students' educational needs

Immediately after the dialogue with the students, the teachers and I sat together to have a quick reflection on the discussion. To facilitate the reflection, I asked how the preceding discussion might impact on the focus of their teaching.

Nandan: Students will be the central focus of my teaching and learning activity. I will try to be close to the students. I mean that I will not let any excuse keep me from my role and I will not allow the students to do so.

Kusol: I will try to bring professionalism in my teaching. The central focus of my teaching will be the students. I will try to make the lesson easy for the students and help them to engage actively.

Arman: Taking preparation on the topic that I will teach. It would be easy to respond to students' questions if I take good preparation. Students might ask many different questions and thus both students and I can benefit.

Aaron: I have to read for self-preparation, because it will help to articulate the message of the lesson clearly. Classroom teaching techniques need to be considered in advance.

Polash: Knowing myself. I mean that I have to take preparation on the lesson in advance, because preparation helps to deliver the lesson efficiently.

The teachers' immediate reflections were indicative of their good intentions and mainly focused on self-preparation. It seemed the students' sharing of their ideas and concerns in the meeting had a powerful impact on their teachers. The next phases of our project would allow teachers to consider how they make use of what they had heard in further reflecting on their practice.

What the students showed in their photos

A few days after the discussion the students took photographs of what interested them in the school, and wrote commentaries. A number of these images and their accompanying commentaries are presented in the montage below.



An educational institute is for educating the human race

The school is surrounded by lush-green trees, green fields. A river is passing by the school. Overall the natural environment of the school is very pleasant. This environment can build up students as well-educated. Moreover, the friendly behaviour of the teachers, their affection, and love gives us a special education to be enlightened human beings. The school's various recreational activities inspire us to be dedicated in learning.



Teacher teaching students in Classroom.

Students are taught on the basis of the textbook and the teacher's own knowledge. The teacher always tries to teach students something new. Students show enough respect to their teachers. Students are also properly cherished by the teachers. Thus a strong relationship between teacher and student is built up. The teacher understands students' weaknesses and tries to solve them.



The Library is a part of education

The library is important for students' learning. Every school should have a library so that students can enrich their learning in general knowledge and common sense. When I see that different types of books are arranged in library, a desire to read books is evoked. I like most the story books. I read my favourite story books during tiffin period. We can gain knowledge about national and international affairs by reading books. Book is an important element of students' intellectual development, and it enlightens the minds of everyone.



Teachers are doing research on how more accurate and quality education can be provided.

Teachers are the centre for pursuing higher research on educational knowledge. Teachers are craftsmen who build us as human beings. Education causes mental development of human beings. Nowadays education has become a prerequisite for livelihood. Many different education systems have been discovered in the present world. Teachers are teaching us the new educational discoveries. We must acknowledge that in the present civilisation our teachers can give us a right direction for our future career choices. Human life is blossomed in the light of knowledge.

Figure 7.1: Montage of students' photograph

The first image represents the surrounding school environment and the corresponding written reflection affirms the student's strong sense of belonging to the school. Despite poverty, Farhana identified school as a comprehensive place for learning. She enjoyed the natural beauty of the school ground, wanted to discuss educational topics in school, wanted a friendly environment and also wanted to celebrate sports and cultural events.

Tapan photographed a moment from Kusol's lesson and his commentary complements what he had said in the meeting. The image itself shows the teacher standing in front of a large number of students. The students are facing the teacher with all their desires and intentions about education and learning visible in their physical attention. Tapan's commentary describes how a strong teacher-student relationship could be developed and he names essential elements. He seems to have developed a conceptualisation of teaching in which teachers acknowledge students' weaknesses first and then try to explore possible ways to resolve them. Thus a relationship of respect and care between teacher and student can be built up.

The third image is of the library. Some of the students are smiling quietly about a shared joke and while others carry on with their reading. Two girls share their journey through a book. Shirin's commentary enthuses about the richness and pleasure she finds in books. For her the library is a place that promises knowledge but also holds interesting stories. There is no teacher there conducting the class, but there is still opportunity to fill her natural desire to learn by reading.

The fourth image captures what was happening in the teachers' lounge during our project. Farjana's commentary positioned the teachers at the centre of making education useful for the students' future life. She put value on educational research and depicted the teachers as craftsmen. Her comment indicates keen interest in what the teachers have been doing in the project and the impact this might have on students' education. Such curiosity is at variance with many students' polite passivity in class.

In the workshop that is described in the next chapter we looked at the student's photographs, the accompanying commentaries and the students' writings about the anthem and the oath. However, apart from several exclamations of surprise by the teachers about the thoughtfulness and intensity of the students' written statements most of focus was on the points that had been raised in the discussion. In writing this chapter I decided not to undertake any detailed analysis or reflection on what the students expressed in their photographs and writing, as the focus of this project is about how the teachers evolved understandings of their practice and how the teachers responded to the students. However, I also deliberately decided to retain the students' statements

about their life aspirations, their thoughts about the oath and the anthem and their photovoices for two important reasons. Firstly, they show further dimensions of the students' conscious thinking about their school and what it means in their lives. While my study focuses on the teachers, I acknowledge that the project was shaped by the students' aspirations and responses to their teachers as well as by the teachers' perceptions and actions. Secondly, they affirm that the students also were processing what was happening in their schooling and they too were forming evolving perceptions of what *their* own practice was about. While investigation of their evolving perceptions was not the focus of this study, I see it as a possible next project for me to undertake.

Emerging concepts

The concerns that were raised through the students' arguments were encouraging. The students seemed to be aware of aspects of their cognitive learning process and had questions about their learning. They wanted to be attentive in the classroom, and, it seemed to me, to be active agents in their learning process.

The students wanted their teachers to create a context where asking questions was not a problem but rather was encouraged. And it also seemed that the students wanted to take responsibility with their teachers to create a context where students' curiosity could be promoted. Their interest in being able to ask questions calls for the development of interpersonal communication, and suggests the importance of supportive teacher-student relationships. If teachers could start to give up their identity as *knowers* and say *let us try to explore*, engagement could start. Right or wrong, students might come up with different answers, and then dialogue can start. At the end students could generate new knowledge or refine their previous knowledge.

Students' silences do not necessarily mean that they are unable to think. It could be like a paddy seed under the soil. If the seed gets a proper environment, it starts blooming and become green. If not, it gradually dies. Students might simply need a suitable environment and teachers can create that environment.

At this stage of the project such ideas occurred only in our conversations, but there was a significant shift in teachers' awareness of their students' potentials and of the wider possibilities in teaching.

Expanding the communicative space

When I look back to the whole discussion with the students, I see the process expanding the communicative space that had begun to evolve during observations and debriefs. The figure below summarises how the communicative space continued to evolve to include the students and suggests a dialogic space was beginning to emerge.

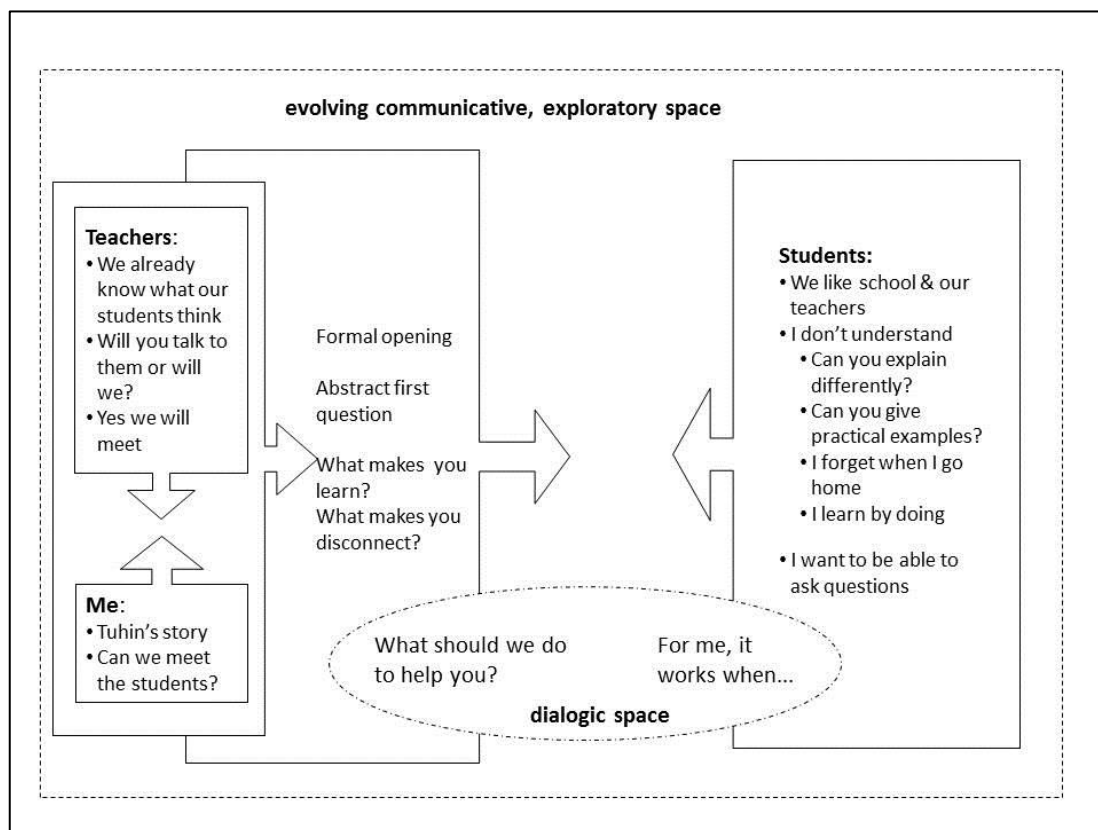


Figure 7.2: The evolving communicative space

In the first instance the decision to hold the meeting with the students came through the exploratory interaction between the teachers and me. I began with the resolve to create such a meeting and initially I did not recognise the reason for the science teachers' hesitation. They were afraid that I might expose them to criticism by the students. Real communication developed as the teachers found the courage to openly express their fear and as I began to listen. Thus we were able to move together to arrange the meeting with the students.

That meeting began with kindness on both sides but also with formality on both sides that was perhaps again the expression of reserve. Gradually both sides found the courage to be more open: the teachers asked more direct questions and students talked about individual and specific problems as well as identifying what they found helpful. Even though a few defensive reactions by the teachers brought a temporary halt to the discussion, those reactions were also indicative of greater willingness to be spontaneously honest.

Finally, as momentum gathered the discussion became less and less formal and teachers and students were speaking whenever they found a space for their voice. It is at this stage that a dialogic space began to develop. I will discuss the concept of a dialogic space further in the next chapter. Here I very briefly explain it in the terms of Westoby and Morris (2011) who argue that a dialogic relationship evolves as parties not only listen to each other's points of view but adopt them as a basis for continuing exploration of a problem or project.

Making connections, vulnerability, and openness

Looking back, I recognise that the discussion did not just involve listening to the students. Rather it involved me and the teachers developing a means to connect the students' learning concerns with our evolving understandings. Setting up a dialogue between teachers and students involved risk on the part of the teachers, and on my part. At the start the teachers set up defences against any suggestions by students that they were not teaching properly and seemed afraid of revealing ignorance. Perhaps, most of all, they wanted to avoid the emotional stress that might come with re-evaluating their own practice, maybe even their knowledge and ability.

However, the rapidly interweaving threads of dialogue allowed us to further explore the relationships that already existed in classrooms and the different kinds of relationships that could evolve if we were to engage deeply with what the students had to say.

When the discussion with the students started it could be seen that the students were curious and aware of aspects of their own learning processes. They wanted to ask questions, but were afraid of showing ignorance, of appearing confrontational, and of being put down by a teacher. So in our debrief after the meeting we examined how listening to students not only builds relationships, but also helps teachers to become more effective.

I recognised that participatory process is not stream-lined. The greater the participation, the more risk there is of differing agendas. So as a community of teachers in a small rural school who wants to learn from each other we needed to develop, explicitly or implicitly, protocols for discussion and ways of taking and sharing leadership. I realised it was important to listen to the sub-texts in our dialogues and also to recognise shifts in confidence, risk-taking and in the detection of complexities.

Chapter 8: The sparkling morning fog

In the preceding chapter I reported the meeting with the students and traced how the teachers had opened out communicative space they were developing to include discussion with the students. I also suggested that as the communication became more confident and open and as the participants engaged in collaborative exploring issues and looking for where answers might lie the space was become a site for dialogic communication. In this chapter I report how the teachers processed what they had learned from their meeting with the students and used it to reconceptualise their own practice and to plan changes they would like to make. I also return to the concept of dialogic communication and examine how the teachers, and I among them, continued to deepen our engagement with exploring what we wanted to achieve in our practice and suggest that the quality of our communication was moving towards what may usefully be described as dialogic.

The half yearly examination period followed shortly after the teachers meeting with the students. This break in the normal schedule of classes allowed us to hold a three day intensive workshop. Considering the invigilation roster for the examinations, the teachers chose one representative from each cluster to participate in the workshop, with a plan that everyone would be involved in the final report back and discussion. The representatives they chose were those who had entered into the discussions most passionately and who indicated they wanted to start putting their evolving ideas into practice. In fact they became the core group for the remainder of the project. Because of the examinations, there was no spare room so we arranged the workshop in one corner of the school's open tin roofed cycle stand. This chapter describes how we sat together to establish some core ideas about what *quality education* meant to us, in terms of grounding in this school and community and in terms of some achievable indicators, and how we then planned for specific changes in classroom interaction. Finally it describes how we reflected on the process so far and on our shifting awareness. During our exploration process we sometimes worked in a single group and sometimes in two separate groups. After group work we shared ideas and tried to combine our understandings. Throughout the whole workshop, by rotation, two teachers took responsibility to write down our questions, the significant points that arose from the discussion, and agreed summarised understandings.

Exploring our core aims

We initiated the discussion by considering my absence after the end of the project. We agreed that what the teachers thought about their teaching was more important than what I thought. On

the basis of what we had already explored, we decided to have an intensive discussion on where the teachers wanted to go next. We also agreed to expect possible risks in our future endeavour.

We began by trying to choose a motto for the workshop that would indicate our educational purpose and a vision of our own courage and pride. After some discussion we chose the following lines from the poem, “স্ফুলিঙ্গ” (Spark), by Rabindranath Thakur.

বহু দিন ধরে বহু ক্রোশ দূরে	By spending many days and by going miles away
বহু ব্যয় করি বহু দেশ ঘুরে	By spending lot of money, by travelling many countries around
দেখিতে গিয়েছি পর্বতমালা,	We went to see the mountains,
দেখিতে গিয়েছি সিন্ধু।	We went to see the Sindhu ⁴⁸ .
দেখা হয় নাই চক্ষু মেলিয়া	We never saw that just two steps away from our door
ঘর হতে শুধু দুই পা ফেলিয়া	There are sparkling morning fogs on our paddy fields
একটি ধানের শিষের উপরে	
একটি শিশিরবিন্দু।	

I suggested the poem partly because we had all read it in our schooling and, more importantly, because I hoped we could utilise a Bangla poetic metaphor in exploring the changes in our understandings of education. Without explaining my own understandings of the poem, I requested the teachers to think if it held any guiding educational perspective that we could relate to our aim of improving teaching and learning. Nandan related the poem to the teachers’ practice:

The school is situated in a remote place and it is very unlikely that the experts will come from Dhaka or outside regularly and train us. As suggested in the poem, if we could explore our own expertise, think, help each other, and utilise this in practice, we could start unfolding many hidden possibilities.

Aaron quickly related Nandan’s point to an issue that been at the basis of many of our earlier discussions. He said that the students need to learn for both passing examinations and exploring knowledge. He regretted that the main focus of their teaching was being limited to enabling the students to just pass the examination. Referring to the teaching observations, he said that the teachers tended to ask students the date of a writer’s birth or the name of his renowned work.

⁴⁸ By the word Sindhu Rabindranath means the Indus Valley and this carries the resonance of a civilisation which flourished on the basins and banks of Indus River. It was a Bronze Age civilisation. In history the existence of Sindhu civilisation is marked in the period of 3000-1300 BCE. The Sindhu civilisation encompassed most of the Pakistan, parts of south-western India and Afghanistan.

Reference: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indus_Valley_Civilization

Then he raised a question for the group: “Shall we just teach the students how to answer correctly, or shall we try to show them how to negotiate practical life complexities?”

When I look back I see that Aaron was asking his colleagues to explore the core purpose of their work. He then urged them to think about the main focus of our research project and to aware that it was not just to produce subject experts. Aaron acknowledged that working out how to enable the students to pass examinations as well as equip them with skills to negotiate life’s complexities was not a task that could be completed in six month; rather it would need to be a continuous process. He requested the teachers to think about how to begin the process.

Exploring a grounded meaning of quality education

Through their enthusiasm Nandan and Aaron created ground for me to enter the discussion. I raised the following questions:

The pass rate in SSC exam of this school is 96%, teachers are sincere, and the students are attentive in classroom. Then, what are the concerns about present teaching? Why do we trial alternative approaches in teaching? What alternative approaches can we trial? And how can we trial them?

As they tackled these questions, they were often argumentative, sometimes referring to earlier activities to give evidence for their arguments, and sometimes using their own experiences. I listened actively and participated in the discussion with some provocative questions. Looking back, I am aware of how my understanding of what could be usefully provocative evolved during the project.

Laying out the core issues

Nandan was the first to respond.

Nandan: Yes we have many problems. Where are we sitting for this workshop today? Please write down that physical infrastructure is a big challenge for us.

Kusol: There are rather more important issues.

Aaron: I am not agreeing with you (pointing to Nandan), but I am coming to this point later. The pass rate is 96%. We need another 4%. Teachers are sincere and the students are attentive. So where is the problem?

Nandan: We need to arrange training for the teachers.

Kusol: No, no, sir, please listen.

Aaron: There is nothing above 100%. What do you do with 100%? Do you want to produce 100 % *sundor gadha* (*sundor*-beautiful *gadha*-ass)?

Initially it seemed the teachers were talking past to each other. When I look back again I find that the teachers were laying out the core issues they wanted to address and their subsequent dialogues returned to the issues of the impact of physical conditions and meagre resources, the dominance of examination system, the possibility of teaching for life understanding as well as for exam success, and the need for relevant professional development.

The discussion continued as follows:

Nandan: No, of course not.

Aaron: Then, what do you want to achieve with 100%?

Nandan: Quality education for the students, I mean standard -

Aaron: Yes, we need to think about quality education. 96% students are passing in SSC exam, but all of them are not up to the mark.

Nandan: Perhaps 50% would be up to the mark.

Kusol: It is like not only quantity but quality. Quality achievement is better than quantity of achievement. So we can write that down and focus on it.

It was apparent that the teachers no longer considered that an examination was a good indicator of learning. Earlier, especially in our discussion with the students; we had talked about students' active engagement in learning and the dangers of memorisation. I saw teachers' new advocacy for quality in achievement as an understanding that has developed during the project. I remained silent because I wanted to see how the teachers would manoeuvre the discussion. But in my field journal I reflected how important the teachers' shifting understandings were. I also reflected that while the Bangladeshi examination system allows many students to score high marks just by memorisation, achieving problem solving capacity in real life contexts is very unlikely to develop. Moreover, examination scores would not reflect the actual ability to accomplish real life tasks of those who do not memorise well and those who cannot concentrate fully in class because of poverty or an inhibiting classroom environment. Therefore, quality achievement cannot be just about passing examinations or scoring high marks. It has to also be about enabling students to achieve the intent to deliberately engage with learning and on-going life issues. I see such intent as aligning with what Biesta (2010) termed as subjectification, the process that enables students to become more autonomous and independent in their thinking.

The discussion then took a curve:

Kusol: We have been talking about physical infrastructure, teachers' presence in classroom and so on, but why are we not thinking about much more important issues.

Arman: Actually the students are just passing the exam but they are not achieving expected life goals. How can the students not be attentive if the teachers are sincere? But the reality is that the students are afraid of asking questions as they repeatedly mentioned when they sat with us. It should come into our dialogue.

Nandan: I want to say something here. The common scenario in Bangladesh is malnutrition and lack of a balanced diet. Because of malnutrition both teachers and students cannot take the load in the classroom. After fifteen minutes teachers lose energy and the mentality to teach. Many students fall down in assembly. What will they learn in class? It is not only poverty or shortage of food. The kind of food is a big concern. During the mango season we just take mango over and over and cut other food items. Thus we fall short in calories.

While Kusol and Arman were urged their colleagues to explore how they could better engage students in class, Nandan seemed to be returning to his basic argument that rural students would inevitably achieve at a lower level. Initially I thought that Nandan was not following the flow of the dialogue, but I realised that he was asking the teachers to put their feet on the ground and acknowledge the contextual realities. In this he aligned with many teachers in Bangladesh who argue that political struggle for better conditions should take priority.

At this point my role became challenging: we needed to move the discussion through the two diverging ideas, pedagogical encounter and teachers' powerlessness, which were both very significant but taking our exploration in different directions. I cautiously broke my silence.

Me: What is the relationship between malnutrition and teaching and learning in the classroom?

Nandan: Definitely there is a relationship. Both the teachers and the students have shortage of calories. I cannot teach properly and after a while my brain stops working. At the same time the students fail to answer when I ask them questions, because they fail to concentrate.

Arman: So you are trying to say that if I am physically weak I cannot enjoy my work even if very encouraging and attractive discussion occurs?

Nandan: Just look at the students' faces and what dresses they are wearing. They are not well dressed and they come to school without eating anything. So 80% is poverty and 20% is food intake habit. To ensure 100% pass rate we must think about nutrition.

Nandan's insistent arguments were bringing a different perspective to our earlier exploration of how to engage students. I realised he was saying that malnutrition colonises teachers' and students' bodies and brains and that this creates a disconnection from the classroom. The intensity of the teachers' exploration was forcing me to re-evaluate how I had been thinking about change. The teachers were speaking directly from their own experience and their understanding of their context. I could not ignore Nandan's arguments. We could not explore changes to our practice without recognising the reality of physical needs. Within our immediate community context we might not have the means to reduce poverty, but I reflected that the relationship between poverty and education is a political issue that we as nation can, and I believe must, address. I return to this issue in Chapter 10. Meanwhile, Kusol brought the discussion back to the challenge of what could be changed.

Kusol: I am not denying your point. Just three weeks ago I thought malnutrition, hunger, poor salary, abjection, and inadequate physical infrastructure are the only problems that we should and need to think about. Yes, these are big problems, but I have shifted a little bit. According to today's initial discussion I want to focus on the point that the purpose of education is not just to pass the exam, but that education needs to be life-orientated and practical.

