Utilizing "a Version of PAR" to Explore Children's Voices on Inclusion: The Case of Two Primary Schools in Bangladesh

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LAUNCHING IN

Academic research is always conducted within certain contexts bound to a given time and space. Through the works of scholars across the fields of sociology, anthropology, and education, the impact, significance, and relativity of research contexts have proved to be crucial time and time again. No two contexts are the same; hence no two research projects are identical either. Context in research is defined by many boundaries (Maxey 1999). Two of those often are national/cultural and physical boundaries. The context of a research project is defined by the physical reality of where a certain study is taking place—for example, at a school, community center, or child's home (Punch 2002; Maxey 1999). Similarly, it is defined by the culture within which the study occurs—for example, a country's norms, practices, and traditions. Depending on the context in which research is conducted, the results or findings will vary, as will the relationships and ethical dimensions of investigators and participants (Riessman 2005).

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My experience as a diasporic researcher affiliated with a research-intensive university of the Global North returning to my native country of Bangladesh to conduct research in the Global South[1] posed subjective challenges in regards to how I engaged with research participants in their given context (Mukherjee and Mahbub 2015).

As a native of Bangladesh who has lived abroad for many years, my transnational spatial location and "double consciousness"—to use the term employed by W.E.B. Du Bois (2007)—as a native and an alien acculturated within a Western academic environment posed unique subjective challenges when I worked within my national and cultural space (Mukherjee and Mahbub 2015). This chapter is about that experience.

OBJECTIVES

Hence, I present my experiences of working at two Building Resources Across Communities (BRAC)[2] primary inclusive schools in Bangladesh using a version of participatory action research (PAR) as my research methodology. The chapter is nested within the larger questions and concerns of PAR that have to do with how this research strategy changes as it traverses national and geographical boundaries. It also asks if PAR, when conducted in the field, is determined more by context or theory or rather through a careful and measured balance of both. Further, my goal is to illustrate how a version of PAR, as I like to call my research process, can be useful to illustrate and highlight the benefits and limitations of this hugely popular and growing methodology. The choice to deploy PAR as the framework for the research design stemmed from my methodological affiliations and ideological positioning, which are clarified in more detail later in the chapter.

More specifically, through a collaborative and reflexive PAR methodology, I utilized observations, Photovoice, written scripts, *adda*[3] sessions, and a questionnaire to explore children's perspectives on issues at school that they liked and disliked as related to inclusive education. The utilization of a range of methods was vital to answering my main research question:

What do children in nominally inclusive primary schools operated by the NGO Building Resources Across Communities (more commonly known as BRAC) express when asked about their likes and dislikes at school?

I had two subquestions in addition to this one. The first was related to finding central motifs from children's perspectives and the second was about distilling their voices through the educational philosophy of Bengali theorist and educational scholar Rabindranath Tagore.

The motivations behind my research questions were manifold. First, I wanted to work with children, who are one of the least ethnographically researched groups in Bangladesh and generally the Global South. Second, I wanted to illustrate the possible theoretical, philosophical, and hermeneutical links between Tagore's humanistic framework of education and that of inclusive education and what it could mean for today's Bangladesh—a country messily traversing tradition versus novelty, especially in fields of social change including education. I wanted to do this in order to base the discussion of inclusive education in Bangladesh more on the indigenous Bengali milieu, to make a slight push away from all the Northern-based literature that dominates glocal educational concepts in Bangladesh currently.

However, my goal in this chapter is not to discuss my entire study. Rather I aim to present the intricacies of my methodological journey, with a focus on field methods, showing how I mapped the research arena through tools of PAR and reflexivity. It is, hence, a contribution toward this book's overall aim to divulge, dissect, and discuss the challenges and processes of conducting PAR in Southern country contexts, methods that differ significantly from doing PAR in Northern contexts. Further, a focus on *only the field process* is just as important as an overall discussion of the study, as PAR fieldwork with young people is rarely conducted and written about from the context of Bangladesh. As a result, I do not discuss final results and findings as they resulted from my doctoral study in this chapter.