Aaron: I want to say something here regarding Nandan Sir's concern about balanced diet, malnutrition, and inadequate calories. These factors were more severe when we were school boys. And you remember that after six hours schooling we played football for another two hours. Nothing stopped us. Yes, I acknowledge that malnutrition is still a concern, but not so immense that we should ignore and bypass other possibilities that we can explore and practise.

The above exchange was important because it crystallised a transition: the teachers knew that they work in a difficult context, but while acknowledging it, they committed to what they saw as a greater goal: exploring what they *could* do better in their teaching. The debate and the move towards a consensual focus marked yet another step in the development of the group as a learning community and in their understandings of their professional identity.

Arman turned the discussion to the classroom:

Arman: There is a gap between the students and the teachers. How can I explain it? The gap is like that the students cannot ask the teachers questions. They feel shy or they are afraid of asking questions.

Nandan: So we can write and think about teacher-student friendly relationship.

Aaron: This is a good proposal.

Arman: The students repeatedly mentioned their shyness in asking question when we sat together.

Aaron: So it is like reinforcing the good teacher-student relationship.

Me: What do you mean?

Nandan: Do you mean how we will fill up the gap?

Arman: Yes, I mean to bridge the gap. The students are very curious to know, but do not find the courage to ask. I am also sincere and want to teach math clearly so that the students understand. But for some reason I cannot make the lesson understandable. Perhaps the students do not understand a particular step, but they do not ask. I am failing to reach the students. If you could remember my math class, you must recall the complexity that arose with the plus and minus signs. The students recognised the mistake at the beginning, but they did not say it to me. We could expect that one or two, at least, could have thought that I might have overlooked the mistake. But they were silent.

Here Arman offered a different way of analysing what was happening in the classroom from what had occurred in the first stage of the project. Then the teachers had focused on very functional aspects of teaching and challenged my non-directive role by seeking advice. Now they were advancing the dialogue confidently themselves. Nandan acknowledged Arman's point to an extent, but framed it in terms of attitude rather than action. The exchange indicated how the group was negotiating the level of challenge they could agree upon: good relationships or real change in classroom interaction?

Shifts in direction

Kusol then proposed that the group could also think about the gap in terms of guardians and the school.

Kusol: We have already talked much about teachers' sincerity. So, now we can think about the gap in terms of guardian's responsibility. Guardians will leave everything on

the teachers' shoulder, if we do everything. We simply cannot do everything. Therefore, we can assign the 4% missing in our pass rate to guardians' unawareness.

Polash: Yes, guardians' awareness is crucial. There have been many instances when guardians allow their children to go to a relative's house for celebrating family occasions when school is open.

Aaron: We can think another way. We can refer it as guardians' awareness that needs to be increased.

Arman: Here, guardians, teachers, and students are collective.

Nandan: If we want to overcome the issue and bring quality, we must think about the weak students and how we can teach them differently.

Kusol: Okay, but we already give something to the weak students; that is why we have achieved 96%.

Aaron: As quality is our vital concern, we must consider the weak students.

Nandan: We have to give more. Quality is needed for both the weak and good students. The good students have some sort of ability, but the weak students are far behind.

The dialogue seemed to move from facing the challenge of how to teach more effectively to placing blame on disinterested guardians, and then to a concern for weak students. Looking back, I reflect that shifts in discussion such as these were not necessarily avoidance. Rather I see them as indicative of the way the group walked around as well as directly towards issues: new themes would come up, take focus for a time and then someone within the group, and not always me, would insist on a particular direction. Looking back, I compare the shifts in the discussion with how Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) conceptualise participatory action research as learning process that leads to material changes in not only what participants do, but in how they understand and interpret their world (p.565). I find that the teachers each connected new ideas with specific social issues that concerned them, and the shifts are indication of the ways they were actively evolving personal as well as collective understandings.

Developing a working definition of quality in education

At this point of the discussion I felt the need for us to record something firm about quality or good education. At the same time I knew the concept could demand more time and exploration,

and since I did not want to force a conclusion I looked to the flow of the discussion to find a transition.

Me: I want to raise a question for you to think about. The SSC exam is arranged by the examination boards. The 96% of the students who have passed the SSC exam from this school answered question papers formulated by unknown persons. The exam scripts were evaluated by unknown examiners. Can we say that there is no quality?

Kusol: Of course there is quality, but not at the desired level. Perhaps, most of them have got just pass marks, and some got marks that fall under the average CGPA. Now I am thinking about how I can bring those students to A+ level.

Aaron: Okay, let us think that one student who got 33⁴⁹ marks and another got 85⁵⁰ Will you firmly describe the student who has got 85 as quality? I will never say that.

Nandan: We cannot consider quality education only in terms of a pass rate. We need to think more.

Arman: Perhaps, we need to think about the implication of book knowledge in exam success. The students can just memorise what is written in the text books.

Nandan: Then we have to think about real life need and practical things. Book knowledge is not enough. We need to insert practical aspects into teaching and learning. Then we can ensure quality education.

Polash: Nandan sir, when you want to go beyond book knowledge, you need to consider creativity and ability.

Aaron: Good proposal, we need to bring creativity.

Nandan: The point is how we can bring creativity. As a teacher I am the craftsman of creativity. I have to insert the idea in the student's mind.

I noted in my field journal that Nandan had now moved his focus from economic difficulties to a desire to place the nature of quality at the centre of the discussion.

Kusol: As a teacher I need to do more analysis. Therefore, by quality education I mean teachers need to know more and try to give perfect example.

Aaron: We can try to make a meaning of quality education by thinking how we can teach.

⁴⁹ 33 is a pass mark in SSC exam

⁵⁰ 85 is A+ GPA level

I noted the shift that had occurred in that Kusol was now suggesting it was the teacher who had to change and Aaron was supporting his emphasis.

Me: Aaron is proposing a workable understanding of quality education in terms of teaching techniques, and Kusol places emphasis on teachers' own ability to analyse and so develop students' ability. Both ideas interrelated. What can we achieve from analytical ability? Aaron has mentioned that quality is not just exam passing. We need to enable the students to apply knowledge in real life context.

Arman: I want to explain Aaron and Kusol sir's idea with an example. For example, I am teaching a poem. I just read out four lines from the poem and finish my job. There might be 16 ideas inside the lines. We never encourage the students to explore those ideas and they stay behind in quality.

Finally, the teachers agreed on a meaning of quality in education and crafted the following statement:

The teaching and learning that helps to fulfil the present and future needs of the students is quality education.

At the beginning of the project I never anticipated that the teachers would have a dialogue about quality education in terms of their professional roles and reach an understanding. When I look back at the initial discussions we shared and the ways, in which they had echoed the dominant discourses in education in Bangladesh, I am aware of the extent of the shifts in understandings. While the issues were not yet in sharp focus, they were starting to emerge like the morning sun's rays. The fog on the paddy fields was beginning to sparkle. I had been hoping that the teachers would take responsibility for their own processes of change, and it was happening. I had seen earlier indications that we were starting to move towards being an active learning community. I felt it was in itself a major achievement that the teachers were talking about their work together and challenging each other. I wrote in my journal, that it was "huge" to see the group actively picking up and building on each other's ideas. As I look back, I align this movement with how Kemmis and McTaggard (2005, p. 576) explain *communicative action* as the process that occurs when a group steps back from their everyday practice and to consider "whether their understandings of what they are doing *make sense* to them and to others", "whether these understandings are *true*" (in the sense of aligning with what else is known), "whether these understandings are *sincerely held*", and "whether these understandings are *morally right and appropriate* under the circumstances in which they find themselves." In this discussion the teachers were actively working with each other's suggestions to make sense of that they had

heard in the discussion with the students and in our earlier debriefs of our classroom observations, and align new ideas with their own experience and existing concepts. They were challenging each other to think more widely and to ground their ideas in their evolving sense of the responsibilities of teaching as well as in the realities of their rural context. I felt we had reached a milestone, and I wondered what further milestones we could reach by the end of the project.

Quality education in terms of some achievable indicators

Once we had a working definition of quality education, we looked at how we could achieve something practical. For a while we examined the real constraints of teaching in a village school and explored a range of questions. What are the indicators of quality education that help to fulfil the present and future needs? We have no resources except text books and the teachers. In that case teacher-led transmission is obvious. Why would we force teachers to trial alternative approaches in teaching and learning? Why would teachers listen? Considering the limitations, where can we place our effort to make teaching and learning more interactive? We were moving on to explore what could be done rather than what could not, and to identify specific operational steps.

Students' ability to make decisions

The teachers started exploring ways to translate the working definition into practical action.

Nandan: First we can consider analytical ability. As a teacher I need to give everything to the students what I know and I need to be more open and generous. In that case we can think about some approaches such as silent reading, loud reading and group work.

Polash: These are techniques. First we need to consider some indicators.

Me: What ability can the students develop through group work?

Nandan: Leadership.

Me: It can be a huge indicator for quality education. Let us think about qualities of leadership.

Nandan: Ability to take risks in work.

Kusol: Instead of advancing in your direction, rather I can add: intellectual development

Nandan: Are ability to take risks and intellectual development the same? I have to work in a particular area. I will not show the students any dream as a future prime minister.

Me: Leadership is a big idea. We cannot work with every aspect of leadership in the classroom. What are the key elements of leadership that we can work through?

Kusol: Okay, it can be making decisions or making a plan. Actually I mean developing students' ability to make a decision.

Although Kusol and Nandan were replying to each other abruptly, they were collaboratively trying to refine the idea of leadership in terms of what was realistic for the classroom and consistent with their sense of quality education. Life requires us to make decisions and these may involve degrees of risks, and so we need to be careful about the risk we take and its possible consequences. Whatever the result of a decision or risk, it generates new experience that perhaps aligns with what Kusol termed *intellectual development*. However, there was still a need to relate the dialogue with the process of teaching and learning. In that moment Arman took up the point and tried to relate students' decision making ability with classroom teaching.

Arman: We need to relate the leadership idea with what we teach in classroom. Every lesson can have direct links with many real life aspects, and we need to allow students to explore the links. For example, I pick up a mango from a tree or a mango is falling down from a tree. My question would be: do Newton's laws of motion and gravitational law act on the mango? How do the laws act?

Arman seemed to be configuring leadership qualities as tools for teaching and acknowledging that students would need guidance to learn to think differently. He was drawing attention to the need to *teach* students to think differently

Developing communication and ability to adapt

Nandan then offered his interpretation:

Nandan: It could then be self-belief.

Kusol: I want to say it as self-confidence. In addition we can think about another idea of leadership: developing communication ability.

Nandan: You mean, reflecting on something by having dialogue. If I fail to do my task, I can ask your help. Thus we can develop a communication network.

Two significant applications of leadership were emerged from the discussion. One was developing support systems to help teachers become leaders of learning in their own classrooms. And another was developing leadership in the students. Both agendas were complementary to teachers' professional development. Then Kusol offered a further shift in the discussion:

Kusol: Yes, but our central focus is on the students. We want to develop students' leadership abilities. We have already identified decision making ability, self-confidence, and communication skills as leadership qualities. Another important element could be adaptation. I mean, the students need to have the ability to adjust easily to any kind of environment or situation.

Me: Can you elaborate the idea of adaptation little bit more in terms of teachers' perspective and students' perspective?

Kusol: From a teacher's point of view adaptation is about the classroom environment. I mean, how the teacher approaches different students. From students' point of view adaptation means how they can help each other and work together.

According to a reflection in my journal, Kusol's contribution initially seemed a denial of the need for professional development and a move away from relating lesson content to concrete life situations. When I look back again, I realise it was rather a shift of focus back to the students: he was arguing that if students are allowed to help each other and work together in classroom, they can consider the perspectives of their fellow peers as alternative ways of thinking and this offers learning opportunities and so it is important for us, as teachers, to develop strategies, and confidence, for facilitating collaboration between students.

Stirring up the students' curiosity

A moment or two later Kusol took the discussion in a new direction:

Kusol: We can consider another point and that is stirring up the students' curiosity.

Me: What do you mean by curiosity?

Kusol: I mean developing students' interest to know and learn.

Me: Why is it important for the students to be curious?

Nandan: Ability to ask question will increase and shyness will gradually decrease.

Arman: Students start to analyse when they start asking questions. At the beginning of this discussion we talked about analytical ability and creativity.

Nandan: Students' creativity will increase when they ask questions. They start analysing. They cannot just ask question. First they need to think. Thus their ability to think will increase.

Arman: It will help to remove the monotony. Our normal trend is that teachers give a lecture and the students just listen. Another issue is that when one student says *no* others just echo. Even those who know part of the answer do not respond because of fear of being wrong and laughed at. If they ask questions, we can get the opportunity to explore answers. Those who feel shy to ask a question can get courage. Gradually the students can get out of the fear of being right or wrong.

It seemed Kusol had been following his own thought pattern, making connections with earlier issues, and Nandan and Kusol were picking up and expanding the point he raised. Nandan was no longer moving away from discussing changes in teaching practice. All the group seemed to be talking about the same thing and on the same wavelength.

Exploring the difference between active and attentive in classroom

In the next phase of the workshop, we took students' curiosity as a central indicator for quality in teaching and we tried to link this with the ways students had expressed their understandings of teaching and learning. After a discussion the group summarised the students' points as follows: *we enjoy being active; we forget when we come home, slower students miss out, and we feel shy to ask questions.*

Then we started thinking through the ideas of leadership the group had raised and laid them against questions we developed from the teachers' and students' expressions through their photos. Finally we developed the following two guiding questions. The first question was: *Do teachers and students need to be interactive in the classroom, and, if so, why?* The second was: *Are attentive and active similar? .*

The teachers decided to explore the answers in two different groups. I participated in both groups, and in some cases challenged them with some provocative questions. After finishing group work the teachers shared their ideas.

On behalf of the first group Aaron reported back as follows:

Firstly, do we need to be interactive in the classroom? My response is yes, because first I need to understand clearly. For example, when we were working on the questions, first I had to understand and then I shared with my partners. Therefore, we summarised our ideas as

follows: (1) so that we can understand first (2) to express what we understand with our learning partners, (3) to develop new understanding.

From the first group's report it seems that they were actively making connections between their own learning process and that of the students, and also linking between the evolving teachers' learning community with the classroom.

After a brief discussion we re-stated the points made by the first group as follows:

First we need to understand any learning topic clearly. Then we need to develop skill to express it clearly and convincingly during teaching and learning. And so through interaction both the teachers and students can develop a comprehensive understanding of the learning topic. The learning topic could be the function of blood in the human body, or English grammar, or a math formula.

On behalf of the second group Nandan reported back as follows:

We have no questions on what Aaron and Arman have shared about interaction in the classroom. We also have some complementary understandings that we want to share. We reached consensus in identifying the necessity of interaction in classroom to achieve the following goals: (1) students will be able to express their understanding, (2) shyness will decrease gradually, and proximal development of knowledge will increase, and (3) leadership quality will develop and students can start making decisions.

Nandan then explained how their understandings were linked to the students learning:

We have tried to focus on how the students could participate actively. They can give their opinions. Then their shyness will decrease. Many of our students do not want to talk. If they become interactive during class, they can start talking. And thus their knowledge will increase. They will be able to know many things from their interaction. Even their knowledge can increase by observing what their partners' writing. Thus they can grow up as a leader. They will argue with each other and can say *hey, let us think otherwise instead of doing this task this way*. Thus they can be able to make decisions.

Nandan was also making a link between the evolving teachers' learning community and to that of the classroom.

The discussion then moved to the second question.

Aaron: Are *attentive* and *active* the same thing? We are saying no. After having a discussion we understood that attentiveness is one-centric and activeness is multi-centric. For example, now you are listening to me attentively and simultaneously you are shaking

your legs. But activeness is everything. In school assembly, we command the students to stand up comfortably and to stand up straight. First the students listen to the command attentively and then they perform according to the command. They are active.

Kusol: Now we want to share. We understood attentiveness as something internal and activeness as something both internal and external.

Nandan: We have discussed another point. Activeness increases the ability of understanding. For example, one student is reading a text attentively, but he may or may not understand the meaning. He or she is just reading but not active. They cannot respond when we ask questions.

The teachers were arguing their points with examples that related to their classrooms. When I reflect back, I see that the teachers had actively explored the difference between being attentive and active, and had begun to evolve collective understandings. I see a growing expectation that others in the group could develop parallel approaches to the topic, and this appears to be an acceptance that differences in focus and expression can exist within the search for a common direction. I saw this as a further indication of the way that the teachers were developing a learning community.

They continued with their exploration as follows:

Kusol: But if a student becomes active, he or she can try to understand.

Nandan: If a student reads something actively, he or she can be involved in the reading. If we ask a question, they can answer, because they were attentive as well.

Finally Nandan and Kusol summarised their understanding of active and attentive as follows:

Attentiveness is internal and activeness is both internal and external. Attentiveness is something that we may or may not understand or recognise. Activeness increases ability to understand.

While their summary is informative, the most important aspect is the way they were developing an understanding that they can gain better awareness of various aspects of teaching and learning by talking through ideas with each other.

Finally, the teachers developed the following three key ideas to address in action:

- making students more active,
- developing partnerships,
- encouraging students to ask questions

This decision created the opportunity for us to move forward and plan for changes in teaching practice.

Collective plans for changing practice

On the final day of the workshop the teachers again worked in two separate groups to explore teaching approaches for trialling. They focused on the two issues that had emerged so far: *how can the teachers make students more active in classroom learning? And how can the teachers’ design their lesson so that students feel safe to ask questions?* They each came up with a model that encapsulated their proposed approach.

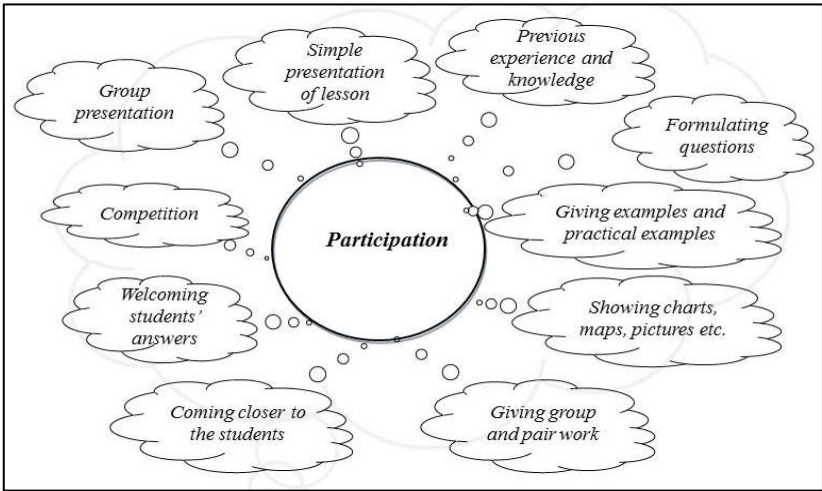


Fig: 8.1: group1’s plan

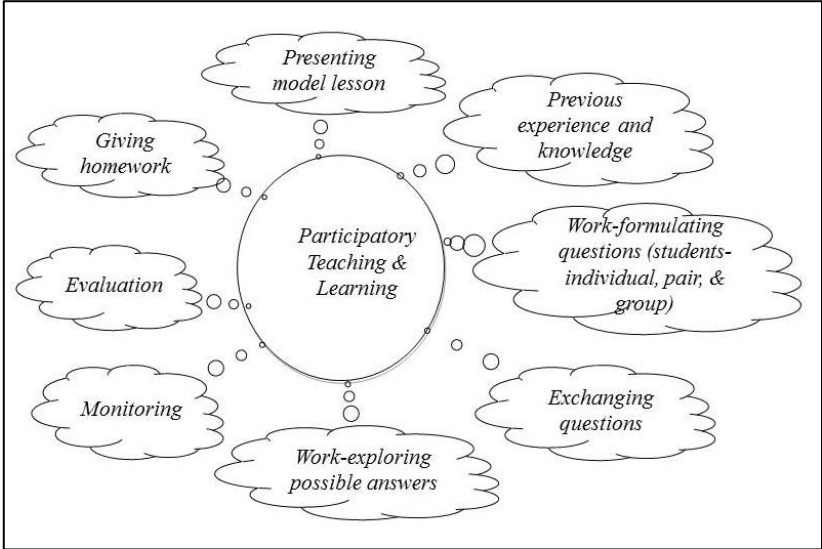


Fig 8.2: Group 2’s plan

Each group took time to develop each component in their respective models. As a facilitator I worked with both groups. When I saw the members wrestling with ideas or differing with ideas or perspectives, I tried to help reaching consensus by asking questions, or requesting examples. It seemed significant to me that both group focused on participation. Perhaps this was the influence of TQI's professional development programme. An overarching goal of TQI training was to ensure participatory teaching and learning in Bangladeshi classrooms. I have addressed some limitations of TQI training in earlier chapters, especially the gap between the training tool and rural teachers' experiences. These models provided an explanation of participation in terms that were grounded in participants' understandings and that were actively directed towards future practice. Rather than being instructed from above the group had developed its understanding through honestly sharing ideas and doubts with each other.

Now, when I consider the dominance of transmission and when I look again into the two models I recognise the inherent emotional challenges for the teachers. The models still represented intentions, and I was not sure if the teachers realised how much they might need to sacrifice their roles as *knowers* when they would come to translate the intention into classroom practice, especially in allowing students to formulate questions and in engaging them in exploring answers. Questions might arise for which neither teacher nor students would know the answer. Or, maybe only the students would know the answer. However, I felt optimistic because the teachers had already taken a risk in re-evaluating their professional role and identity as they developed the models. How they responded to the emotional challenges in translating their models into practice will be reported in the next chapter. After developing their models, each group presented it, with the others interjecting as they recognised similarities. Aaron started.

Aaron: We have tried to say: *participation in the lesson*. Thus we tried to explore ways to make teaching interactive. How can we make the students more active in classroom learning? We can give group work, individual work, pair work, and even homework. And teachers need to be more cordial in every moment. When we have combined the two questions, we have got the main topic: that is *participation*.

Aaron: First step of participation is to introduce the learning topic simply.

Kusol: We have explored it as model lesson.

Aaron: Then we have considered formulating questions.

Kusol: We did the same. We termed it as preparing questions.

Me: Who will prepare the questions?

Nandan: The students will prepare them.

Aaron: I will start with my questions. Then the students will be given the opportunity. I can even formulate the focus question before teaching. Thus the students can develop more questions.

From the discussion so far it was evident that a real convergence was developing between the understandings of the two groups. I was captivated by the momentum of the discussion, but I also tried to stay alert to seeing future challenges and to engage the teachers in anticipating risks and being ready to deal with them.

Kusol: I think after the formal part of the lesson you will not prepare any questions. The students will ask questions. They can ask: *I did not understand what it is or what the meaning of this word is.*

Aaron: Therefore, I mentioned the need for a focus question. Then the students will ask the questions that you are mentioning.

Me: Let us think about some possible risk factors. They may not ask any questions or they might ask stupid questions. What will be your role? It might happen when you implement your plan. How will you deal with it?

Aaron: We have mentioned that we will appreciate and give thanks first, and move forward.

Arman: We will not show any negative attitude. We will try to give the students a feeling how they can do better.

Nandan: Okay, thus they can understand their own mistakes.

Aaron: After appreciating, I will try to direct them towards the main focus of learning.

Nandan: So that they can understand that their questions need to be relevant with the learning focus.

Me: I want to give an idea regarding formulating questions. After introducing a learning topic if you tell the students to ask questions on the learning topic, they may not respond. Rather you can think about a different possibility. You can ask them to write what they want to know about the learning topic. You can give the students two or three minutes to write down their questions.

At this stage it had seemed that the convergence of ideas had led the teachers to a temporary plateau of satisfaction: they seemed to be feeling they had resolved a challenge. So I had decided to pose a further challenge. Nandan picked up my intervention.

Nandan: If we ask them to write, all students will participate.

Aaron: It's all right that we can ask them to write questions, but you cannot expect that every student will write a question. I want to give a practical example. If there are forty students in my class, at best ten might write questions on the very first day, because we are not familiar with this kind of approach. You will get proof of my argument when you start practising this approach in the real classroom context. Yes, from the second lesson it will gradually increase.

Kusol: Yes, it will increase.

Nandan: Initially we need to monitor it.

Aaron: Nandan sir, I am not disagreeing, because we never taught them before how to ask questions.

Nandan: How will they learn to ask questions, if we do not start?

Aaron: They will not learn if we do not start.

Aaron seemed to be developing his thoughts as he spoke. Initially he set out to say that only a few students would write questions, and then he talked himself through to acknowledging that the practice would grow with time and thus confidence could develop. This shift in mid-statement was an affirmation of his developing confidence in thinking past his first idea.

Then Kusol invited the group to anticipate a challenge that might occur.

Kusol: What will you do if you see many students did not write any question?

Nandan: Then I will try to help them.

Me: You can ask them to read the lesson at home. It could be a kind of students' preparation for the lesson.

Arman: If they read before, they can ask a question.

Kusol: Okay, how will we introduce the learning title, if we ask the students to read the lesson before they come to class? They will already know the lesson title when they read at home.

Nandan: I agree with Kusol.

Arman: I want to add little more about introducing the lesson title. I can continue teaching a learning topic three days. Do I need to introduce lesson title every day?

Me: Okay, you are focused heavily on how you will introduce the lesson topic. From the observations I have seen that you are already good at that. I think it is not problematic if the students take a little preparation at home. It may help us identify their learning interests in a particular learning topic. You can observe both the slower and faster learners' questions when you give them two or three minutes to write. You can select two or three questions for discussion that cover different aspects of the learning focus. However, your mental labour will increase.

Kusol's concern echoed earlier conversations in which teachers expressed their concerns about introducing a learning topic. It seemed that teachers feared that if students took preparation in advance, a lesson might lose newness and they would lose pride in their work. Perhaps the fear arose from the longstanding habits of the transmission approach to teaching. Moreover, TQI in-service training offered a fixed model of what was called participatory teaching and learning, and asked teachers to introduce a learning topic in an attractive way. Teachers saw students' preparation before a lesson as a risk to their teaching approach, and so a cause of vulnerability.

I had stepped in because I saw an opportunity to introduce the concept of feeding forward. I wanted the teachers to break the rigid structure of an approach that they had received in training, and to explore different ways of identifying the useful key concepts in a given topic. I also wanted to endorse the value of awareness of uncertainty that accompanies formulating questions and students' preparation. I was actively engaged in the dialogue and I was developing my own thinking through listening to the teachers. As I look back I see this as a form of the *learning from below* that is advocated by Spivak (reported in McMillan, 2007). I hoped that by sharing my own thinking process and consequent vulnerability I could make the teachers more comfortable about their feelings of vulnerability when they would come to implement the changes of approach they were planning.

The discussion continued and moved towards how the teachers can involve the students in asking questions.

Aaron (in a low voice): First we need to teach them how to ask questions.

Nandan: Let me say something. Say, I am teaching a short story from Bangla literature over three days. I will introduce the learning topic on the first day. In the following days I will teach different sections of the story and tell the students to raise questions. But

Aaron sir's concern is the weak students. I will encourage them and ask them to write *I do not understand*. This will be their question.

Kusol: I want to add something. Though Aaron sir has said something in low voice, I somehow have listened to it. I also support his idea. What Nandan sir wants to do is good, but perhaps our main focus is to encourage and enable students to pose questions.

Arman: Yes. How students will throw questions to us and how we will try to explore possible answers.

Kusol: We want students to become involved and to be interactive during teaching and learning. How can we involve them? The key approach that we are trying to find is enabling the students to pose questions.

Nandan: Yes, that is why I have talked about monitoring. If you ask the students to write questions and do not watch what they write, it will not work. Now we are getting fifty-five minutes for a period.

Kusol: I have been wondering from the beginning how I will manage students' questions and whole lot of other activities. Now slowly I am getting the feeling that it is possible if I start working through the students' questions. If we allow students to exchange their questions, that would be a different kind of group work. I mean this could be a possible and simple way to be interactive.

Here Kusol brought together a number of ideas that had been raised in the discussion. Moving beyond Nandan's concept of questions as student feedback, Kusol suggested that the sharing of questions could itself be an interactive form of group learning.

Arman raised a practical concern:

Arman: Is it possible in case of a new learning topic?

Kusol: The pace will be slow.

Arman: First I have to take more responsibility.

Aaron: Afterwards our workload will decrease.

Arman: For example, I start teaching a new chapter that I never taught it before, and the students have no previous idea. In such a situation I have to work more.

Kusol: Yes, but when you start practising this approach, perhaps you will explore ways to minimise the workload.

Aaron: Then our group thought about presentation in parts. We will not be able to teach the whole topic in one session. We will teach it part by part. Then we considered competition. One group will ask a question and another group will try to explore the answer. Thus all the students can participate.

Me: Do you mean a question exchange?

Kusol: No, it's not only a question exchange. When one group ask a question, the other group will also get courage to formulate questions.

Aaron: So far we have just talked about how we can involve students in questioning and finding possible answers. We want to move forward. Our group also thought about appreciating the students' work and their effort and coming in closer contact with them.

Kusol: It means monitoring.

Aaron: It is actually working through the students' inability. Nandan sir has mentioned earlier that some students might not write questions or might do nothing. We need to watch closely and very gently ask some little questions. Then we can insert the idea of pair and group work. We can give the task of asking questions and exploring answers in groups or pairs. More or less it is similar to your approach. Then we thought about displaying or showing something practical. We can show them something relevant to the learning topic by using materials or we can take them to the practical evidence.

Arman: For example, we can bring a leaf when we teach them botany.

Kusol: Okay, it will depend on the learning topic and situation. We cannot fix or choose what material we will use in advance.

Aaron: Yes we are not saying to fix it before. It depends on what we will teach. And giving explanatory examples and practical examples actually falls under the category of display. So, overall this is our approach through which we want to ensure students' participation in teaching and learning.

As the discussion progressed the participants in both groups were interpreting their original models and what they were hearing to make sense of what they intended to change in their own practice. Out of the exchange of ideas awarenesses shifted and new understandings developed.

Reading from the curriculum document

In the last part of the workshop I wanted to connect our discussion with the Bangladesh national curriculum. I requested the teachers to read the two pages in the curriculum that explained constructivist learning theory and enquiry-based learning (Bangladesh NCTB, 2012, pp.10-17). I did this for two reasons. First, I wanted the teachers to navigate between the understandings that had developed through the workshop and the statement of constructivist learning theory that was written in the curriculum. My intention was to see how the teachers' individual understandings about participation complemented or conflicted with a western paradigm of learning that is included in the national curriculum document. Second, I wanted to practice how we as adults could ask questions ourselves.

After ten minutes of reading I requested the teachers to share anything they found interesting. They again started reading. Afterwards we together tried to explore what we read about constructivist learning by giving examples. I tried to understand the meaning of constructivist learning according to their explanation.

The discussion started as follows:

Aaron: Just see how difficult it is to ask questions.

Arman: Yes we are failing to ask questions.

Their acknowledgements were interesting because they were clearly moving from aspirational planning to direct experience, and because their reflections suggested the difference between questions that come from simple curiosity and those that come as a strategic tool for learning.

Me: According to your structure you will involve students in asking questions. This is just a little practice how we as adults can develop questions.

Kusol: We can develop question through discussion. In one section it is written that the students will be able to know how to learn with the help of teachers. Thus they will be able to be life-long learners. What does it mean? We know that after grade five students finish primary school and after grade ten they finish high school and then some go to university. But here it talks about life-long learning.

Kusol was querying one of the core ideas of constructivist learning theory, that of life-long learning. To me life-long learning is strongly connected with a desire to learn, and so with curiosity. Perhaps a desire to learn make students curious and they start posing questions. Instead of sharing my own views directly I waited to see how the other teachers build ideas about learning on Kusol's curiosity.

Nandan: In another paragraph it is said *gothito (constructed)* and the students will develop new idea with previous experience, knowledge, and ideas. Why did they write *gothito (constructed)* here? They could have written previous lesson.

I reflected in my journal that Nandan was still seeing learning as a school and curriculum based activity which was good, but that school and curriculum needed to be based on people and society. I now find the same idea in Rabindranath's writing (1908). I realised how hard it was to align the discussion with what Kusol raised, as I started to think that *life-long learning*, as it is framed in the curriculum is also a western concept. What does it mean for rural Bangladeshi teachers and students? Why should life-long learning be important for rural Bangladeshi students? How does it relate to curiosity and how can the process of life-long learning begin in the classroom? I became emotionally unsettled and hoped that the teachers could navigate their understandings around these questions.

Then Arman asked for a simple explanation.

Arman: Okay, but please tell me what constructivist theory is. I want to know an easy meaning.

Me: Let us try to develop an understanding of our own about constructivist theory. You have read the text twice. I request you to focus on Kusol's points-: *life-long learning* and *the students will be able to know how to learn with the help of teachers*. Can we try to develop understanding of constructivist learning theory on the basis of Kusol's points?

Nandan: By my understanding, it explains all the techniques of how to teach the students. The topics we have been discussing here for two days all are here. Another point is life-long learning. Life-long learning means that after taking education the students might encounter challenges; even if they face any challenge, they can overcome it.

Me: How will they overcome it?

Nandan: By their knowledge and merit.

At this point, I felt vulnerable about my capability to explaining a highly theoretical concept in very simple accessible language. I did not want Kusol's points to get lost. When I look back I see with wonder how I became learner again in the strained situation created in the process of working within this community of practice. Perhaps I could not have learned in this way in an environment isolated from the context of the rural school.

Me: Okay, what Nandan has said about constructivist theory is good. I just want to add little bit more and then focus on Kusol's points. We have been working here together for

the last two days. If you look back you will be able to see how we worked together. We posed some questions to develop our understanding about the educational concerns in this school. We worked in groups and tried to explore possible answers and tried to find ways to overcome the problems we had identified. Then we shared our ideas together. Sometimes we accepted some ideas and sometimes we challenged each other and asked new questions or asked for further explanation. We argued according our own experience as teachers and we shifted our understandings. None of us tried to impose ideas on each other. We tried to develop ideas by discussion. This is the key concept of *gothonbad* (*constructivist theory*) which means we cannot transmit or impose ideas or knowledge; rather we can construct ideas together. So *gothonbad* is about how students can learn and how we can help them to learn. The key role for teachers is to encourage students in self-enquiry and to constantly ask each other questions. When students start self-enquiry and asking each other questions, they actually start learning how to learn. Thus they might become a life-long learner. In a nutshell the central idea of *gothonbad*, that we need to keep in mind, is that we need to avoid simply transmitting ideas to students: rather we need to help them to construct and share ideas together. When students construct ideas by self-enquiry and by asking questions, they learn and change occurs in their understanding and thinking.

After my sharing, Kusol became emotionally charged.

Kusol: Earlier Aaron sir said that the teachers' method⁵¹ is the best method and Nandan sir said that he will focus solely on teaching if he gets a salary of 20,000 BDT⁵² a month. I am rejecting both. If government gives me 30,000 BDT a month, what kind of grass will I cut here? Even if I agree that teachers' method is the best method, I need to prepare myself. The way we have been working here for last three days, we need facilitation. Perhaps this is the reason the curriculum never reaches us. The government sends the subject curriculum to us, and we lock it in our drawers.

Nandan: Now tell me why you lock it in your drawers.

Kusol: Why not? Those are theoretical things. I want practical ideas. We need this kind of facilitation where we can share and take preparation.

⁵¹ *Teacher's Method* is a widely articulated term in Bangladesh. I heard many teachers using this phrase during my field work. I observed the teachers used the phrase to argue against any theoretical intervention regarding teaching and learning, especially when intervention involved emotional challenges. Initially I thought the teachers used the phrase to mean that they wanted to build on their own capacity and experience. Later I identified that they used the phrase loosely. Of course *teachers' method* is best if it evolves through teachers' life experiences and the students' educational needs.

⁵² 350NZD

Arman: The surrounding culture is a concern. When we hear that neighbouring schools do not teach with an alternative approach, we also stop following what we have been trained to do. Another point is that we are sitting together in your presence and trying to do something differently. If we four out of five continue with this trend, it would be a good achievement. But, if only one continues and four give up, it is uncomfortable for the one who wants to continue, and we actually end up with nothing.

What Arman said made me aware that a community of practice could undermine learning as well as foster it: when a community of practice gives up, individual teachers feel the impact of group power and find it hard to sustain their effort.

In the final part of the day it seemed that Nandan tried to soften the group's consensual understanding, but the others held him back.

Nandan: We need this kind of workshop at least one in each month with different experts. If Kusol sir says anything to me, I disregard it, and if I say something to him, he disregards it. We cannot do anything, but we have the ego. And we often regret about our salary. I think we need to stop just thinking about salary. We need to rethink our sincerity.

Kusol: I said the same thing a month ago. Now you are just echoing.

Aaron: Nandan sir, if tomorrow the government give me a salary of 30,000 BDT a month, what benefit will the students will get? Nothing new will happen. We need to be developed as worthy of that salary. We need knowledge.

Kusol: That is what I have mentioned. We need development.

After this discussion I asked the teachers if they want to add anything from the curriculum document to their models. They decided to add the term *previous experience and knowledge*.

Nandan's comments seemed to be an attempt to make the implicit agreement to change less unsettling and more like what has already been known and therefore feels safe. Looking back I identify this kind of reaction as a product of the bigger system within Bangladesh that we as teachers belong to, and so as a challenge as we work towards change. However, there had already been a clear shift from a community of practice that reinforced each other's habits to a community in which the members interacted and even argued with each other and made an overt commitment to learn from and with each other. That in itself was an achievement from the workshop. I see it as part of the process that not all the members were processing their learning in the same way or arriving at identical conclusions: a learning community is not a choral

learning group and it is not to be expected that all the members can or should learn the same things at the same pace. The important thing was that knowledge began to develop, change and evolve within the group through the members' interaction.

Emerging ideas

At this stage the learning community can be seen as a dialogical community. I take the term *dialogical community* as it is used by Westoby and Morris (2011), who, drawing on Buber, talk about “community as dialogue”, as a process where the participants relate to each other in terms of “equal exchange and connection”(p.142) and see each other as “active agents in making decisions, using their creativity, resources, relationships and intelligence” (p.143), to develop a process of dialogue that is “attentive to what is being said” in order to develop “a collective process of social change” (p.144). A dialogic community moves from *I* to *we*, from private concerns to shared public actions. Westoby and Morris identify four levels of practices in developing a dialogical community: bonding, banding, building and bridging. The figure below relates these four levels of practices and Kemmis and McTaggart’s criteria that characterise communicative action to this stage of the project.

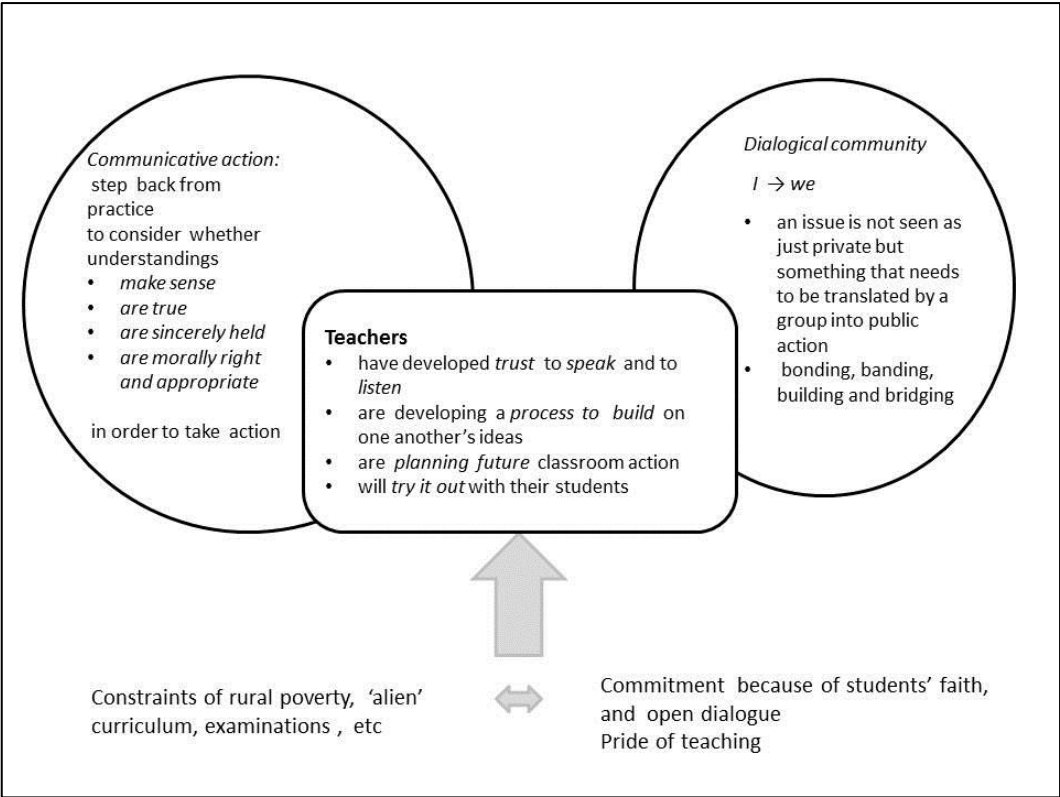


Fig 8.3: Developing a dialogical community and taking communicative action

The teachers are well aware that they work within the constraints of rural poverty, inadequate physical and learning resources, a dominant examination systems, and a curriculum that feels

alien not only because it has been developed far from the rural context but also because they themselves do not fully understand it. At the same time they are strongly motivated by their students' faith in them, by their professional *pride in teaching*, and by the sharing that took place in the recent meeting with students. During the project they have developed trust to speak their thoughts, to risk critique by their colleagues and to listen to each other, so deepening their existing bonds. Through their successive opening of classroom doors to each other and discussions they are banding in participatory action, developing a process whereby they can receive and build on one another's' ideas, as well as reaching out to receive ideas from the students. In this process they are step back from their everyday practice in order to investigate it and to carefully consider whether the understandings they have about their practice really make sense to them personally and collectively, are true in terms of the realities of their experience and context, are authentic and not just borrowed or imposed, and whether they match the values that they hold and the needs of their students and community. At this stage of the project the teachers are planning how to put their new understandings into practical classroom action, and so building practices that they hope will be sustainable. And they are committed to trying these out in their classrooms with their students, so creating a link or bridge between their own learning community and the learning needs of the students in their classes.

Several significant notions emerge through the dialogues that I have reported in this chapter. The first is that rural schools can be spaces where learning communities can be facilitated and sustained. The second is that through dialogue such a community can allow teachers to develop individual and collaborative, criticality of their professional identity, and so see the school as a place where they can challenge and rebuild understandings of quality education. The third aligns the emergence of such a dialogical community with the participatory action research process, whereby we acknowledge the school as a place where collective effort for educational change can be planned in such a way that brings private concerns into the focus of public action. The challenging issue for us was to see how this action would develop. That is reported in the next chapter.

Chapter 9: Embodying praxis

The previous chapter reported how in dialogue with each other a core group of the teachers explored their shifting understandings of the purposes of their practice and how they hoped to change it. This chapter reports what happened when they individually put their decisions into action in their own classrooms. I track the experiences of each of the five teachers who had participated in the workshop, drawing on our discussions, their reports of their experiences and, in some cases, my invited observation. Although the events occurred over approximately four weeks, school had been closed for much of that time with the period of Ramadan, and the celebration of Eid and Puja⁵³. In addition a sudden and severe flood created further interruption.

At the end of the workshop Aaron, Kusol, Nandan, Polash and Arman, the five participating teachers, committed to trialling the changes they had decided on in their own classrooms. Although we still saw the support of the group as important, the focus now shifted to individual action. What was important now, we decided, was that each teacher should have the autonomy to try out and reflect on his changing practice in a way that felt personally comfortable. It was decided that I would help each teacher reflect on their experiences and, if they wanted me to, I would observe a further class. At this point of the project I considered that their evaluation of what took place in their teaching was more important than mine. In this stage of the project an academic from my university visited the project, and we decided to take advantage of her visit to invite all the earlier participants in the project to share our progress. Several of the core group offered to again open their classrooms for observation and discussion.

In the final section of this chapter I explore how this stage of the teachers' exploration aligns with notions of praxis as they are discussed in western literature, and how the concept of *akshi* might be extended.

Although all five teachers reported significant new awarenesses, the experiences of Aaron, Polash and Arman are told in greater detail, because they offer me the opportunity to further explore what I now see as important aspects of the project.

⁵³ Ramadan is the Muslim month of fasting. Eid - ul-Fitr comes at the end of Ramadan and is a major Muslim festival. Puja is the main Hindu festival of the year. Along with the Christian Christmas these holy days are acknowledged throughout Bangladesh, and schools have holidays.

Aaron's story

Just before the flood I spent some time with Aaron and he reported his first trials of putting his workshop decisions into practice. Aaron first explained how in one English lesson he had taught the conversion of direct speech into indirect speech.