Rather, I start the chapter with a short discussion on PAR and then unpack notions of reflexivity as it worked as a theme throughout my research process. After that, I focus on how both PAR and reflexivity impacted my research design, methods, and tools of data collection utilized at the two BRAC schools. Other definite methodological considerations were made throughout the entire methodological process, such as analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical parameters; however, those are beyond the scope of this chapter also. The chapter ends with a discussion on the dynamics of "voice"[4] and how that can be negotiated through tools of PAR and reflexivity while conducting research with young people.

I specifically chose to focus on the issue of voice as participation is an integral component of PAR, and participation (or not) can be understood only through a discussion of voice (or, simply put, what participants state and do not state), and the multiple considerations surrounding how to "hear" them, a process shrouded in complexity.

PAR

As explained by Baum et al. (2006), "At the heart of [the research approach PAR, participatory action research] is collective, self reflective inquiry that researchers and participants undertake so that they can understand and improve upon the practices in which they participate and the situations in which they find themselves" (p. 854). According to scholars, PAR is a research approach with the specific intent to create social change. More importantly, it is about the degree of participation achieved in any particular research project. Later I discuss in more detail which "degree" of participation I utilized.

PAR is not an approach that can be imposed as an intent, as no one can know in advance how a particular research process will become fully participatory; rather it is a process that must be generated (Greenwood et al. 1993). The intent plants the seed, which starts the process but continues to build through the progression of any research endeavor. Thus it is an emergent process. This process can evolve in several characteristics—collaboration, incorporation of local knowledge, and linking "scientific" research understandings to social action—and it depends on the particular research context and case how that unfolds.

PAR as a research methodology draws on the epistemology or worldview of advocacy and participation. Other worldviews can also be nestled within the methodology of PAR. In my case, I was additionally influenced by constructivism and phenomenology. Hence, I used only some elements from the advocacy aspect of PAR, and I make no claim to have conducted "complete PAR." I worked closely with participants but used their input in only certain aspects of the study. For example, the degree of participation in PAR differs from study to study, but the integral aspect at the heart of the process is the value placed on participation. In my study, this was done mostly through children having autonomy in deciding how they wanted to engage with the proposed methods. They were open to suggest changes and had full flexibility in offering propositions that better worked to access their ideas within each method. However, they did not participate in establishing the study's methods themselves.

The decision to involve children in the manner I did was done intentionally as I believe that meaning is not discovered but rather constructed and that phenomena come into meaning only when consciousness engages with that particular singularity (Crotty 1998). I also believe that in order to co-create the constructed meanings, we must engage the *self* and the *participants* in the research process. I agree that "nothing can be accomplished without subjectivity, so its elimination is not the solution. Rather how the subject is present is what matters, and objectivity itself is an achievement of subjectivity" (Giorgi 1994, p. 205). Understanding this results from "a dialectic between the researcher's pre-understandings and the research process, between the self-interpreted constructions of the researcher and those of the participant" (Finlay 2002, p. 534). Through my methodological journey, therefore, I explore and transparently present my enmeshment as an integral part of this research endeavor. Hence, my role as the researcher, through the overall process and often contesting with the ideas of PAR itself, was a bit more involved than that of the participants.

In this sense, as the researcher-participant who was also a guest teacher at times at the schools, I conducted only a version of PAR. There are certainly other versions of PAR as the spectrum of research on PAR is vast. For me, however, the part of PAR wherein the self-reflective and collective process that researchers and participants often find themselves involved in was of utmost importance. Hence, I leaned towards reflexivity.

Reflexivity

The practice of reflexivity is a process that allows for "detachment, internal dialogue, and constant scrutiny of the process through which the researcher constructs and questions his/her interpretations of field experiences" (Ahsan 2009, p. 398). In other words, reflexivity involves researchers being honest about contemplating their own feelings, assumptions, biases, and experiences and allowing themselves the space needed to navigate those in relation to the research process. Reflexivity occurs during and after a certain process in the field, as researchers cannot enter a field and be completely objective, leaving biases, identities, and personal understandings of the world behind. During the research process, these issues play into how researchers engage with participants. Afterward, reflexivity on the research process occurs as researchers go through the process again in their own minds and in writing, addressing how their "selves" in the moment of and soon after the fieldwork affected the research process. Reflexivity happens during and after the event, in essence because as

researchers interact in the field, they are aware of what they bring onto the field, and later they address those biases in their write-ups. Ahsan (2009) stated that reflexivity is not only useful but a methodological necessity when conducting research in the Global South; she used reflexivity as a methodological tool in her study of children's rights and child participation in Tangail, Bangladesh.