Aaron: When I asked the students to apply their learning in converting a direct speech into an indirect one, very few became able to accomplish the task. They were struggling in changing the tense. When I explained, it seemed easy to them, and when I stopped explaining, the students again started struggling. I again tried to explain. So, in the first day it was almost a failure. In third lesson some students just started to understand.

Me: What did you do for the students who did not understand?

Aaron: Yes, I went on back gear. I did not move forward. I confined the discussion to two sentences.

Me: Did any students ask any questions for further discussion?

Aaron: The students showed very low tendency in asking questions.

Me: Why was that?

Aaron: I cannot imagine the reasons. It was neither shyness nor fear. It might be they do not know how to ask questions. Or they might have fear of getting it wrong in asking questions.

As I listened to Aaron I became more aware that students might ask questions for two different reasons. One is to ask for help when they don't understand something; the other is to speculate about the meaning of content. In an English lesson it was probably hard to ask the second kind of question. I reflected that it was still important for students to be able to ask for help when they did not understand, but I was also becoming aware that practice in manipulating structures might be as important an issue as understanding.

Aaron: In addition, some students understood fairly quickly and they felt bored if I did not move forward with new sentences. The students who went for private coaching were very happy. But for the rest it was challenging. I then asked the students to write assertive and interrogative sentences in direct speech. But there were few responses. Then again it was shyness or something else that I cannot explain. I am thinking deeply what can be done. But the advanced students became impatient to show me their work. They would say, "Sir you did not see my work." Then as a teacher I feel bad. I cannot monitor all at a time.

Aaron was exploring a range of problems. He was grappling with why so many of the students were silent, as well as realising he needed to meet the needs of his more advanced students at the same time as he attended to the slower learners. When I consider the *akshi* concept, I see that Aaron had begun to think about how to make a connection between the work he had planned and various students' respective shyness or impatience, and he was attentive to individual reactions and aware that he was not yet meeting all the students' needs. He had already begun to develop a trustful relationship with the students. I hoped to see his exploration translated into creating space for a kind of relationship between him and the students that help him overcome the blocks he was still experiencing.

After Eid Aaron sat with me again and reported a further lesson. It was taken from an English textbook passage describing the Olympics. He shared his vulnerability about his own gaps in knowledge of English. He said that he could not read a text fluently and understand clearly when he first read it. He admitted this weakness as a barrier in developing English language skills. He mentioned that it happened especially when the new text books arrived. He picked up a sentence for discussion. The sentence was "the Olympics have many memorable moments and athletes we'll remember by name alone." He said that he knew the meaning of every single word in the sentence but the word *alone* at the end of the sentence puzzled him.

Looking back I see that Aaron was aware of his weakness and actively searching for tools to develop his competencies in teaching English. His problem is widely echoed in the area of teaching English in Bangladesh. At first I felt frustrated because, while I wanted to help him, I was conscious of my lack of expertise in the field of second language learning. Then I began to realise that the lack of support structures for teaching English was not an issue we could resolve just within our project. There was need for networks of support at regional as well as national levels, and perhaps the textbooks themselves needed to be further adapted to suit the experiences of rural students and teachers.

In a later lesson Aaron taught from another passage in the textbook describing the practice of power cuts called *load shedding*⁵⁴. He told me how he had engaged one student in a dialogue in front of the class. As the dialogue progressed, the student gradually became confident and twisted the dialogue into a convincing and interesting one. The student asked Aaron a number of questions. *Why does load-shedding occur? How does it affect life? And how can the issue be*

⁵⁴ To cover up the gap between electricity production and actual need, by rotation some part of the country fall under power outage during the day which is known as load-shedding.

resolved? In the conversation Aaron and the student used both Bangla and English. Gradually Aaron involved others and finally the dialogue became a whole class discussion.

On the following day Aaron tried to assess the students' ability to use English in talking about load-shedding. He asked the students to raise questions. For five minutes there were no questions. Then a student asked Aaron to re-discuss load-shedding. He worked with the student separately. Then another student requested Aaron to translate the dialogue that she developed in Bangla. In her dialogue the student tried to develop an idea of how load-shedding can affect the students' preparation for the examinations. Aaron was pleased with the student's different approach to the topic. Then another student asked Aaron a question on load-shading. Now Aaron became disappointed. He asked the students why they had remained silent for first five minutes and why they were asking questions so late in the class.

Looking back I realised how literally Aaron had interpreted our group decision to encourage students' questions. He was successful in promoting students' voices in his class, and students were becoming more confident in asking him to explain something again, but it seemed he might be blocking participation by requiring students to ask questions. As I reflected on our conversation later I felt I had lost an opportunity to explore more fully with him the adaptation of questions, and their limitations.

At the same time I reflect that Aaron, I, and the students are products of a system. Our expectations and our understanding had been shaped by what Gee (1992) describes as the *Discourses*⁵⁵ that we acquire through enculturation into the social practices of the society we live in. Kemmis and Grootenboer (2008) explain how we are pre-formed by our history and society in terms of the *extra-individual conditions* shape individual dispositions and actions. The students did not reach grade nine in one jump: for years they had been taught how to memorise and pass examinations. Similarly both Aaron and I had been shaped by the ways English is used and taught in a country that can be described as postcolonial and developing. Just as the students are vulnerable in trying a new approach, so is the teacher (and the researcher). I further discuss Bangladesh's dilemma with English language teaching in the next chapter. What I see as an important implication of Aaron's story is that while the learning community within one school could support its members in inquiring into their practice and instigating changes, in itself it could not provide the awareness and knowledge needed to remedy the structural flaws (Podder, 2013; Hamid & Baldauf, 2008; Das, Shaheen, Shrestha, Rahman & Khan, 2014) within

⁵⁵ Gee calls the social practices that structure and constrain meaning as " 'Discourses' (with a capital 'D') " (p.20)

nationally accepted approaches to pedagogy. Perhaps a future development of more widely based learning communities could allow collaborative critique of national assumptions and practices.

Kusol's story

Kusol and Nandan, like Aaron, did not invite me or their colleagues to observe their trials with changing their teaching approach. When Kusol and I sat to talk he explained why he preferred to not invite observers.

Kusol: After observing physics and social science classes on 21st and 22nd July, when we agreed to try out an alternative teaching approach that promotes students' curiosity, I felt it challenging. I thought about how I could do it effectively. I wanted to try and identify the key points myself and I also wanted to see if I could explain how I conducted the session and share the gist of what happened. I felt challenged in utilising the knowledge that I have gained from this project to engage the students actively in learning. I wanted to see how effectively I can utilise the knowledge that I have collected from the project. That is why I did not invite.

Kusol reported how he had invited students to bring him their written questions about a topic he was teaching in environmental science. He then briefly explained the key professional idea he got from his exploratory approach.

Kusol: As a teacher I would have never gone as deeply as the students provoked by bringing me their written questions. I can tell you that. After having discussion with you and then working through how a particular concept could be made accessible for students' learning, I think I have given the students something different. The students engaged their brain critically and they went through line by line and point by point. They utilised their brain to ask questions. And they have got the benefit. I am satisfied that they did it successfully.

Kusol then shared what he saw as an unresolved challenge.

Kusol: The only demerit is that the questions are good for those with talent but tough for the weaker ones. In that case I need to be more helpful to the weak students.

Me: Aren't the weak students somehow getting benefit from the discussion?

Kusol: Yes, yes of course. Because when their peers are throwing questions and participating in discussion, they are also thinking how to ask questions. They are also

asking questions, though not critical ones. They are asking normal questions, and advancing.

Kusol's report indicates that he was fairly satisfied that he could transfer what we had discussed in the workshop into practice that could work in his classroom. At the same time he was aware that he was not yet meeting all his students' needs, and he turning around thoughts about just how much criticality he could expect from everyone. At this stage of the project I considered that what was important was how Kusol himself interpreted the results of his explorations of change to his practice. He was telling me that he had started an approach that he could continue to explore on his own.

Nandan's Story

When Nandan sat to discuss his shifts in practice, he shared one of his exciting experiences. Before the Ramadan vacation he asked the students to write an essay on the question: *why does agricultural cultivation in Bangladesh during rainy season depend on climate?* Nandan said that two of the students' writings were so excellent that he was surprised.

Nandan: In their writing, the students have discussed the effect of altitude and latitude on seasonal monsoon rain in Bangladesh when they have argued how agricultural cultivation depends on climate. They have explained how the weather in Bangladesh depends on the position of the equator. They compared the Bangladeshi situation with other countries. They also discussed how the disruptive behaviour of climate affected the poverty situation and thus forced us to use underground water for irrigation. I have just surprised.

The key point here is that Nandan was pleased but also surprised by work that he saw as excellent. He was becoming aware that several of the students could think deeply and creatively and discuss their ideas and views convincingly. Previously he had thought he had to organise the thinking for his class. He felt inspired and re-energised. I encouraged Nandan to keep utilising students' creative thinking ability for whole class learning and for his own professional development.

Nandan: Actually I have to go much closer to the students. I have to ask questions and give extra time. Initially they might get afraid, but later they will get the joy. If they cannot finish their study successfully, they could get involved in anti-social activities. Therefore, I must take care of them. I am afraid for their future. That is why I am saying that I need to go closer to them. If I do, their hope will increase and they will think that

they can get something from me. Otherwise they remain silent and get afraid of their inability. I have to remove their fear. I have to insert the belief that they are also capable.

Nandan identified his further challenges as follows:

Of course I will continue. The first challenge is the use of time in class. Another is that I do not know what the students know and at the same time the students do not know what I know, so we do not know how to challenge each other. We will learn together. Third challenge is to include the slow learners. They are also members of the class. They might find it hard to understand some questions. My objective would be to enable them to learn something from the discussion. Fourth is my own weakness as teacher. Therefore I will continue this approach according to my own way.

Looking back now, I see that Nandan had taken some of the ideas we had explored as a group into his own practice and given students' opportunity to exercise their inquiry and creativity, and that he felt re-motivated by the experience. Earlier in the project I had reflected that some students were unconscious about their ignorance and that as teachers we needed to find ways to become conscious of our areas of ignorance and to help our students to do so. It was heartening at this point to hear Nandan speak about how he and the students could learn together and challenge each other. I also see it as important that despite his excitement he still had his feet on the ground and was considering the challenges that still lay ahead of him. I see this focus on practicability as what makes his new initiatives sustainable.

Polash's story

When I sat with Polash to listen to his experiences, I detected some sadness in his face, or at least absence of his previous enthusiasm. He started smiling slowly and said that because of some personal life difficulties he could not focus on changing aspects of his teaching practice. He said that because of unavailability of agricultural day labour he had to apply pesticides in his paddy fields himself. He somehow inhaled some pesticide when he was spraying. His accident spoke of the reality in which most of the rural teachers live. I wanted to quit our discussion, but Polash held me back and proposed to revisit his understanding about the social constructivist theory of learning we discussed in the three day workshop.

Polash: To me constructivist means making things in proper order. To me, the key concept is to express one's own understanding clearly to another person, and at the same time to learn from the other. Definitely there is value of previous knowledge in the

process of sharing. On the basis of previous knowledge, we can create something new, and learn new things by sharing.

Me: Any example?

Polash: First I can initiate something provocative in relation to a learning topic in class. Then the students might want to know more or they can explore something new on the topic. Thus we can construct what we know, and the new knowledge can change our perspectives and we can achieve something new.

Me: Tell me more.

Polash: We can do something inquiry-based or problem-based. The key thing of constructivist theory is to solve problems by inquiry and by asking questions. It does not necessarily mean that I will try this approach in all my teaching. I need to develop my understanding first, then I need to know where and how to apply this approach in practice. It is not possible to continue with this approach every day. At the same time it is not impossible. We have got training and we have gained experience. Now we need awareness, and need to think about the students. We need to listen to them. Therefore, we need to continue slowly.

Me: So it can help you to....

Polash: Aaha! The students can develop their questioning skill and we can develop a partnership in learning. Thus the students can learn from each other. I as a teacher can also learn from the students. I also need to inquiry into the unknown aspects of a learning topic. Then we can develop partnership. My point is achieving skill by continuous practice.

Polash's emphasis on developing his new approach slowly and his insistence that developing an interactional classroom is an evolving skill shifted our earlier emphasis on questioning to a wider consideration of the role of inquiry in teaching and learning. I was heartened both by the way he had independently picked up the concept of constructivism and translated into his own understanding and also by the way he was evolving a plan of how to implement it in his teaching.

Polash was one of the teachers who opened his classroom to the whole school group as basis for sharing and for further reflection and discussion. He invited all the teachers in the project, the head teacher, several members of the SMC and the visitor, to observe his social science class. He

made it clear to all of us that he was aware that his new approach was still developing and that he actively encouraged feedback and suggestion.

Polash taught the concept of *state* and its various elements. At the beginning he identified the learning aim of the class and elicited knowledge from the class. Then he asked students to pin up on the pin board some prepared statements about the idea of a *state* by Aristotle, Garner, and Wilson. He opened the discussion by asking the students how they made sense of the statements in defining a *state*. After a hesitation, the students were asked if they could find differences in perspectives in the statements.

The students took time, and after a while one student came to the front confidently.

Student 1: Actually Aristotle describes state only in terms of a village and society. I mean he discusses state only in terms of a small land territory, while Garner and Wilson bring the idea of a specific geographic territory, government, and population into their discussion.

The student's comparative analysis of the concepts of state suggests that students can contribute strongly to learning if they are given the opportunity. Polash appreciated the interruption and started discussing different elements of state. At the end of his explanation Polash again asked the students if they had any questions about these elements. The students remained silent. Polash was just about to conclude the lesson, and since there was still a little time left, I intervened and asked the students to write down questions that they wanted to explore further. All the students in the classroom rushed to their exercise books and immediately started writing questions. Polash began to move around and observe the students' questions. I did too. We only gave them two to three minutes to write the questions before Polash collected them. The following are some of the questions that were written.

Student 1: In many occasions we see political unrest in our country. In such a condition we have seen that when the tenure of an elected government has come to the end, the army took over to rule the state. But an army ruled government is not elected. Then according to the four basic elements of a state, how can we describe Bangladesh as a state?

Student 2: From today's discussion I have learned that sovereignty is one of the important elements of state. I want to ask a question from the details of today's discussion. Can we explain sovereignty as a form of liberation or freedom?

Student 3: Is sovereignty only entrusted in the hands of government?

Student 4: Why is Aristotle said to be father of political science?

Student 5: Our neighbouring country, India, is a state and Bangladesh is a state. Why cannot we describe Rajshahi⁵⁶ as a state?

The students' questions show that they were really thinking about the implications of the topic and that they wanted to understand it more deeply. And none of the questions fell outside the key learning focus. After collecting the questions I requested Polash to allow the students to have a little discussion. He accepted.

Polash: What do you think about the first question?

Student 8: Today we have learned that there are four elements of a state and we cannot describe anything as a state if there is an absence of one element. According to the context given in the question, when the army takes over, no elected government exists in Bangladesh. In that case how can we describe Bangladesh as a state?

Me: Okay, you think that in the given situation no government exists. Why do you think so?

Student 8: Mmm... then the state is taken over by the army and, um- I mean, sir, that chaos arises.

At this point another student spontaneously stood up. Perhaps this was the power of the free space that had suddenly been created, and the students started enjoying the space.

Student 2: The tenure of government in Bangladesh is five years. After the end of the tenure there should have been an election to elect a new government. But in the middle the army or another form of government is taking over. In that interim period can we describe our country as a state?

Polash: Does anyone have any opinion here?

Student 6: I can give an opinion here. There is an elected government in operation and everything depends on the prime minister. But at the end, because of chaos, the on-going prime minister loses control and army takes over. In such a situation the election is held up in delays. So the question is: can we accept our country as a state in that situation?

Me: Okay, again you have raised the same question. You have clearly mentioned that because of chaos the army takes over responsibility. And you also have said that

⁵⁶ Rajshahi is one of Bangladesh's divisional regions.

according to today's learning one important element of state, *elected government* becomes non-existent. Can we explain the interim government as army backed?

Student 7: Mmm not sure. Perhaps we can, though it is autocratic. It is a different form of government.

Polash: Yes, it is not democratic, but we need a conclusion.

Student 8: Sir, we had been ruled by the British and the Pakistanis. In that period there was prolonged martial law and there was no election for a long time. And in that period the state did not get any development. According to today's learning, at that time none of the elements of state existed, but it was said to be a state, though in a different name. So how can we now define Bangladesh as a state?

Looking back, I see the spontaneity of the discussion as one of the powerful explorations in our process of change. Various students' answers raised a further overarching question: how could we construct a concept of state with its different basic elements in a complex situation? Polash's enthusiastic facilitation of the discussion made it clear that he also recognised the shift in learning that occurred and that he was gaining confidence in how he could support this kind of student intervention and argument.

In a debrief after the class, Polash described his reaction to the students' questions.

Polash: As a whole, this is a new approach. Though we had got training from TQI, we never had been asked to try this way. I mean teaching a whole chapter and then asking the students to think and bring questions for further discussion. This is new and it might give us good experience. Actually the teacher is not the only knowledgeable person. As long as I am in the teaching profession I have to believe that I can learn from the students. If I work through the students' questions I can learn.

Polash's delight in the questions his students raised and in the issues they debated was one emotion among a whole range of emotions that he and colleagues encountered during this project. As earlier chapters describe, at times the teachers, and I, had felt vulnerability, fear, embarrassment, enthusiasm and joy. Sometimes it called for courage to invite criticism, and it also took courage to give it to the others. And the teachers also became aware that if they were going to continue a journey of critical exploration of their practice, they would need to continue to deal with those emotions. What seemed to be happening at this stage of the project was that the teachers were finding ways to channel their emotions into planned and even direct action. In Chapter 5 I talked about the pride of teaching and how the teachers had become suffused with

the emotion of love for their students and their community. Then, however, they felt their intentions were blocked by frustration with the shortcomings in their students and the sense of their personal inadequacy. Now that intensity of emotion seemed to be a force that they could translate into action and that they could convert into relationship with their students. In this way the cycles of exploration, discovery, critique, frustration, and further exploration that shaped the project as a whole seemed to have a correspondence in each of our personal experiences.

How this appeared in Polash's practice is illustrated by the student's comments on a further lesson I was invited to observe. The lesson itself was in economics and concerned concepts of *production, labour, utility* and *commodity* and involved very active and exploratory discussion between Polash and the students. After the lesson Polash left a space for me to talk with the students about their reactions to the lesson.

S1: If someone fails to understand and bring question to sir, he or she can get something from the classroom. In that case we can do well in exam also.

S2: Usually we are not interested to read home. If we are given the task to ask question, we try to make sensible question. Then if sir allows us to explore answer, we learn how to make question, we know the answers, and we learn. And it can also help in exam.

S3: Sir, the way we have been asked to bring question was new. We had to think to prepare question. We had to think what we actually want to know. So we are actively getting involved in making plan to ask questions.

S13: Sir, we have been asked to bring question which was good. If we do not practice home, we will not be able to ask question. So the good side is that this practice will help us to start exercise home and then we will be able to bring many good questions.

S10: Sir, main point is that there is no limit to learn. There are many instances that we cannot answer critical questions. Or it seems that we understand when sir teaches from text book, but later we forget. So now we can get chance to understand if we start focusing on text book.

At this point I asked the students to identify if there were any challenges. They said:

S2: I do not see any problem in this practice.

S1: Sir, yes, there is a problem. If we continue discussion the way we have discussed today, we will not be able to finish syllabus. Perhaps, we can learn many aspects of a learning topic, but if we do this type of discussion regularly we may not complete the course at the end.

Polash came forward, took the floor.

Polash: Okay, first I am not denying what you are saying. Yes, time is a concern in completing the syllabus. But I have a question for you to think about. The social science book covers five different subjects: sociology, history, geography, economics, and political science. For example, there are three chapters on economics. You can bring questions covering three chapters and then we can spend a full day to have open discussion on your questions. This could be a possible way that we can continue. Yes you are right that we may get troubled in completing syllabus, if we have this kind of discussion after every chapter. If we utilise one day to have comprehensive discussion on an overall topic, we won't get any problem.

As I stood back and listened to Polash I had a sense of satisfaction that Polash had translated his aspirations into practice. He had been relatively silent in the workshop but clearly he had been processing all the arguments inside his own mind and now he led a class where the students actively participated. It is interesting that afterwards while most of the students voiced appreciation of the changed approach there were some differing opinions, and these were expressed freely. Moreover, Polash himself felt confident enough about his new approach to explain it and to reassure the students that it would not impede their progress towards examinations. As I will discuss further below, it was apparent that Polash had gradually taken ownership of the ideas we had discussed throughout the project and finding ways to embody them in his practice. As he said, he did not yet know how much he implement his new approach, but at this stage will he felt the need to proceed slowly, he did not set any limits on the changes he might make. I recognised that he was no longer relying on my leadership but prepared to develop his own direction through developing his reflective awareness and by responding to his students' reactions.

Arman's story

In my discussion with him before the flood, Arman talked about his continuing problem with student silence.

Arman: But the problem is that usually when I ask the rest whether they understand or not, they remain silent. They never say: *Sir, we do not understand*. My experience suggests that nobody raises a question at that moment. They behave as if they all understand.

We agreed that often students mask their incapacity with silence and try to satisfy us by appearing to understand.

Me: What did they not understand? Did you try to identify that? You could have asked the students reasons why they could not solve the problem.

Arman: Actually I did not ask the students the way you are suggesting. I just started to solve the problem on the blackboard when they said they could not do it.

Me: Then only you are actually engaged in learning, not the students.

Arman: This is the way we have developed our teaching culture.

Me: Once you identify the reasons, you will have actually solved most of your concerns.

Arman: But still there is a concern for me. What if sixty students say that they do not understand? How can I identify the challenges of sixty students?

Me: It is very unlikely that sixty students will have sixty different kinds of concerns. You can ask five or six students to mention their learning challenges in math or physics. It is very likely that you will get some similarity.

Arman: We have the pressure to finish the syllabus. We have no time to see whether the students understand or not. Therefore, we are obliged by the pressure of finishing the syllabus, to solve only three or four mathematical problems from a chapter. If we fail, the students will report us to the authority and we will need to show causes. Therefore, we focus on completing the syllabus.

Arman was wrestling with the tension between the long standing culture of teaching as instructional practice and processing his understandings from the project and applying them to practice. Nevertheless, when we were later looking for classes for the whole group to observe, Arman opened his classroom door to the wider group.

In that lesson Arman taught about *waves* and *sound*. He started with some concrete examples of waves from the students' life surroundings. The examples were relevant and interesting, but when the opportunity to link the examples with basic concepts of waves came, Arman jumped to another approach. I tried to read what was going on in the students' minds. The students' blank faces and timidity suggested that most of them were almost in the middle of nowhere.