In my work, based also in Bangladesh, I use reflexivity as a form of methodological scrutiny, mostly as a form of discussion between what happened in the field and what I did in my position as the researcher in order to question, resolve, or challenge what occurred. Therefore, my stance has always been one of a critique, and my work has been informed mostly by the critical standpoint that reflexivity provides.

Research Design: Qualitative Inquiry

Keeping PAR and reflexive intentions as a priority, I designed my research study as a qualitative inquiry. Within it, practices of visual, written, and spoken methods informed data collection while phenomenological tools informed data analysis. I chose such approaches because I had to make methodological decisions that suited me as a researcher and also best suited the study of young children. It should be mentioned that all of these methods were conducted keeping the PAR methodology in mind, wherein the ongoing interaction between participants and researcher formed and informed the field process.

Why this design?

Very briefly, by choosing to use qualitative methods, I gave myself the flexibility to make creative choices regarding methods and, at the same time, to allow my research project to become a therapeutic process (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). As I worked on this project, to which I have dedicated almost six years of my life, I have become more aware and connected to my complex identity as a Bangladeshi woman doing research in Bangladesh. My stream of "double consciousness" (Du Bois 2007), developed through my long tenure in Northern educational institutions—first in Bangladesh and later on at universities in the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada—provided me a unique yet challenging position in terms of my research topic, questions, and participants. Therefore, as an individual, I always felt as if my identity were divided into several parts,

which made it difficult or impossible to have one unified sense of self in my project. This stream of double consciousness, for example, allowed me to relate to my study at one level because I too grew up in Bangladesh and faced some of the challenges that children there face. However, at the same time, my education and acculturation within Western academic environments revealed a certain linguistic, cultural power gap from my participants. For example, I struggled to speak entirely in Bengali in the field, often unconsciously utilizing English words during my daily banter with participants. I instantly caught myself and translated the word used into Bengali. However, as a reflexive thinker, I must question how that may have had an impact on my position and relationship with my participants. It may have caused a moment of discomfort or even utter incomprehension, which may have affected participants' thoughts.

A further more direct reason I chose a qualitative approach is that it is highly suited to working with children. Children prefer flexible, interactive, and engaging methods, which qualitative research allows (Punch 2002). In addition, children as individuals and as a social group are often powerless and vulnerable in relation to adults (McDowell 2001). Adult researchers—with their physical presence, institutional positioning, social standing, and life experiences—possess a great deal of power in contrast to their child participants (Valentine 1999). Qualitative methodologies allow researchers to at least partially bridge this gap, because in qualitative work, researchers have the flexibility to be emergent rather than predetermined, participant driven rather than researcher driven, and open and accommodating rather than imposing. Creswell (2007) explained that power can be deemphasized by collaborating directly with participants, by having them suggest methods of data collection or help with the research questions. In the case of children, it allows for multiple realities and voices to be represented in a complex, thick, in-depth description.

How did I navigate chosen research design?

Within the design of the qualitative inquiry, I depended on a mix of visual, spoken, and written methods to collect data and used phenomenology to analyze my findings. These approaches all share certain elements in common with qualitative research but at the same time expand it to fit evident, more specific research criteria. For instance, I used visuals especially because they allow vulnerable, often disempowered individuals to express

the ineffable in a creative way. I used phenomenology because it allows researchers to distill multiple perspectives from any given situation. Both of these points can be better explained through examples.