I hesitated, but did not want to miss the opportunity to develop a point of reference for later discussion and so I decided to take a risk. After getting permission from Arman I intervened.

I asked the students if they had any questions. Though the students took a while to respond, at the end they said that they had no questions. In the workshop we had extensively discussed how to make the students curious, and here was a chance to engage the students and lead them to think differently. So I asked a question in what I thought was a very simple form. I asked “Are all periodic motions simple harmonic? Why?” All the students remained silent.

My intention had been to make the students interested in exploring the difference between periodic and simple harmonic motion. I also intended to offer an example to Arman and the other teachers of a teaching point which was fundamental to the lesson.

I wrote in my research journal that anyone who wants to understand *waves* must understand periodic motion and simple harmonic motion clearly. These two concepts are keys to open the door of the concept of *waves*, and students who have not developed these foundational concepts are likely to end up with nothing. And all the necessary information on these two concepts is written in the textbook.

However, a little later I realised that the physics concept was perhaps less important than what I learned through my apparently failed intervention.

I had not managed to create the dialogue that I had expected. I was probably right in diagnosing that the students needed to understand periodic and simple harmonic motion clearly in order to understand the rest of the lesson. But my intervention did not succeed in provoking student response, and I realised that the asking of a question, even a good one, in itself was not enough to generate inquiry. My question may have even been a further block. At this stage I felt embarrassed and wished I had not intervened. Then I considered how I was encouraging teachers to take risks and how they sometimes felt they failed. I decided that failing was perhaps an inevitable part of trying new things. I resolved to talk this through further with Arman.

Arman took the short interruption positively and started teaching again.

When we did talk I acknowledged to Arman that I felt embarrassed about my intervention. He, on the other hand, picked up on the point I had made about motion and admitted that he had not explained the key concepts. He firmly stated that he wanted to resolve the gaps in his teaching.

Arman: Actually the concepts are written in the text book very precisely. For example, the concepts of frequency and amplitude are explained in one or two sentences. Yes, I agree that we need to elaborate the ideas. For comprehensive discussion we need to read more. If we can do that the students will learn more.

He requested me to discuss the *waves and sound* chapter and some other chapters on electricity and magnetism, geometrical optics, and pressure of liquids that he found hard. He wanted to refresh his understanding and see how and where he could provoke students' curiosity. He invited Shanto, another science teacher, into the discussion so that later they could both can re-discuss the ideas and help each other. This was encouraging for me because he felt the need to develop a support network within the school. When this kind of mutual respect evolves from within the context, change could naturally become sustainable. The support network could be extended between various schools in the region for different subjects.

When I later thought again about my intervention, I still considered that I had framed it badly, but it had an unexpectedly positive outcome in that Arman used it to invite a personal teaching seminar. I thought back to the math class, described in Chapter 6 where Arman had transposed a plus sign for the minus sign in the textbook, and how I had argued that the mistake on the blackboard could be a learning opportunity, that it was not important to always get everything right. I now understood at a personal experiential level how getting it wrong can carry an immediate emotional impact, but it should not stop us taking the risk. I felt proud of Arman for his determination to consolidate his subject knowledge.

Four weeks later an incident occurred that made my satisfaction seem short-lived. I was sitting in the teachers' lounge when Arman went out to collect the questions he had asked his students to write the day before. He returned and vehemently threw the papers on the table.

Arman: Safayet bhai, please forgive me, you can tell me whatever you like. From today I will not teach physics. I will ask the head teacher to change the routine and replace me with the other B.Sc. teacher. I have been teaching the chapter for three days. They have submitted *twenty-eight* questions. One student has written: *how many types of wave are there?* I am not a capable teacher. I will not teach physics any more.

Nandan: The student has made a joke. We are here to teach, not to make jokes.

Kusol: We need to remember that we are enabling the students to learn how to ask questions. So the next step would be to talk with the students about these challenges.

I recognised Arman's vulnerability. I also felt so vulnerable. I never thought it might happen. I felt pressure and embarrassed and I had a fear that I had put pressure on him. I was feeling so uncomfortable and scared of the impact of the incident on the project and on the students' learning.

After one hour Arman came to me with a smiling face and asked to have further discussion on the students' questions. I felt myself relax and thanked Arman for taking the risk. I told Arman that he could think about the twenty-eight questions in two different ways:

Me: The questions mean that you have taught well, therefore, they want to learn more. This is positive. Or you have taught and they did not understand well. Now they want to understand. Your teaching made the students curious to know. This is also positive.

Two days after the above discussion I surprised when Arman came to me and very confidently invited me to observe another lesson.

Arman: As this is my last class in your presence, so I want you to observe. I am confident now that there will be something different. At least I will try.

There was no point to say no to Arman. I gladly accepted his invitation. Arman also invited Sodanando, another science teacher, to observe his teaching.

He started the lesson by giving a short but very encouraging statement to the students.

Arman: After finishing the chapter on waves and sound I told you to think and submit questions about what you found hard or where you wanted to know more. You submitted twenty-eight questions. We will not discuss all today because you know some answers. Some questions are even hard to me. So it is very likely that those are harder to you. We will discuss those today. As we have discussed the whole chapter before, so today I expect that you mainly participate and explore the answers to the questions. I alone know one thing but you ten students (waving at the row in front of him) perhaps know ten different things.

Arman was showing a commitment to strengthen the learning partnership in the classroom. I saw his statement as the emergence of a new language of teaching and new sensibility in considering the students as contributors to the learning process. Discussion started with the first question and Arman invited the students to explore the answer.

Arman: I am giving you one minute to discuss the question with your friend sitting beside you: *why can we not listen to sound clearly when it is produced under water?* After having one minute discussion I want you share your thoughts.

After one minute a student stood up and shared his ideas:

S1: For example, when we speak in air it travels fast and we listen. But the inter-molecular force is stronger in water than air. For this reason either we cannot listen to sound or we listen to weak sound when it reaches the air.

Arman: But we get sound when we hit an iron substance. Why cannot we produce sound when we do the same thing inside water?

S1: No sir, we can produce sound inside water, but we hear very little, because water is less than iron..... (He was fumbling). But here our question is not how we listen. Our question is why we cannot listen.

Arman seemed to be enjoying the student's argument.

Arman: Yes, why we cannot listen. You've asked a good question. Here I want you to think little further.

Throughout the lesson Arman provoked students to offer their opinions and to debate the science with each other, and with him. A little later the discussion moved to the nature of an echo.

Arman: I want you to explain what an echo is. You do not need to be worried about mistakes. We will help.

A student stood up.

S3: The sound we produce from our throat is an echo.

I saw Arman was looking to the student with a complete embarrassment. He seemed to be exhausted but very quickly he recovered his poise, and without any negativity simply redirected the question.

Arman: Then what is the sound?

The student remained silent. Then Arman asked the whole class if anyone could help.

S4: (turning towards S3) after producing a sound if we listen to a repetition of the sound, it is an echo. Amm, I mean, we can say this way: After producing an original sound if we listen to it differently, we can term it as an echo

Arman: Differently? What do you mean by differently?

S4: Amm, actually sir I mean the repetition of the original sound.

Arman: You are right to some extent, but your concept is not clear to me. Anyone can take the opportunity to make our conception clear?

Then from the last bench a student stood up and confidently said that he could explain.

S5: (turning his face to the whole class) Sir, if I produce a sound and it returns to me within 1/10 sec. amm I mean if the main sound returns after getting reflected from a solid medium, we say the reflection is an echo.

The whole class gave a big clap for the student. He convincingly and simply articulated the basic concept that an echo is just the reflection of an original sound. Arman picked up the student's answer and used it as the basis for the next phase of the lesson.

At the end of the lesson Arman invited Sodananda, the students and me to reflect on the lesson. He began with his own reflection.

Arman: I want to say something. At the beginning I said that as a teacher I am alone, but you are forty students in the class. Some of you understand very quickly, some take time to understand and some are slow. Those who are good can bring different examples. I as a teacher can bring only one example. When you share your examples we, all the others, can learn from your examples. I had some conceptual gaps and throughout the last six months I have tried to overcome them. In the coming days my knowledge will get stronger. I have tried to teach according to my own analysis, knowledge, energy, and, ability. If we continue, I will get more confidence and the next batch of students and even my own children will get the benefit. But I want to tell you one thing: if you read more at home you will be able to bring more to class.

Sodananda: Then we can learn more from your questions. It is very likely that sometimes we may not give an answer to all of your questions. If that happens we will try to give answer in the following session. One thing I liked today that you expressed your thoughts fearlessly, though you made some mistakes. Unless you express, as teachers we cannot help you to develop clear understanding and the topic will remain unknown to you. Today we have discussed many questions and during the discussion some of you clearly said that you did not understand. Not only did the teacher help you, some of your friends also helped you to understand. You can continue this practice for other subjects also. Sometimes you feel shy to go to the teachers. In that case you can take help from your friends with whom you feel comfortable.

S9: Many aspects of sound and waves were unknown to us. We wrote those concerns as questions and submitted them. Today we discussed the questions and learned many things. This is good for our future learning.

S10: I liked the opportunity to ask questions by writing. Then the most important thing is that today we have discussion on the questions and sir helped us to explore answers.

Later I talked with Arman personally to explore his final assessment about the lesson.

Me: How do you evaluate your latest teaching?

Arman: Undoubtedly it went towards development. But I recognised one point. First I taught the whole chapter and then we discussed the questions. So there was already a preparation. That is why they were much more responsive and we got an opportunity to ask new questions. They took part in the discussion. Sometimes they explored answers fully, sometimes partly, and sometimes they could not. Definitely this will increase their absorbing ability and consistency which is not possible with only a teacher's lecture. The main point is that through the discussion we tried to create their eagerness to learn. This can keep them focused on learning.

Me: What is your own professional development?

Arman: They asked me some questions for which the answers were unknown to me. I had to explore them. I thought hard. I read reference books and I took help from you. Not only that, I also had to explain those in classroom during the discussion. So both the students and I got the benefit. The most important learning for me was that I had thought they understood when they were silent, but when they submitted questions I realised I had been wrong in my thinking and that were gaps in their understandings. This is the big development.

Me: How do feel about you own conceptual knowledge now?

Arman: I will just mention one point. I had many conceptual gaps. I could have overcome some gaps myself and some I would have never been to understand without your help. Especially I learned how to illustrate some abstract concepts by using pictures and examples. But this does not mean that my delivery will be 100% effective in the classroom. If I can absorb the ideas through continuous practice, I can get confidence and feel comfortable in teaching. This can be the most pleasing aspect to me.

When I look back on the range of discussions I had with Arman over the last four weeks, I was deeply impressed by all the shifts in understanding and action that he had made, and by his persistent courage in taking risks, inviting help, and his preparedness to share his mistakes as well as his new learning and confidence with his colleagues. I felt that he was beginning to re-create a further cycle of our learning community with his immediate colleagues and with his students. I see Arman's last statement as a clear sign that he was owning his teaching practice. He clearly acknowledged the gaps in his knowledge, he harnessed his emotional frustration as energy to learn, and he determinedly found ways to embody his commitment and his knowledge in his classroom teaching. At the same time he acknowledged that there would not be any overnight magical change. He realised he needed to absorb the impact of the changes in student

behaviour that were occurring and to achieve mastery through continuous practice. I saw that as the full richness of the pride and commitment of teaching.

Using an outside lens

As I mentioned earlier we had visiting academic with us for several days. She had observed the lessons that been opened for the wider participant group and she had talked informally with teachers. On the last day we utilised her role as an interested outsider to reflect, conversationally, on what we had achieved so far. All the teachers, the head teacher, the visitor and I sat in the teachers' lounge. We began with talking about the observed lessons and then talked about the project as a whole. The visitor started by asking how the teachers had felt my interventions during their classes.

Visitor: Please be honest: what was your feeling? What did you feel at that sudden interruption?

Arman: Undoubtedly it was good!

Me: Little bit more detail?

Polash: It was actually good. I was pleased to give the students opportunity to ask questions. Now we will get an opportunity to understand many different aspects of that learning topic by exploring and explaining the answers to students' questions.

Visitor: What you others think when you watched?

Aaron: It was a good sign. If the teacher sacrifices cordially then that will be a good sign for the students' learning.

I had seen an initial flicker of doubtfulness on the visitor's face when Arman answered. It seemed to go when Polash and Aaron also offered positive affirmations. Later she explained to me that New Zealand teachers might have felt exposed by such interventions and wondered why this group did not. I reflected that many Bangladeshi teachers also might not welcome such interventions and that it was a sign of how far we had come as a learning community that teachers could stand at the back of a colleague's class and watch with active and critical curiosity, and they could accept my, and each other's comments and interventions as positive suggestions in a collective effort to improve teaching.

The conversation then moved to considering the usefulness of the project.

Visitor: What was your main feeling about the project with Safayet? How was it useful, or not useful?

Kusol: Okay, undoubtedly if it was not perfect, it was good. Day by day we have tried to develop our teaching. We have established liaison with each other and we have had really talked to each other.

Visitor: It's fantastic if that is happening....

Head Teacher: We now often talk about globalisation. At the same time Bangladesh has also its own education program. In particular we have our own kind of education programme in this very remote school. Through this project, I think we have developed a practical understanding of what is happening in our education programme in this particular school. At the same time it has also explored concrete ideas about how to achieve what we want to do in our rural education, with all the constraints, without giving up.

Polash: This project has shaken our thinking. I think gradually we are becoming aware of our practices.

Nayan: Initially, we were little bit sceptical about the project. But now, after four months, we are feeling good, especially about the way we have developed a relationship with Safayet bhai, and our interest in the project has gradually increased.

Head Teacher: At the beginning, maybe all of you or some of you were a little sceptical about the project and to some extent disappointed with me when I said yes to it. But today you all are much richer. You have been rich then also. When you get a new touch on your old painting, it gets new shape and beauty. Over this four month period your earlier disappointment has turned out into various kinds of accomplishments.

Kusol: No, none of us was disappointed. You have taken a gap chance⁵⁷.

Head Teacher: No, it is not a gap chance. The discussion needs to be open.

Shisupal: It is true. At the beginning of this project a few of us were sceptical, but later we have developed a partnership.

I had not known that at the beginning there had been tension between differing opinions about the project. I was grateful for the generous way all the teachers had welcomed me, despite doubts, and I valued the collaboration that had evolved between us all the more for hearing

⁵⁷ Taking a *gap chance* is a Bangladeshi idiomatic expression that here might be interpreted as *testing the water*, or making a speculative comment.

Nayan and Shisupal admit there had been initial reservations, and hearing how they now felt a relationship of partnership had developed.

The head teacher's poetic metaphor about the new touch to an old painting struck a strong cord with me. He was encouraging us to consider the existing practices of rural schooling in our collective approach to facilitating change. I appreciated the way he affirmed the value of *the old painting*, and so the existing work and commitment of the teachers, at the same time as he affirmed the new initiatives we were taking. His words reminded me again of the importance of working within the realities of the context and building on as well as extending teachers' existing perceptions and experiences.

The conversation then turned to student learning.

Visitor: My next question is: are there any changes in students' learning that you have observed at this stage of the project? Specific changes in learning?

Head Teacher: I have been informed by the teachers, students, and the environment. In a single word I would say that a significant change has occurred. I do not mean that change is already established. Through the project, I am exploring what I should do differently. This is a big change to me. It will take time to establish the change.

Rojen: It was true that the students hardly asked any question during teaching. Especially after our group discussion with the students, now they are gradually showing their interest in asking questions. We are also giving the students courage to constantly ask what they want to know. Thus gradually their ability to ask questions is increasing.

Nuri: I just want to add with Rojen sir. As we are gradually allowing the students to ask questions, we are in the process of developing a good teacher-student relationship.

Polash: By applying their inquisitiveness, actually, the students are now becoming able to express their thoughts in front of us. They are slowly getting the confidence to ask questions. The most important thing is that we have started to think about how to explore answers to the students' questions. I personally recognise this as a change.

Visitor: Can you identify changes in the way you teach now? Or changes that are beginning in the way you teach?

Rojen: We have recognised that students' tendency to ask questions has increased in the classroom and this is putting the teachers under pressure. We are thinking about how to deal with students' questions. We must admit and accept this fact. To me, this is the key aspect of change.

Head Teacher: I think that collective inspiration has increased now. At least the teachers are showing their composure to thinking differently.

Kusol: Actually we are slowly making a shift from a *jug-mug* theory of teaching.

Aaron: Before we were lacking in patience to listen to what the students wanted to tell us. Now we are saying: *Let X or Y asks his question.*

Kusol: How the teachers are responding to the changing process. Previously students' voices were shut down. At least, teachers' moral courage to allow the students to ask questions is gradually increasing.

Rojen: It is also true that when I create an opportunity for the students to raise their voices, it gives me an opportunity to develop my skill to respond to the students' questions. What will happen if I fail to respond after giving the students opportunity to raise their questions in class? First we can try to listen if the students can explore answers. As a whole these are the awareness that we have been trying to develop through this project.

When I look back, I am struck by the head teacher's conceptualisation of change first as a personal responsibility and then as an opportunity for gradually exploring what a school should do differently. His brief comments crystallised some of my thoughts about change, prompting me to consider it as a process of renewal, a re-examination of what each of us is doing individually and collectively, why we are doing it, what the impact is, and what we could do differently.

Embodying praxis

In the conversation with visitor teachers identified that they had develop ways of *really talking* to each other and seeing each other as partnership in their collective desire to teach for the benefit of their students. The head teacher observed their willingness to *think differently*, and teachers themselves commented that they considered their willingness to *sacrifice cordially* their authoritarian stance would be a positive role model for students' learning. Above all they affirmed that while previously *students' voices were shut down*, now the students were freely asking questions and they the teachers had found the *moral courage* to allow and support the questioning, and use it as a prompt for their own professional development.

In addition the stories of the five teachers who took part in the workshop and then applied the ideas they had explored to their own practice highlight further aspects of change in practice. All

five reported that they had actively sought to develop a more interactive classroom environment and encouraged questioning. They also variously reported that they had found the process challenging and were finding their own ways to create a practice that they felt could be sustainable. They acknowledged that their awareness was still evolving. Kusol, Nandan, Polash and Arman variously reported that they were now *going deeper* in their teaching, and believed the rapport they had created with their students was already showing visible changes in their performance. Polash's and Arman's accounts testify to their determination to overcome challenges that are inherent in their rural environment: the poverty that makes it necessary for teachers to do work beyond their teaching, and the lack of professional networks that will allow them to deepen their subject knowledge. Polash's story speaks of his deliberative evolution of understandings and the way he sought to integrate them into his classroom teaching. He was confidently developing a personal plan that would allow him to change his practice will still fitting in with the realities of the examination system. Arman's story speaks of his courage to keep trying, of how he translated his vulnerability and frustration into further reflection and further personal learning. Not only did he incrementally change his own practice in the classroom, by the actively involved his subject colleagues in his explorations, so creating a potential new learning circle and a support team. Aaron's account indicates that not all rural challenges can be readily overcome; that it is difficult if not impossible for a single teacher to significantly improve English language learning within a nationwide context of confusion about goals and teaching approaches.

I want to sum up the changes as a process that involves discovery and working with realities as they are experienced not only by the teachers but also the students; continuous reflection that results in questioning and thinking differently; and putting new understandings and intentions into action. In other words I see the changes made by the teachers as a way of embodying the concept of praxis. The figure below depicts the concept of praxis, aligning it with the actions of the teachers and with the ways praxis is explained by Freire and Kemmis and Smith. It also suggests that the concept of *akshi* might be further extended to involve the concept of praxis.

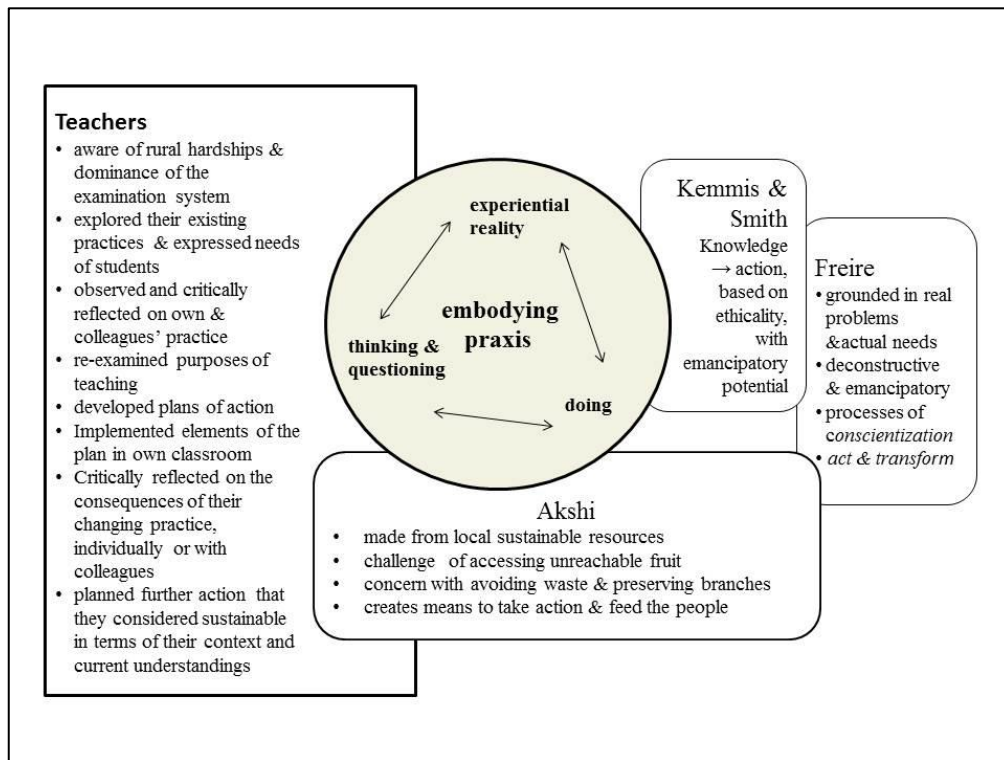


Fig 9.1: Embodying praxis

As discussed in Chapter 3 there is a wide range of ways praxis is defined in international writings. For example, European usage, as explained by Ax and Ponte (2007), tends to make no conceptual difference between practice and praxis. For the purposes of understanding this project I do not need to argue with these differences, but rather I simply suggest that the action of the teachers in the project align with theorisations by Freire (1970) and Kemmis and Smith (2008). Freire (1970) emphasised that educational praxis needs to be grounded in people's real problems and actual needs, and not in those imposed by external interests. He explains praxis as "reflection and action upon the world to transform it" (p. 51) and argues that "action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection" (p. 66), so positioning praxis as a deconstructive and potentially emancipatory process. Further he asserts that emancipation needs to come from dialogue and so be a result of people's "own conscientização" (p. 67). Kemmis and Smith (2008) define praxis as "morally-committed action, orientated and informed by traditions in a field" (p. 263). They assert that personal praxis "has the greater moral purpose of also bringing about the self-development of each individual learner in her or his interests and for the greater good of humankind" (p. 16).

Their theorisations lead me to extend the metaphor of *akshi* to include a slightly different, but complementary, notion of praxis. The tool itself, invented to reaching mangoes on high branches, is grounded in the practical realities and needs of rural life and is made from local and sustainable resources. It recognises the challenge of accessing unreachable fruit and honours

ethical concerns about avoiding waste, preserving branches, and protecting human limbs. And it creates a means to take action and feed the people. This alignment of the concept of praxis with the metaphor of akshi allows me to make explicit the local significance of the way the teachers embodied their reflections, learnings and intentions into action.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

This chapter reports the outcomes of the project and explores some of their implications. First it reports the final meeting with the teachers in which we examined the process and the results of the work. Then I report my own understanding of the outcomes of the project and what I have learned through it. Finally I make recommendation for policy, professional development and research.

Final evaluation with the teachers

At the end of the six months of collaborative work we sat together in the same compact teachers' room to evaluate the project. The teachers and head teacher highlighted what they thought had been the biggest changes through the project. Most of the teachers affirmed that interactions in their classrooms had changed.

Kusol recalled how in the past he, and others, would reprimand students without first finding out what might be behind their behaviour. He now realised, he said, that it was more useful to listen carefully to the students and find out what they want to know.

Polash agreed, saying that he had learned that the most important need in his classroom was for him to develop friendly relationships with the students. Only then, he had realised, would they get the courage to ask him questions. "Then," he said, "I will be able to move forward with my teaching approach and deepen my understanding of my teaching style."

The head teacher observed that he had noticed teachers were becoming less shy in inviting students' questions, and he believed that "what now still feels shy will gradually become normal". He recounted that he had just observed a dialogue session in a Grade 8 English class and "from that observation I got the idea that now the students are confident that they can ask the teachers questions. They are gradually overcoming their own shyness. Now they are more fearless." He then suggested that the next challenge would come after the project had ended and I would leave the field. "The most important task will be to absorb the knowledge that you have gained, and to extend it in absence of Safayet. It is possible.

Nuri, who had been so confined in her role as authoritative teacher during our first observation, stated that she, like others, engaged so deeply with students' questions that she would forget about time. "I want to be able to give the students more time," she said. "Now I am experiencing this kind of dissatisfaction."

Nayan did not work directly in the last stage but he had observed closely. “I can learn from the students,” he said now, “if I create opportunity”. He too identified that the most significant new direction in his teaching practice was that he was committed to understanding the students’ needs. “If I cannot answer the students’ questions on the day, I will try to find answers in the following days.” His response and Nuri’s were particularly interesting because they indicated that the core group of five who took part in the final phase of the project did indeed share their experiences with the others and that the others picked up their colleagues’ ideas and tried them out in their own classrooms.

Aaron talked about surrendering “a teacher’s ego”. He admitted that when he first tried to put the ideas of the workshop into practice he had been quite disappointed in the kinds of questions that were asked by the students in his class. Now, however, he had become more accepting and responsive.

After listening carefully to the others, Arman added that for him the most important learning from the project was about keeping patience and perseverance. He looked back at his own experience in the final stage and reflected on how it might have been different if I had dictated the direction rather than waiting for it to evolve. “You could have imposed the approach on which we worked in the final stage, right from the beginning. In that case we would have been disappointed and thrown it out after you leave the school. But you keep the patience, and now we cannot leave out what we have learned ourselves. This is a big learning for me,” he said.

Polash returned to the discussion, adding that he thought there was an overall change in classroom teaching and learning. The significant change, he stated, was in asking students to bring questions after a chapter had been taught and then exploring the answers together with the students. “We never worked through the students’ questions before,” he said. He also observed that when they started discussion based on the students’ questions more critical questions would evolve during the discussion. “Thus we achieve skill,” he said, “and students’ creativity increases.”

Shriti came in immediately and stated he had observed Polash’s teaching the day before. “There were no yes/no answers,” he said. “Different students explained their ideas differently. They explored answers differently.”

Arman looked back at the other things he had learned. He recalled that he used to take physics and math classes orally and in the open field. “I would give instruction orally,” he said, “and they just listened.” Through the project he learned how to use illustrative diagrams to explain difficult concepts. Above all, however, he considered that developing friendly relationships with

the students was the most important. “There was a gap,” he said. “They were actually afraid of me. They always said in my class that they had understood. From the last class I explored that there were lots of gaps in their understanding. Now they have started asking me questions. I am mingling with the students.”

It was an emotional moment for me as I listened. I reflected on my fears and my hopes and all transitions that had occurred during our work together. I recognised how sincerely and bravely they had engaged with the project, and reflected that perhaps the biggest achievement was they had willingly, and sometimes vulnerably, continued their active inquiry and reflection for such a sustained period of time.

The group’s evaluation emphasised four key areas of change: that classroom relationships were more open and friendly, that they were in better dialogue with their students, that they were becoming more confident in encouraging student interaction, and that they recognised that their own learning was an on-going process. There were statements that indicated that the process of sharing practice with each other was also on-going, that individual teachers were still inviting colleagues into their classrooms to peer critique and to share further experimentation in action. There was also expression of appreciation of the way the project had developed: a sense that they had not followed a set of instructions but rather had participated in growing reflection on their own practice and been encouraged to translate their own shifting understandings into new developments in their practice.

The figure below summarises in broad terms the progress and general outcome of the project. Through our work we created a communicative and exploratory space. It was my task to facilitate the project, and it was also my role to finally walk away and leave it in the teachers’ hands. The teachers, individually and in various forms of collaboration, examined their teaching intentions, built on and successively critiqued their practice, stepped outside their normal protocols and actively dialogued with students about their needs, investigated their knowledge and capabilities, refined their aims, and implemented change in their practice. Through the process they continued reflecting. In this way, through the work of the learning community they developed their *akshi* and embodied praxis.

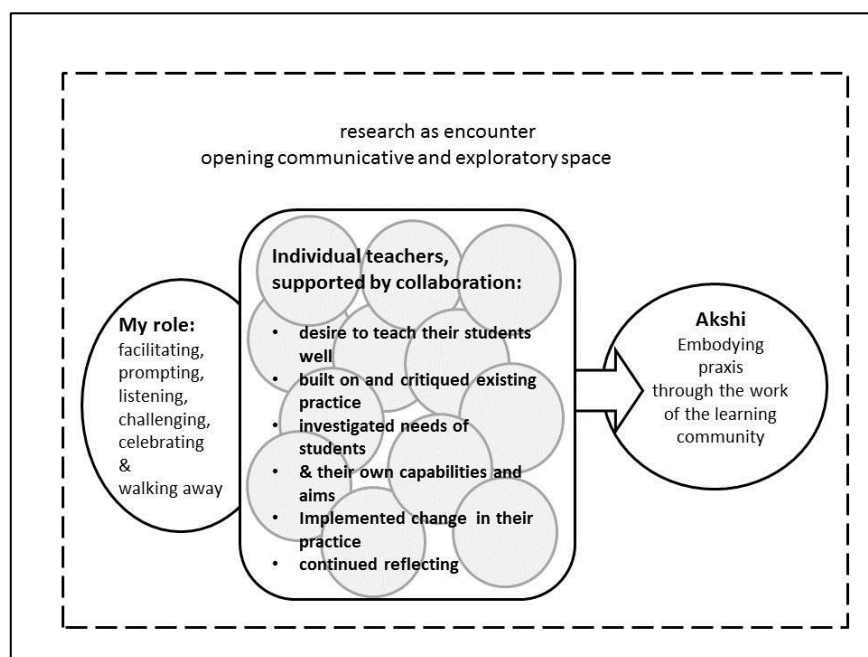


Fig 10.1: overview of the completed project

Practical outcomes of the project

When I started the project I had been a bit anxious about the outcomes and of my ability to facilitate. Although I came into the field with some knowledge of the problems that face rural education and with the broad aim of collaboratively exploring teaching practice to make what happens in class more accessible and meaningful to the students, at the beginning of the project I did not know what the outcomes would be. But I had a clear awareness that I needed to engage myself and the teachers within the grounded context and let the direction of the project come from the people. It was only after finishing the project that I could look back and consider the outcomes.

Perhaps the most significant outcome was that the teachers invested six months of their energy and interest into the project, despite having an already full workload, and despite the challenges, and occasional pain, it created for them, emotionally and conceptually. They showed that they really cared about their teaching and about the students' learning and that they were willing to continually examine what would make their teaching better. As Chapter 9 reports, the core group of five who were active participants in the last stages of the project took the greatest opportunity to use the communicative space we had created to explore their challenges, their evolving understandings and to develop plans for action and to experimentally implement and further refine them. However, several members of this group deliberately invited their subject colleagues to share their experimentations and further reflections, and other members of the wider group, like Nuri, continued their own process of applying to their own classrooms the new understandings they developed from our group observations and debriefs.

As significant as the teachers' commitment to the process was the way they evolved willingness to and a practice of sharing and exchanging. They opened their classroom doors to each other and to me. They risked and accepted critique. They argued with each other, and sometimes with me. They asked for and offered advice. They sat with the students and encouraged their insights, gradually developing a dialogue that was genuinely exploratory. They invited students' questions within their classrooms, used the questions as contributions to the structure of their teaching and began to acknowledge that the students could add to the collective learning in the classroom. In this way the establishment of a culture of sharing was itself an outcome as well as a means of producing further outcomes.

There were changes in the teachers' understandings of learning. At the beginning of the project they had tended to see student learning in terms of pass rates in examinations. In our initial discussion some had acknowledged there was a gap between what was taught at school and what was needed in real life, but they had not seen how it might be their business as teachers to do more than transmit what was in the textbook and encourage their students to replicate it. By the time I left they had started to see learning as a process of making meaning and were actively experimenting with provoking students' questioning and requests for further explanation. They also recognised the importance of their own continuing learning, both about the content of their field and about ways to make their classroom interactions more engaged and effective. In addition they were becoming aware of the potential of collaborative learning. To a degree they accepted the role of being facilitators to one another. They allowed themselves to disagree with each other, and so recognised the value of different approaches to their common goals of *quality teaching*, and also that *quality* was a complex concept.

In the judgment of the participants, the teachers and I, there were visible changes in classroom interactions. The creation of space for students' questions was perhaps the most obvious. In addition the teachers observed that their relationships with their students were more open and inviting of inquiry and meaning making. They observed that they themselves and their colleagues were less inclined to ask students for 'correct' answers or expect them to repeat their words or those of the textbook but were more willing to explore what the students already understood and where their confusion was. Many of the teachers now reported that there was more energy in their classrooms. Some of the teachers reported that they saw these changes as a beginning.

There were changes in student behaviour. One was their confidence in asking questions, both speculative ones and requests for further clarification. Another was their willingness to offer their ideas in class and to disagree with each other. The quality of many of their contributions

surprised and impressed their teachers, and also inspired me. Several teachers, like Nandan, commented on the surprising quality of work produced by their students when they were allowed more room for initiative. This project focused on the teachers and both that focus and the coincidence of the Eid holidays with the end of the project did not allow me to directly investigate the students' perceptions. However, from observation of their demeanour in and out of classes I gained strong impressions about their growth in confidence. These village students had always tended to appreciate their school and their teachers and that did not appear to have changed, but what I did notice was the way the students who took part in the meeting described in Chapter 7 gained increasing confidence in expressing their views and increasing expectation that their teachers were not only listening to them, but also actively seeking to build common understandings. I also noticed how rapidly the students in several of the classes I observed took up the invitation to write their own questions about a topic.

The actual meeting between teachers and students was itself an important milestone. Such meetings, simply for the purpose of developing better communication and understanding, are not at all common in Bangladesh. The holding of the meeting crossed a previous boundary. As it progressed, it allowed the teachers to step outside the formal box of expert they had thought they were locked into and it also provoked them to see their students not just as recipients but as people who could explain their learning desires and so could potentially become some kind of collaborators in the classroom.

The quality of the engagement of the head teacher was another important outcome of the project. Initially he has strongly supported the project. Then he stayed outside the discussions in the initial stages, allowing us to find our way without his intrusion. He came back in during the final observations and in the discussions with the academic visitor and the final evaluation. His input then was appreciative of what the teachers had changed in their practice and affirming of their personal courage and professional commitment. What was particularly interesting was his acknowledgement that he would now need to think through the implications of the project for his own practice. He clearly indicated that he expected the project of collaboration and inquiry to continue after my departure.⁵⁸

Beneath these observable outcomes were less overtly visible shifts. In repeatedly opening both the physical and the metaphorical doors of their classrooms the teachers showed they were gradually surrendering aspects of a role they had thought they had to act out, that of the authority

⁵⁸ A parallel study of the impact of leadership on classroom change is currently being completed by Salahuddin, A. (2016). *Making a door; A case study of the leadership and change practices of a principal in Bangladesh*. Doctoral thesis. University of Canterbury.

and expert in their classrooms, and beginning to explore other possibilities. They began to explore the idea that they did not need to know all the answers, and that even mistakes opened up learning opportunities. They began to appreciate that in some cases their students knew more and had more skills than they had thought. They became more aware of what they could in fact change despite the severe limitations of constrained resources, rural poverty and distance from the centre where curriculum decisions were made. They found the courage to experiment with the ideas that came out of their reflections, retaining awareness that they had to do it in a way that made sense to them personally and that they could sustain, and perhaps improve, over time. As I look back, I see it as a crossing over of what had seemed like fixed limitations, and a willingness to think and act differently.

What we could not achieve

We also realised there were limitations to what we could achieve through the project. At various stages in the work we had talked about what we could change and what we could not. Repeatedly one or other teachers raised the issues of poverty and limited resources and I frequently reflected about the global and national economic and political factors that impact on our education system as a whole and on rural schools particularly. In our group discussions one or other teacher would regularly bring the focus back to the classroom and to what we had influence over. As discussed in earlier chapters we agreed that we could not, directly and immediately, resolve rural poverty or the lack of resources. Rather we explored small but significant do-able changes in teaching practice that could be achieved despite poverty and despite the nation-wide emphasis on examinations.

We also became conscious of other problems over which we had limited control. The first was the difficulty with English. Despite Aaron's willingness to do the emotional labour of re-shaping his teaching practice he continued to feel frustrated with his own lack of knowledge, and with the lack of resources that he could use to bring English language to his students. It was also apparent that while students became more confident in asking for help, they remained confused about English language structures. I came to realise that in the field of English teaching especially there is a serious mismatch between our national curriculum goals, examination questions and teaching resources. While English may be a working second language in our city contexts, in rural areas it is a completely foreign language. Moreover, language is a communicative process and learning a language requires practice and not just theoretical understanding. But apart from the textbook there were no resources Aaron and his colleagues could draw on to provide models

for communication or to prompt practice. Through the project Aaron could and did create a more inclusive environment in his classroom, but he could not solve our national struggles with English language teaching.

The second realisation was that we could not provide teachers with content knowledge within the isolation of one school. The issue became evident because of the science teachers' frustration with the limitations of their own science understanding. I was able to work with the Physics teachers because that is my field, and they repeatedly asked me to sit with them and unpack complex Physics topics. We could and did share expertise between us, but I came to see there is evident need for provision at national level of continuing education in content fields as well as in pedagogy and need for ways of recruiting successful science graduates into teaching.

What I learned

I also learned a lot through the project: about education, teaching and learning, collaboration, reflective practice, facilitation, research strategies and the importance of grounding research in the local context.

In the first instance I learned that despite the many constraints and problems that confront our rural schools, if we look at the possibilities within our reach we can make some difference. I also realised that if our national policy wants to understand the needs of the people who teach in remote schools we cannot do it by staying far away from the context where they work.

From my own working experience I had seen that most education projects in Bangladesh hired international and national experts to design professional development training courses. That we can make a difference locally made me understand that, as a country, instead of importing all our curriculum plans from the outside, we need to work with our own teachers so that they can investigate their own potential and we can collaboratively discover what works for our students in our contexts. In that way we can also develop our teachers' sense of agency whereas now some professional development processes deepen their sense of inadequacy.

I also realised that to create change we need to take risks and to be able to evaluate the results of our risks in real contexts. However, our formal professional development programmes do not allow that kind of exploratory action. They are short in duration and they take place in isolation from teachers' own classrooms. In existing professional development training programmes teachers from different social and economic backgrounds would come to a training venue to learn new teaching approaches. When they would return to school they either forget or find it

hard to apply training knowledge into their practice. Some dedicated teachers would continue for a while with their new learning, but at some point they would give up. It requires time and in context experimentation for teachers to internalise new approaches to teaching. Before such approaches can become internalised habits teachers need institutional support so that they can collectively reflect on how the changes in their practice work. I believe we need to explore ways of developing more in-school teacher development programmes and where it is not possible to reach all teachers in their own school to at least explore ways of doing so in small regional clusters. Such clusters could have the additional benefit of providing on-going professional networks. Perhaps we also need to think how we can develop our own teachers as collaborative challengers of one another's thinking instead of developing, as we do now, a layer of educational officers and advisors who are disconnected from the school's practice and so tend to become tick-box monitors of school performance.

I came into the project hoping I could find a way of making the participatory action research approach adapt to the needs of the rural school, and I found that, irrespective of particular theorists' subtle emphases, the underlying processes suit our Bangladeshi ways of relating to each other as much as they have been reported to suit the needs of other cultures. I learned that a participatory action research approach is not a mechanistic process, but rather something that needs to flow with individual and collective shifts in understanding and emotional readiness.

I learned that changes in understanding do not occur in the head alone, that they are often accompanied by feelings of fear or embarrassment, and that facing the emotions is as much part of the shift as the cognitive ideas and the words we frame them in. I also realised that changes in understanding are ephemeral until we try them out in action. It is in those terms that I have come to understand what Spivak, Freire and Kemmis and McTaggart talk variously about as activism: that it is not just physical or oral activity but that it involves a change of consciousness and that it creates a need to take what one has come to understand as ethical action.

I learned that for our project to move forward my role as facilitator could not be a neutral unassuming one. I had to become an active and vulnerable participant and put myself and my understandings on the line just as I was asking the teachers to do. Therefore, as the research process evolved, I had to learn to what extent I needed to sacrifice my preferred non-directive role, and when and how I should take the lead. Gradually I became aware that if I took over and failed to create opportunity for the teachers' own experimentation and growth I would just end up creating dependency, but at the same time the call for reciprocity and honesty in dialogic exchange meant I could not hold back my knowledge when it is necessary to share.

During the course of the project I learned facilitation skills, some of them as a consequence of initial hesitations or mistakes. One of the most important was to consciously try and free myself from my pre-established ideas of what should change. In part this meant working to connect my academic thinking with the teachers' lived experience of their practice. It also meant negotiating with peoples' different viewpoints. I learned how to create space so that teachers could accommodate and challenge one another's ideas.

As the research progressed I learned how to utilise my personal insights to provoke reactions from the group. I found I had to intervene at various stages and I learned about the importance of timing. I learned to take risks, and how to recover from anything that did not work as I expected. It is perhaps too easy to label something as success or failure. There were indeed aspects of both in the work, but from the success I learned to consolidate and consider the consequences, and from failure I learned to explore new learning opportunities by looking at the background reasons. I find this aligns with how Russell explains the concept of reflection-in-action.

Through the project I also deepened my understanding of a number of theoretical concepts, and I explain these below.

Building capacity

Chapter 1 introduced this project in terms of *community capacity building*. I acknowledged there that capacity is not something that is added to an empty space. The community already had *capacity* before the project. As reported in chapters 4 and 5, the community had built a school without government funding. The teachers had worked for several years without government salaries. They were providing education for the children of the village, and the school was one that the students loved and valued. There was a robust record of national examination passes. Through this project I came to understand that while capacity does have a material aspect, the teachers' and wider community's capacity also included ethicality and hope. Ethicality can be seen on the founders' part in the choice to build a school which serves the people rather than investing the resource in a profit making business. It can also be seen in the individual teachers' decisions to take up the challenge of working in the school, because of honour towards their parents' wishes, because of seeing it as a way of benefiting the community, or because it held out the hope of being able to earn an honourable income in the future. Hope is evident in not only in terms of anticipation of future government recognition and financial support but also terms of the courage to start something from one's own initiative and resources with the determination to

make it work, and in terms of being willing to make sacrifices for a belief that something good can be created.

Thus, I recognise that the teachers already had courage and drive. I did not bring those through the project. What I did bring was the facilitation of a collaborative process that allowed us to *build* on the capacity that existed. In that building individual and group capacity further developed through deliberate reflection about exiting understandings and through exploration of new possibilities for action. Each new action invited further reflection and more exploration. And with each exploration capacity was further built. As I observed the growth, it was evident that ethicality and hope were still driving factors. What changed were the choices the participants felt were available to them and their understandings of what they could do with those choices.

Such an understanding of building on capacity is implicit in the way Rabindranath, Nazrul and Das exhort us to look to and love what is in our own roots. It also aligns strongly with Spivak's concept of love as ethical responsibility, Freire's explanation of *conscientização*, Kemmis's explanation of a philosophical life as one that involves living an ethic, ethical awareness, Zuber-Skerritt's association of ethicality in research with commitment to strive for success, and Smith's challenge to researchers to be respectful of the community's existing engagement in their well-being.

Looking back at the project reflectively, I find I have come to understand the concept of emancipation as an effect of building capacity. Freire talks about emancipation coming through conscientization, through the deepening of awareness, by critical reflection, and the development of ability to intervene in their situation. Such emancipation is a process rather than a result, a shift in thinking that has been refined through the challenges within collaboration and that can be translated into better informed action. It is also a process that is on-going. The extent to which the participants in this research, I as well as the teachers, increased our conscientization becomes a new basis for further exploration.

I became more aware that as teachers we are also people, situated in our life contexts, with emotions and aspirations. We are shaped by our history, by dispositions we acquire from our community and its discourses as well as from our own experiences, but we can become agentic through progressively examining these and intervening to develop or change our aims and our actions, and so, to some extent, change our life context.

The *akshi* and indigenous perspectives

Within this project, *akshi* became an important and evolving metaphor. First it applied to the teaching approaches that might be relevant for students' needs. Then it was extended to describe the collaborative investigative process through which the teachers' explored ways of improving their practice. Finally it was further extended to encompass the process of putting their discoveries into action and their reflections on their action.

It is a metaphor that arose out of one of the participants reflections, and it relates to an agricultural tool that is well known in that community. Therefore, I found it a very useful way of grounding my reflections and emergent theorisations within the experiences and language of the local context. However, I do not want to propose it as a fixed theorisation or as a means of making the process of participatory action research relevant to a wider Bangladeshi context. The community in this project is a farming one, and mangoes are a valued crop. Other communities might be centred around fishing or be involved in the garment industry. There will be other metaphors that will be more meaningful to them.

What I consider is important is to express our research and our theoretical concepts in terms that pay their respect to the communities that are at the heart of the work and that will not only make sense to the people themselves but will also indicate some aspects of their culture to other readers. This is how I have come to understand the agenda of indigeneity now.

I heard and read a lot of discussion about the importance of indigenous perspectives in New Zealand and I appreciate the insights I was given about the need to avoid both homogenisation and the imposition of colonial or neo-colonial frameworks upon a culture that has its own, and different, living values and traditions. Reading Spivak and Bharucha further alerted me to the dangers of assuming a western framework to be universal and also warned me that the imposition of such a framework onto the work of a rural Bangladeshi community would obscure the nature and the meaning of that work. In Rabindranath I found a spokesperson for the values, history, language, and future possibilities of Bengali people. His writing encouraged me to ground my study in the activities and discourses of the local community and in the immediate concerns and discoveries of the teachers.

However, there is still little writing in Bangladesh that examines research or education in indigenous terms. I could not readily find contemporary models. I resolved this dilemma by trying to build from the ground up, rather than working through the lens of any established international theorisations of education or of professional development. Perhaps this is like what Spivak describes as *learning from below*, as opposed to unquestioningly accepting the teachings

of the accredited theorists above. Learning from below requires a different set of skills. It needs commitment to understand the situated experiential reality, openness to accommodate diverse ideas, and awareness of the teachers' shifting roles. Just as teaching may be seen as an ethical act, doing research on teaching also calls for ethicality. To learn from below requires integrating the process of research with the practice of teaching that occurs in a grounded reality.

At the same time I am aware that the rural community exists in the wider context of the nation of Bangladesh and the global powers beyond Bangladesh, and that we can learn from others. Rabindranath also encourages us to explore the perspectives of others, as long as we retain a sense of our own knowledge systems. He sees the interaction as a dialogue. I have ventured into that dialogue by tentatively aligning ideas from a number of international theorists with what I have interpreted from the discussions and actions that occurred within the project. I see it as a useful further research project to explore what else might come out the dialogue.

The process of participatory action research

One international resource I did freely draw on was Kemmis and McTaggart's (2005) explication of participatory action research. In the first instance this was because I needed a methodological model for the approval of my research project. Then as I worked in the field I found that more and more of the concepts discussed by Kemmis and McTaggart aligned with what was happening with the project, and that these were not prescriptive of either progress or outcomes. I realised that participatory action research was not so much a method as a philosophical commitment to use the collective as a means of exploring and enacting change, and therefore it offered no contradiction to my aim of working with the teachers and honouring the local context.

One initial anxiety came from the confusion about whether the process itself should be part of the data as well as a means to collect data. Now I understand that the process was as vital as the outcomes that we achieved. The learning that occurred was evolutionary and each stage was important because it reflected how participants understood their practice at that time and how they considered the possibilities for enhancing it. The experience of creating change was, I realised, as important as the changes made. I see participatory action research now as a process of provoking, processing, embodying and reporting change. And I see the most significant aspect of that change in terms of not only understandings but also in the capacity to reflect personally and in participation with others on those understanding and be willing to change them and to embody the exchange in practice. In terms of the results of participatory action research I do not

see it as useful to separate attitude from action: what is significant is the attitude that transforms itself into action.

I have offered exploratory theorisations of the process at the end of each stage. I will not repeat or try to collate them here because I think that would impose an artificially definitive dimension onto them, and would contradict the improvisational nature of the participatory action research process. However, I think that collectively they offer a useful illustration of how one project developed and an encouragement for others to find similarly grounded theorisations of their projects.

Implications and recommendations

Drawing on the previous discussion and the project as a whole I examine the implications of this research for policy and practice in Bangladesh and for future research, and make a number of recommendations.

The narratives in this study represent teachers' problems, tensions, evolving commitment, and search for how to improve their practice to create better learning opportunities for their students. The primary significance of these narratives for education in Bangladesh is that these real stories provide a basis for grounding the idealism of policy and exploring how it can be translated into practice. This has implications for the forms of professional development programmes we create, for their content, and for the skills needed in facilitating them.

Professional development of teachers is important in Bangladesh but it needs to be facilitated from the ground up. We need to change our focus from relying only on courses designed by expert and often foreign consultants to finding out what can actually work in various Bangladeshi contexts. Because of the impact of history Bangladesh is faced with need to create change on a very large scale and fast. Therefore, there has been a visible need to develop professional development project that can cater for the large numbers of teachers who need more professional knowledge and skills, and these projects are having some impact, particularly in some urban areas. Perhaps now we are at a point where we can reflect on our existing national practice and explore ways to improve it.

Thus the first recommendation for policy and consequent practice is to develop a number of school-based and participatory professional development programmes, perhaps in one region so that the schools can support each other.

The second recommendation is about content. Many teachers find the explication of national curriculum goals very abstract and seemingly unrelated to what they believe they have to do in their classrooms. Courses need to help teachers bridge the gap by teaching them how to reflect on their own practice, how to ask open rather than closed questions, how to elicit divergent answers and how to listen to their students. In broader terms courses need to encourage teachers to see themselves as provokers of curiosity rather than the holders of knowledge and to make them feel safe with taking risks and making mistakes.

The third recommendation is to develop facilitation skills in professional development trainers. To an extent this involves the encouragement of similar attitudes to those I have just outlined above: willingness to engage teachers as collaborators in achieving the course goals, working with the needs and concerns they articulate, and seeing themselves as co-learners. It also involves developing in facilitators the skills of creating space for dialogue, engaging with different personalities and backgrounds, and recognising the value of emotional as well as ideological reactions. Perhaps investigation of how these facilitation skills might be developed could be the basis for a further participatory action research project.

One of the findings in this project has been that a school based learning community cannot in itself resolve all the learning problems that arise. This was particularly evident in the case of English teaching but it was also apparent in the gaps in content knowledge in other subjects. Therefore, this research suggests that there is need for developing localised networks to support teachers' self-inquiry. The recommendation is for the government to provide centralised financial and initial administrative support for subject-based regional associations that are developed by the teachers themselves and in which they can share subject-knowledge, classroom practices and collaboratively identify where they need additional training or guidance.

While such regional networks would alleviate some of the problems faced by isolated English teachers, the experience in this project indicates our national approach to English language teaching needs to reconcile the clashes between national development goals, the communicative language teaching approach endorsed by central policy, the content of examinations and the resources supplied to teachers.

Teachers' pride in teaching was an underlying theme throughout the project. A more generalised recommendation from this project is the need for the government to consider how it can better recognise, support and encourage teachers' professionalism. Salary is an obvious issue: teachers need a sufficient salary to be able to make their classroom teaching their fulltime job. Equally important, however, is the development of a culture of valuing teachers, not just placing them on

a tokenist pedestal, but as professionals who are capable of reflecting on their own practice, working with colleagues to improve it, and able to contribute, through their reflection and praxis, to national dialogues about what is needed to make education more effective. As already acknowledged, such a culture requires active and sensitive facilitation.

Recommendations for research

In earlier chapters I identified a lack of Bangladeshi-led research projects that explored cases where schools or individual teachers achieved various kinds of success. The first recommendation, therefore, is that, without denying the existence of deficits and problems, we need to carry out and publish qualitative and richly exploratory research that is based on local sites and everyday practice where individuals or teams are creating change.

A further recommendation is that the government of Bangladesh should invest in a range of school-based participatory action research projects that are longitudinal. Because of my doctoral candidature I needed to leave the field at the point when the teachers had become confident in exploring their practice and the collaborative process was creating a change in the culture of teaching. There is need for more research that tracks shifts in consciousness and practice over longer periods of time.

A third recommendation is an organisational one. Action research is talked about in Bangladesh but we have yet to develop a culture of working with it. It would be useful to develop a Bangladeshi participatory action research network, where we could share ideas and challenge each other.

A final reflection

At the end of the project the teachers and I reflected on the journey. I recalled how the head teacher had shown me a video on the school's sports day and had said how much he wanted the school to be a source and symbol of change and development for the community. We then together reviewed what we had done. We talked about low salary, enormous workload, and lack of resources, inadequate infrastructure, and above all the inescapable fact of rural poverty. At some point we realised we could work through the students' curiosity. With honesty and vulnerability we explored our teaching approaches and explored changes and further challenges. In doing so we evidenced respect to the community, students, the head teacher and each other. We then talked about love. Not in the romantic sense, but as something embedded in the

sincerity of our efforts together, and in the respect we gave to each other's feelings and needs. For me, the project meant that I could say to the teachers I worked with, and to the students and community behind them: I love you. I could feel them saying the same. That love is an assurance that one way or another, they will continue thinking about the unresolved challenges. I left the school with this satisfaction.

I finish this thesis knowing there is more to explore, challenge, and redevelop in our Bangladesh education system. Change, as this project illustrates, is an evolving process. This project is a contribution to that complex process.

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Glossary

Bangla

Akshi (আকসি)
Ami (আমি)
Abar (আবার)
Adab (আদাব)
Asibo (আসিব)
Assalamualykum
(আসলামুয়ালায়কুম)
Bangla (বাংলা)
Bhai (ভাই)
Bidroihi (বিদ্রোহী)
Bishaw (বিশ্ব)
Bongodorshon (বঙ্গদর্শন)
Bromhoogyan (ব্রহ্মজ্ঞান)
Chitto (চিত্ত)
Chiro (চির)
Dekhiachi (দেখেছি/দেখিয়াছি)
Fire (ফিরে)
Husiar (হুশিয়ার)
Kandari (কান্ডারী)
Kobi (কবি)
Kolyankor (কল্যাণকর)
Mali (মালি)
Manob (মানব)
Mohan (মহান)
Mukh (মুখ)
Nagorik (নাগরিক)
Namaskar (নমস্কার)
Nari (নারী)
Nor (নর)
Nun (নুন)
Ordhek (অর্ধেক)
Panta (পান্টা)
Sammobadi (সাম্যবাদী)
Srijonishoktishil (সৃজনশক্তিশীল)
Srishti (সৃষ্টি)
Stanadayini (স্তন্যদায়িনী)
Tui (তুই)

English

a local tool make with bamboo and jute-net and used to pick mango
I
again
respect and politeness
come
an Islamic way of expressing greetings
The language people speak living in Bangladesh and some part of India.
brother
insurgent/rebellious
world, universe
a Bangali literary magazine initiated the movement of Bengali literary resurgence in 1872
transcendental knowledge
mind
everlasting
seen, observed, internalised
return
warning ,warn
leader
poet
altruistic
gardener
human being, mankind
great
face, image
citizen
a traditional Indian gesture of greetings
women
men
salt
half
Rice with water
communist
creative
creation
mother, breast giver
You

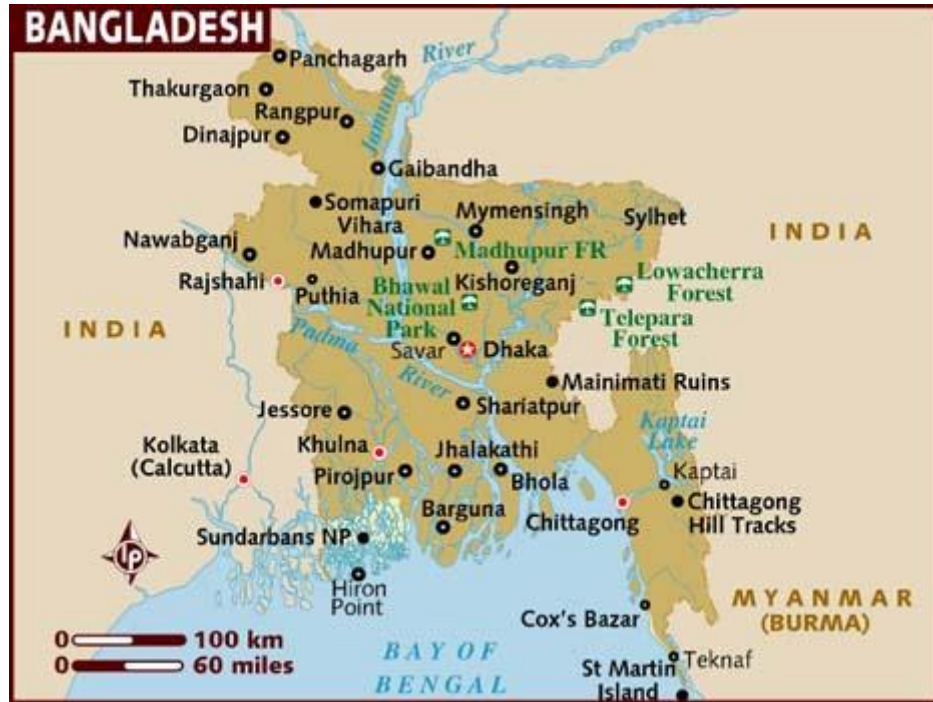
Maōri	English
he	a, an, some - used when referring to something that is not specific
iho	in a downwards direction
iwi	people, tribe
kaitiakitanga	guardianship, stewardship, trusteeship
kanohi-ki-te-kanohi	face-to-face
kaupapa	theme, project, subject
kaupapa Māori	Māori ideology- a philosophical doctrine, incorporating the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values of Māori society.
koha	gift
kōrero	to tell, read, speech, narrative
Mahutonga	Southern Cross, constellation Crux - a constellation seen in the southern skies, these are the stars depicted on the Aotearoa/New Zealand flag
mana	power, self-esteem, personal spiritual quality
Māori	indigenous person or people in New Zealand
marae	common ground or house to meet
pae	horizon, perch, rest, orators' bench, orators, transverse supports of the floor of a canoe
pou	post, pillar
pōwhiri	invitation, rituals of encounter, welcome ceremony on a marae, welcome
puna	spring
rangatiratanga	right to exercise authority, chiefly autonomy, chiefly authority, ownership, leadership of a social group
tangata	person, man, human being, individual
Tangata whenua	local people of the land where the people's ancestors have lived and where their placenta are buried
taonga	treasure, anything valuable
tapu	specialness, sacred
tapa	corner
te	the
te Aomarama	the world of light
te Kore	the void, the nothingness, a stage of creation
te Po	the dark, night, a stage of creation
tuku	given
whā	four
whare	house
whenua	land, placenta

List of key terms & abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
BANBEIS	Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
CPD	Centre for Policy Dialogue
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CREC	Consortium for Research on Educational Access Transitions and Equity
DFID	Department for International Development
DSHE	Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education
ELT	English Language Teaching
ELTIP	English Language Teaching Improvement Project
ERHEC	Educational Research Human Ethics Committee
GPA	Grade Point Average
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
MoE	Ministry of Education
NCTB	National Curriculum and Text Book Board
PALAR	Participatory Action research and Action Learning
SSC	Secondary School Certificate
SMC	School Management Committee
TQI-SEP	Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Project
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Appendices

Appendix-1A: Thakurgaon in Bangladesh map



Appendix-1B: Constitutional obligations regarding education in Bangladesh

17. The State shall adopt effective measures for the purpose of- (a) Establishing a uniform, mass-oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children to such stage as may be determined by law;(b) Relating education to the needs of society and producing properly trained and motivated citizens to serve those needs;(c) Removing illiteracy within such time as may be determined by law;

28. Discrimination on grounds of religion, etc.-(1) The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race caste, sex or place of birth. (2) Women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the State and of public life. (3) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth be subjected to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to access to any place of public entertainment or resort, or admission to any educational institution.

41. Freedom of religion- No person attending any educational institution shall be required to receive religious instruction, or to take part in or to attend any religious ceremony or worship, if that instruction, ceremony or worship relates to a religion other than his own. (The constitution of Bangladesh, 1999, p. 22)

Appendix-1C: Teachers profile in the school

Sl. No.	Pseudonym	Recruited as	Educational qualifications				Training
			Graduation Degree/Minimum Degree	Subjects Studied at Graduation Level	Post-Graduation	Professional Degree	
1.	Shabbir	Head Teacher	B.A (Pass)	Bangla, English, Political Science, Economics	N/A	B.Ed.	In-service Leadership Training
2.	Shisupal	Assistant Head Teacher and Assistant Teacher - English	B.S.S	Bangla, English, Political Science, Economics	N/A	B.Ed.	CPD-English
3.	Arman	Assistant Teacher-Physics & Math	B.Sc. (Pass)	Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics	M.S.S in Political Science	B.Ed.	CPD-Math
4.	Rojen	Assistant Teacher-Religious Study-Islam	Fajil, Kamil	Quran, Hadith, Bangla, English	Tafseer (analysis of Quran)	B.Ed.	CPD-Agriculture
5.	Nandan	Assistant Teacher-Physical Education	B.S.S (Pass)	Bangla, English, Political Science, Economics	N/A	B.P.Ed.	CPD-Bangla
6.	Polash	Assistant Teacher-Social Science	B.Com (Pass)	Accounting, Business Studies, General Business	N/A	B.Ed.	CPD-Social Science
7.	Aaron	Assistant Teacher-Religious Studies-Hindu	B.A (Pass)	Bangla, English, Political Science, Psychology	N/A	B.Ed.	ELTIP, CPD-English, BRAC (PACE)
8.	Nayan	Assistant Teacher-Social Science	B.A (Pass)	Bangla, English, Political Science, Psychology	M.A in Islamic History	B.Ed.	CPD-Social Science
9.	Shanto	Assistant Teacher-Math,	B.Sc. (Pass)	Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics	N/A	B.Ed.	CPD-Math

		Chemistry					
10.	Kusol	Assistant Teacher-Biology	B.Sc. (Pass)	Botany, Zoology, Chemistry	N/A	B.Ed.	CPD-Agriculture
12.	Shriti	Assistant Teacher-Religious Studies (Hindu)	B.A (Pass)	Bangla, English, Political Science, Islamic History	N/A	B.Ed.	CPD-Social Science
13.	Nuri	Assistant Teacher-Computer Education	B.S.S (Pass) and Diploma in Computer	Bangla, English, Political Science, Social Science, Psychology	N/A	B.Ed.	CPD-Social Science & ICT
14.	Sodananda	Assistant Librarian	B.A (Pass)	Bangla, English, Political Science, Islamic History, Psychology	N/A	B.Ed.	-
15.	Soikot	School Administrator.	B.A (Pass)	-	-	-	Physical Edu.-2 cpw
16.	Milton	Admin Support Staff	S.S.C	-	-	-	-
17.	Jubair	Admin Support Staff	S.S.C	-	-	-	-

Note: In the educational qualification column pass means graduation without honours

Appendix-1D: Teachers' class distribution in school routine

Sl. No.	Pseudonym	Recruited as	Class Routine-2013					Total Classes Per Week
			Grade-6 (Yr-11)	Grade-7 (Yr-12)	Grade-8 (Yr-13)	Grade-9 (Yr-14)	Grade-10 (Yr-15)	
1.	Shabbir	Head Teacher						
2.	Shisupal	Assistant Head Teacher and Assistant Teacher-English	English-6 cpw, RS (Hindu)-3 cpw	-	-	RS (Hindu)-3 cpw	English-6 cpw	18
3.	Arman	Assistant Teacher-Physics & Math	General Science- 1 cpw, Co-curricular Activities-1 cpw	General Science- 1 cpw, Co-curricular Activities-1 cpw	-	Math- 4 cpw, Physics-3 cpw	Physics-4 cpw	15
4.	Rojen	Assistant Teacher-Religious Study-Islam	RS (Islam)-5 cpw	RS (Islam)-2 cpw	RS (Islam)-3 cpw	RS (Islam)-3 cpw	RS (Islam)-3 cpw	16
5.	Nandan	Assistant Teacher-Physical Education	-	-	Physical Edu.-3 cpw	Bangla-6 cpw, Physical Edu.-2 cpw	Bangla-6 cpw, RS (Hindu)-3 cpw	20
6.	Polash	Assistant Teacher-Social Science	-	Math-4 cpw English-5 cpw	Agriculture-3 cpw	-	Geography (part of S.Sc.)-4 cpw, Social Sc.-2 cpw	18
7.	Aaron	Assistant Teacher-Religious Studies(Hindu)	-	RS (Hindu)-2 cpw	English-5 cpw RS(Hindu)-2 cpw	English-6 cpw	-	15
8.	Nayan	Assistant Teacher-Social Science	Agriculture-2 cpw, General Science-2 cpw	Agriculture-3 cpw	Math-4 cpw	History (part of S.Sc.)-2 cpw	History (part of S.Sc.)-2 cpw	15
9.	Shanto	Assistant Teacher-Math, Chemistry	General Science-2 cpw	General Science-2 cpw		Chemistry-3cpw, Higher Math(part of Math)- 1 cpw	Math-5 cpw, Chemistry-2 cpw, general science-2 cpw	17
10.	Kusol	Assistant Teacher-Biology	-	-	Bangla-5cpw	Biology-3 cpw, Agriculture-	Biology-3 cpw, Agriculture-	16

						2 cpw	3 cpw	
12.	Shriti	Assistant Teacher-Religious Studies (Hindu)	Bangladesh & International Studies-3 cpw	Bangla-6 cpw	-	Political Science (part of Social Sc.)- 3 cpw, Social Sc.- 2 cpw	Political Science (part of Social Sc.)- 3 cpw	17
13.	Nuri	Assistant Teacher-Computer Education	Bangla-5 cpw, ICT-2 cpw	ICT-2 cpw	Bangladesh & International Studies-4cpw	Computer-2 cpw	Computer-3 cpw	18
14.	Sodananda	Assistant Librarian	-	Math-4 cpw		General Sc.- 3 cpw Co-curricular Activities-2 cpw	Geography (part of Social Sc.)- 3 cpw, General Sc.- 3 cpw	15
15.	Soikot	School Administrator	Bangladesh & International Studies-3 cpw, Physical Edu.-3 cpw, Co-curricular Activities-1 cpw					9

Note: CPW-class per week

Appendix-1E: Academic achievement of Gilabari High in SSC examination

Year	Number of Candidates			Number of Students Passed			Pass rate			GPA-5
	Science	Humanities	Total	Science	Humanities	Total	Science	Humanities	Total	
2006			30			19	63.33%			
2007			45			27	60%			
2008			45			32	71.11%			
2009	09	29	38	08	17	25	88.89%	58.62%	65.78%	
2010	13	45	58	12	40	52	92.31%	88.89%	89.65%	07
2011	12	49	61	09	35	44	75%	71.43%	72.13%	01
2012	13	68	81	13	53	66	100%	77.94%	81.48%	
2013	14	30	44	14	28	42	100%	93.33%	96%	02

Appendix-1F: Composition of School Management Committee

The regulation for SMC is formulated in the capacity of the section 39 of the Intermediate and Secondary Education Ordinance, 1961, (E.P.Ord. No.XXXIII of 1961) (MoE, 2009). The irony here is that we became independent in 1971 but the Pakistani laws are still in operation to guide education.

Sl. No.	Category	Title	Remarks
1.	Renowned Local Social Worker/Local Educationist/Public Representative/Retired first class govt. Officer	President	Within seven days of SMC election the other elected members will elect one president from the available categories
2.	Teachers Representative	Member	All the teachers will elect two representative members
3.	Female Teachers Representative	Member	All the female teachers will elect one representative member
4.	Guardians Representative	Member	All the guardians will elect four representative members
5.	Female Guardians Representatives	Member	Ideally all the guardians will elect one female guardian representative member
6.	Founders Representative	Founder Member	One will be nominated. If there is more than one founder, all the founders will elect one representative member
7.	Donors Representative	Donor Member	Donors will elect one representative
8.	Local Education-enthusiast	Co-opt Member	Co-opted by the majority SMC members in the first meeting
9.	The Head Teacher	Member Secretary/Secretary	Nominated by virtue of being a head teacher

Appendix 2A: List of source materials for data chapters (Chapter 4-8)

Chapter Sub Headings	Source & Date
4.1 TQI, modernism, and teaching	Interview (Z 26-30), April 15-19, 2013
4.2 Head teachers cluster meeting.	Group discussion, Research journal, April 04, 2013
4.3 The teachers	Group discussion, Research journal April 04, 2013
4.4 The students	Informal talking, Research journal, May 02, 2013
4.5 The school mismanagement committee	Informal talking, Research journal May 02, 2013
4.6 The head teacher	Informal talking, Research journal , April 02, 2013 Interview, Video Record, April 21, 2013
5.1 The role of the head teacher	Interview, Video Record April 21, 2013
5.2 Open up a communicative space	Group discussions, observations, reflective debriefs (Z32-36), April 21-30, 2013
5.3 Teachers stories of why they teach	Reflective debriefs and planning action (Z71-74), May 12-13,2013
5.4 Open up the classroom door	Group discussion for collective beginning, Z36, April 30, 2013
5.5 Identifying the Problems-teaching observation and debrief	Reflective debrief on Nuri's teaching observation (Z38), May 02, 2013
6.1 Photos: capturing moments of practice	Shanto, Rojen, Shisupal, Nuri, Kusol, & Aaron, May, 2013
6.2 Transforming the English sentence	Observation of English teaching in grade 6 (Video Record), May 09, 2013 Reflective debrief and future planning (Z72), May 12, 2013
6.3 Physics lesson about work	Reflective debrief and future planning (Z74), May 13, 2013
6.4 Attentiveness, engagement, and learning	Reflective debrief on teaching observation (Z60), May 07, 2013 Reflective debrief and future planning (Z71), May 12, 2013
6.5 Wrong answers and their usefulness	Observations & reflective debrief on teaching observations (Z43-45), May 04, 2013
6.6 More questions than answers	Teaching observation & reflective debrief (Z61-62), May 07, 2013
6.7 Making it accessible & more ideas about engagement	Reflective debrief on first stage activities (Z75), May 15, 2013
7.1 Tuhin's story and the importance of students' voices	Informal conversation, Research journal, May 05, 2013

7.2	Teachers' fears about dialogue with students	Reflective debrief (Z74), May 13, 2013
7.2	Dialogue between teachers and students	Group discussion (Z76), May 15, 2013
7.3	Teachers' immediate reflections on the students' educational needs	Group discussion, Research journal, May 16, 2013
7.4	What the students showed in their photos.	Tapan, Farhana, Shirin, & Frajana; June 2013
8	The Sparkling Morning Fog- 3 day workshop	Workshop for reflection and further action (Z79-83), June 12, 13, & 15, 2013

Appendix 2B: List of source materials for data chapters (Chapter 9-10)

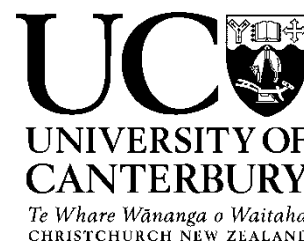
Chapter Sub Headings	Source	Date
9.1 - Aaron's story	Negotiation & reflection (Z87, 92, & 106)	July 04, 2013 August 18, 2013 August 25, 2013
9.2 - Kusol's story	Negotiation & reflection (Z93 & 98)	August 19, 2013 August 22, 2013
9.3 - Nandan's Story	Negotiation & reflection (Z97 & 107)	August 20, 2013 August 25, 2013
9.4 - Polash's story	Negotiation, observation, & reflection (Z 85, 90, 96, & 104)	July 01, 2013 July 22, 2013 August 20, 2013 August 25, 2013
9.5 - Arman's story	Negotiation, observation, & reflection (Z 86, 89, 94, 100, 103, & 105)	July 02, 2013 July 22, 2013 August 19, 2013 August 22, 2013 August 24, 2013 August 25, 2013
9.6 - Using an outside lens	Observation & reflection (Z 88 – 91)	July 21-22, 2013
10 - Final evaluation with teachers	Overall reflection (Z110 & research journal	August 25, 2013 October 16, 2013

Appendix 3A: Information letter to the project leaders and teacher educators

Telephone: 0064 212570685 (NZ), 008801552407628(BD)

Email: safayet.alam@pg.canterbury.ac.nz, safayet2002@yahoo.com

Date:



Action research project : Making our school better

A letter of Information to the project leaders and teacher educators

Dear Sir/Madam

I am Md. Safayet Alam (Assistant Professor, Physics, Officer on Special Duty, Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Bangladesh). I am currently undertaking research for a PhD degree, at the College of Education, University of Canterbury, New Zealand. As part of my research, I am undertaking a project to explore the challenges involved in educational improvement in rural schools. My supervisors for this research are Professor Janinka Greenwood and Dr Kathleen Quinlivan, Senior Lecturer, College of Education, University of Canterbury.

This letter follows the personal conversation we have had by telephone, and in which I described my project to you in detail. The letter formalises the key points of our conversation.

My study will involve

- A collaborative action research project with a selected rural school
- Discussions with education leaders at national level to develop a framework of national educational intentions.

Because of your role in national leadership in education I would like to invite you to participate in this study. This will entail the following:

- Participation in a formal and/or informal discussion (as a form of semi-structured interview) with me to understand the national context of educational development and change in Bangladesh. This discussion would take 45-60 minutes, and I will audiotape it. We can speak in English or in Bangala, according to your preference.
- When I have completed a draft copy of the framework, I can send you copy for your further feedback, if you want it.
- I will happily receive your further suggestions if you wish to make some. I can also give you access to the completed thesis by providing you a pdf link to my drop box or google account, if you would like to.

The material from my study will be used in my doctoral thesis and may be used in further publications and presentations that arise from it. You will receive a summary of the report findings on the study via email/mail if you wish to.

If you wish your comments to be anonymous, I will ensure that by using a pseudonym, or if you prefer your name to be used, I will do so.

I will ensure the confidentiality of all raw data gathered for this study by securely storing it in a password protected computer and/or locked storage for five years following the study. It will then be destroyed.

If you agree that you will participate, then you will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. If you do withdraw, I will remove any information relating to you, providing this is practically achievable.

If you have any queries about the research process, you can contact me (details are given above). If you have a complaint about the study, you may contact the chair of the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private bag 4800, Christchurch, Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz. Alternatively, you may contact Dr. Kathleen Quinlivan (Phone: +6433642987, Ext.: 4829; Email : kathleen.quinlivan@canterbury.ac.nz) and/or Professor Janinka Greenwood (Phone: +6433458390, Email : janinka.greenwood@canterbury.ac.nz).

If you agree to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form and return it to me in the addressed envelope provided. I am looking forward to working with you and thank you in advance for your contributions.

With Kind Regards

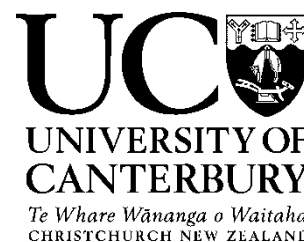
Md. Safayet Alam

Appendix 3B: Information letter to the head teacher, teachers, and students

Telephone: 0064 212570685 (NZ), 008801552407628(BD)

Email: safayet.alam@pg.canterbury.ac.nz, safayet2002@yahoo.com

Date:



Action research project : Making our school better

A letter of information to the head teacher

Dear Sir/Madam

I am Md. Safayet Alam, currently undertaking research for a PhD degree, at the College of Education, University of Canterbury, New Zealand. As part of my research, I am undertaking a project to explore the challenges involved in educational improvement in rural schools. My supervisors for this research are Professor Janinka Greenwood and Dr Kathleen Quinlivan, Senior Lecturer, College of Education, University of Canterbury.

This letter follows the personal conversation we have had by telephone, and in which I described my project to you in detail. The letter formalises the key points of our conversation.

My study will involve

- A collaborative action research project with your school.
- Discussions with education leaders at national level to develop a framework of national educational intentions.

I would like to invite your school to collaborate and participate in this study. This will entail the following:

- As we discussed personally, I would like to spend 4-6 months in your school.
- I would like to work with you, your teachers, students, parents, community leaders and the SMC to explore, and perhaps to develop and trial, suitable teaching approaches which can best equip your students to live and learn in both local and global contexts. This involves the participants as co-researchers and involves evolving action as well as research. The involvements will entail participation in joint observation, formal and informal discussions (as a form of semi-structured interview) on teaching-learning and implementing agreed decisions to improve present teaching-learning practices. At the initial stage I plan to start with the teachers of your school as the nucleus group of participants. However, as the study moves I plan to involve students, parents, community and school managing committee members as participants. How will I do this will depend on my negotiations with you and the teachers. As we work together, we will record our planning, changes in actions, feedback from all parties and any other interesting issues and outcomes.
- We will audio record some of our discussions.
- We will analyse the data we collect together.
- When I have written the report I will return the report to participants for further feedback.

In the first instance the material from the action research project will be used in my doctoral thesis (which has the working title of *A Critical Reading of Educational Praxis in Bangladesh Secondary Schools: A Study in a Rural School*). It may also be used in other publications and presentations that result from the

thesis. You will receive a summary of the report findings on the study via email/mail and all other participants will also receive the same if they wish to.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you agree that your school will participate, then any of the participants will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If they do withdraw, I will do my best to remove any information relating to them, provided this is practically achievable.

I will ensure the confidentiality of all raw data gathered for this study by securely storing it in a password protected computer and/or locked storage for five years following the study. It will then be destroyed.

If you and the community wish the school to be anonymous, I will give it a pseudonym. We can make this decision collectively. Similar decisions can be made by each participant about the use of their name or pseudonym.

If you have any queries about the research process, you can contact me (details are given above). If you have a complaint about the study, you may contact the chair of the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private bag 4800, Christchurch, Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz. Alternatively, you may contact Dr. Kathleen Quinlivan (Phone: +6433642987, Ext.: 4829; Email : kathleen.quinlivan@canterbury.ac.nz) and/or Professor Janinka Greenwood (Phone: +6433458390, Email : janinka.greenwood@canterbury.ac.nz).

If you agree for your school to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form and return it to me in the addressed envelope provided. I am looking forward to working with you and thank you in advance for your contributions.

With Kind Regards

Md. Safayet Alam

Telephone: 0064 212570685 (NZ), 008801552407628(BD)

Email: safayet.alam@pg.canterbury.ac.nz, safayet2002@yahoo.com

Date:



Action research project : Making our school better

A letter of information to the participant teachers

Dear Participant

I am Md. Safayet Alam, currently undertaking research for a PhD degree, at the College of Education, University of Canterbury, New Zealand. As part of my research, I am undertaking a project to explore the challenges involved in educational improvement in rural schools. My supervisors for this research are Professor Janinka Greenwood and Dr Kathleen Quinlivan, Senior Lecturer, College of Education, University of Canterbury.

This letter follows the personal conversation I have had with the head teacher of your school by telephone, and in which I described my project to him in detail. The letter formalises the key points of our conversation.

My study will involve

- A collaborative action research project with the school where you teach.
- Discussions with education leaders at national level to develop a framework of national educational intentions.

I would like to invite you to collaborate and participate in this study. This will entail the following:

- Participation in observations, formal and informal discussions (as a form of semi-structured interview, and focus group discussion), co-planning to bring change in present practices of teaching-learning, implementing the agreed decisions, evaluating the implementation progress, and taking further initiative to improve teaching-learning (if it is felt necessary).
- I would like to spend 4-6 months in your school, and work with you, students, parents, community leaders and the SMC to explore, and perhaps to develop and trial, suitable teaching approaches which can best equip your students to live and learn in both local and global contexts. Exactly how will we do this will depend on my negotiations with you. As we work together, we will record our planning, changes in actions, feedback from all parties and any other interesting issues and outcomes.
- We will audio record some of our discussions.
- We will analyse the data we collect together.
- When I have written the report I will return the report to you for further feedback.

In the first instance the material from the action research project will be used in my doctoral thesis (which has the working title of *A Critical Reading of Educational Praxis in Bangladesh Secondary Schools: A Study in a Rural School*). It may also be used in other publications and presentations that result from the thesis. You will receive a summary of the report findings on the study via email/mail if you wish to.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you agree that you will participate, then you will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you do withdraw, I will do my best to remove any information relating to you, provided this is practically achievable.

I will ensure the confidentiality of all raw data gathered for this study by securely storing it in a password protected computer and/or locked storage for five years following the study. It will then be destroyed.

If you and the community wish the school to be anonymous, I will give it a pseudonym. We can make this decision collectively. Similar decisions can be made about the use of your name or pseudonym.

If you have any queries about the research process, you can contact me (details are given above). If you have a complaint about the study, you may contact the chair of the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private bag 4800, Christchurch, Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz. Alternatively, you may contact Dr. Kathleen Quinlivan (Phone: +6433642987, Ext.: 4829; Email : kathleen.quinlivan@canterbury.ac.nz) and/or Professor Janinka Greenwood (Phone: +6433458390, Email : janinka.greenwood@canterbury.ac.nz).

If you agree to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form and return it to me in the addressed envelope provided. I am looking forward to working with you and thank you in advance for your contributions.

With Kind Regards

Md. Safayet Alam

Telephone: 0064 212570685 (NZ), 008801552407628(BD)

Email: safayet.alam@pg.canterbury.ac.nz, safayet2002@yahoo.com

Date:



Action research project : Making our school better

A Letter of Information to the Participant students

Dear Students,

I am Md. Safayet Alam, currently undertaking research for a PhD degree, at the College of Education, University of Canterbury, New Zealand. As part of my research, I am undertaking a project to understand how you can do better in your school. My supervisors for this research are Professor Janinka Greenwood and Dr Kathleen Quinlivan, Senior Lecturer, College of Education, University of Canterbury.

This letter follows the personal conversation I have had with the head teacher of the school where you study by telephone, and in which I described my project to him in detail. The letter formalises the key points of our conversation.

My study will involve

- Working with your school to improve teaching-learning so that you can succeed in life.
- Discussions with education leaders at national level to make your school a good one.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study. This will entail the following:

- Participation in formal and informal discussions with me, your teachers, and some of your schoolmates and/or classmates (as form of semi-structured interview and focus group discussion) to understand what kind of teaching you prefer for your learning in classrooms.
- I would like to spend 4-6 months in the school and work with you to improve your learning so that you can become a good student and a good human being. I will get permission from your parents and your head teacher, before I start working with you. I will also discuss you and your teachers to decide how and when we can start working together.
- We will audio record some of our discussions.

In the first instance the material from my discussion with you will be used in my doctoral thesis. It may also be used in other publications and presentations that result from the thesis. You will receive a summary of the report findings on the study via email/mail if you wish to.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you agree that you will participate, then you will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you do withdraw, I will do my best to remove any information relating to you, provided this is practically achievable.

I will ensure the confidentiality of all raw data gathered for this study by securely storing it in a password protected computer and/or locked storage for five years following the study. It will then be destroyed.

The community will make a decision if the school is to be anonymous, or not. You can decide if you want to use your own name or a pseudonym. If difference in decision between you and your parent on whether to be anonymous or named arises, I consider your parent's opinion to be accepted, as this is our cultural norm in Bangladesh.

If you have any queries about the research process, you can contact me (details are given above). If you have a complaint about the study, you may contact the chair of the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private bag 4800, Christchurch, Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz. Alternatively, you may contact Dr. Kathleen Quinlivan (Phone: +6433642987,

Ext.: 4829; Email : kathleen.quinlivan@canterbury.ac.nz) and/or Professor Janinka Greenwood (Phone: +6433458390, Email : janinka.greenwood@canterbury.ac.nz).

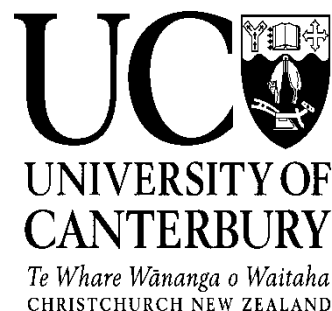
If you agree to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form and return it to me in the addressed envelope provided. I am looking forward to working with you and thank you in advance for your contributions.

With Kind Regards

Md. Safayet Alam

Appendix 3C: Consent form for head teacher, teachers and students

Telephone: 0064 212570685 (NZ), 008801552407628(BD)
Email: safayet.alam@pg.canterbury.ac.nz, safayet2002@yahoo.com
Date:



Action research project : Making our school better

Consent Form for head teacher

Md. Safayet Alam has given me a full explanation of his project. From his explanation I understand what will be required of me if I agree that I and the school may take part.

I understand the community will collectively decide if the school will be named or remain anonymous.

If the decision is made to name the school,

- I wish my own name to be used
- I wish to remain anonymous (My preferred pseudonym is _____)

If the decision is made to make the school anonymous, all participants will be anonymous.

I also understand that:

- My participation in this study is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any stage.
- Material from the interview will be used within the researcher's doctoral thesis and in any resulting publications.
- I will receive a report on the findings of this study if I wish to.
- All raw data collected for this study will be kept in locked and secure facilities and will be destroyed after five years
- If I require further information I can contact the researcher, Md. Safayet Alam.
- If I have any complaints, I can contact the chair of the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury (details on the information letter).
- I wish to receive a summary of report findings via email/mail (My email/mail address is.....
.....
.....)
- I do not want to receive a report on the findings of this study

By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

Name :

Signature & Date:

Cell/ Phone Number:

Email/ Postal Address:

Please return this completed consent form to Md. Safayet Alam on the addressed envelope provided by ---
----- (date).

Telephone: 0064 212570685 (NZ), 008801552407628(BD)

Email: safayet.alam@pg.canterbury.ac.nz,
safayet2002@yahoo.com

Date:



Action research project : Making our school better

Consent Form for teachers

Md. Safayet Alam has given me a full explanation of his project. From his explanation I understand what will be required of me if I agree that I may take part.

I understand the community will collectively decide if the school will be named or remain anonymous.

If the decision is made to name the school,

- I wish my own name to be used
- I wish to remain anonymous (My preferred pseudonym is _____)

If the decision is made to make the school anonymous, all participants will be anonymous.

I also understand that:

- My participation in this study is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any stage.
- Material from the interview will be used within the researcher’s doctoral thesis and in any resulting publications.
- I will receive a report on the findings of this study if I wish to.
- All raw data collected for this study will be kept in locked and secure facilities and will be destroyed after five years
- If I require further information I can contact the researcher, Md. Safayet Alam.
- If I have any complaints, I can contact the chair of the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury (details on the information letter).
- I wish to receive a summary of report findings via email/mail (My email/mail address is.....
.....
.....)
- I do not want to receive a report on the findings of this study.

By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

Name :

Signature & Date:

Cell/ Phone Number:

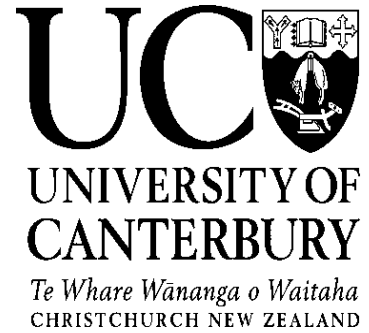
Email/ Postal Address:

Please return this completed consent form to Md. Safayet Alam on the addressed envelope provided by ----- (date).

Telephone: 0064 212570685 (NZ), 008801552407628(BD)

Email: safayet.alam@pg.canterbury.ac.nz, safayet2002@yahoo.com

Date:



Action research project : Making our school better

Consent Form for tudents

Mr. Md. Safayet Alam has given me a full explanation of his project. From his explanation I understand what will be required of me if I agree to take part.

I understand the community and school will collectively decide if the school will be named or remain anonymous.

If the decision is made to name the school, I have discussed the matter with my parents and we agree that:

- my own name can be used
- I will remain anonymous (My preferred pseudonym is _____)

If the decision is made to make the school anonymous, I will be anonymous.

I also understand that:

- My participation in this study is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any stage.
- Material from the interview will be used within the researcher's doctoral thesis and in any resulting publications.
- I will receive a report on the findings of this study if I wish to.
- All raw data collected for this study will be kept in locked and secure facilities and will be destroyed after five years
- If I require further information I can contact the researcher, Md. Safayet Alam.
- If I have any complaints, I can contact the chair of the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury (details on the information letter).
- I wish to receive a summary of report findings via email/mail (My email/mail address is.....
.....
.....)
- I do not want to receive a report on the findings of this study.

By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

Name :

Signature & Date:

Cell/ Phone Number:

Email/ Postal Address:

Please return this completed consent form to Md. Safayet Alam on the addressed envelope provided by ---
----- (date).

Appendix-4A: Sample field note: Conversation with Tuhin

আ: ছোবরা ক-কইতো?
 দু: চাও জেই এক দেস
 আ: খাঁই অসার জেই?
 দু: হই
 আ: জেসর অসেসর কে কি কার?
 দু: একজের ১১৮ গরীছা কার, মাসক
 মসর গরীছার মাসেসর জুসরী কার,
 জর জেসর বিসে কারে?
 আ: হাঁই মাসেসর জুসে কার?
 দু: হাঁই মাসেসর জু-মসেসর কার, মাসেসর
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