Regarding visuals, one day during a picture-taking session at school, one pupil took a photo of a picture (from his textbook) of bumblebees flying out of a tree. This photo seemed unrelated to the issue of the school's "like" or "dislike" aspects, but in conversation, I discovered that the most important aspect of that photo for the child was the idea of "flight." He took that photo because in it bees were shown as being able to fly. He told me how his reason for coming to school was to learn what could enable him to "fly" far, far away and become a police officer one day. These ideas of freedom and flight would have been very difficult to unearth through another method, especially in a context and situation where neither flight nor freedom were topics of discussion. One could argue that I could unearth this information through an interview. However, I contend that taking the photograph unleashed a creative part of the child's mind that a mere conversation could not have. Through conversation, I would not have learned about how he visualizes not only his learning but also his future goals. If I asked him about his goals, perhaps he would never have been able to draw the relationship with the flight of a bee. Further, the application of visuals within PAR specifically enabled me to access information through the children via direct participatory-creative methods, which were translated into action as this boy spoke to me. In other words, this child's answer came up the way it did because he felt comfortable in participating and speaking openly. He knew he had the autonomy to state whatever he wanted to regarding his photo rather than aiming to discuss some aspect of direct application of the photograph as if it were related only to education. The phenomenon of trying to please the researcher with the "right" answer is often an obstacle of fieldwork in the Global South, where participants view researchers as having more power than they have (Mukherjee 2015). PAR, however, allows space to work around that.

Regarding phenomenology, one of my methodological steps involved groups of children creating albums of their photographs. In reflecting back on the activity, I discovered that the perspectives of the group leaders varied significantly from those of the shyer, more reserved group members. Although the group leaders commented on the fun, communal, and inclusive aspects of the project, some of the introverted children mentioned how the task made them feel unnoticed, especially when the group leader preferred to list his or her picture and name first in the album. Through

phenomenological considerations, I discovered that each of these alternative interpretations of the same incident is valid in its own right; it is up to the phenomenologist to recognize these differences and acknowledge the tangled messiness of multiplicity pervading social research. As explained by Denscombe (2003), "phenomenology rejects the notion that there is one universal reality and accepts, instead, that things can be seen in different ways by different people at different times in different circumstances, and each alternative version needs to be recognized as valid in its one right" (p. 100). Phenomenology is hence especially useful and related to the PAR approach. All voices have equal power in the research design, process, and outcomes.

Important Considerations in the Field

Once I decided on my research design and approach, I embarked on my field study of doing research at two BRAC primary schools, "U" and "M," with a total of 66 young pupils. I chose the two schools based on two important criteria: the value of the data and the population makeup.

The value of the data, or the possibility of gaining rich, detailed information, was determined by two factors: children's ability to complete the research activities I had planned and the attitudes of participants and gate-keepers toward my project. What really stood out and helped me purposefully choose these two schools had to do with my second criterion for data value: people's attitudes. During the sampling process, I got a general idea of the attitudes of various teachers, program officers, and children toward my research. I found that at both of these schools, all the people who played different but vital roles were generally open, approachable, and excited about my project. However, obtaining buy-in from host institutions in South Asia while guarding against validity problems is always complex.

As I wanted to explore specifically the opinions of children in inclusive environs, another very important criterion was the issue of mixed populations at the chosen schools. The focus of inclusivity in settings is a characteristic of PAR in South Asia that researchers should pay closer attention to. Although it is more difficult to meet, regardless, it is an important aspect. For me, this issue was more difficult to meet, since there were no children belonging to ethnic minorities at both schools. Nevertheless, the student populations at the two schools were mixed in several other ways, as shown in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1   Students at Schools "U" and "M"

Aspect	School "U" Grade 3	School "M" Grade 2
School location	Urban	Semiurban
Age	8–14	7–12
Gender	12 boys	10 boys
	24 girls	20 girls
Ability factor of	1 physical impairment: female	2 visual impairments: 1 male, 1 female
Religion	36 Muslims	3 Hindus
		27 Muslims

Steps Involved in Collecting Data from the Field

After I chose the schools, I was ready to spend time with the children in each one to conduct the planned research methods. In the succeeding sections, I unpack the details of how I conducted each method. The methods are presented in a linear fashion in this chapter, but, as with most research journeys, the path was not always linear. Rather, it was at times recursive and simultaneous.

Unstructured Observations

I entered the field as a participant observer. The classic definition of participant observation is:

> The method in which the observer participates in the daily life of the people under study, either openly in the role of the researcher or covertly in some disguised role, observing things that happen, listening to what is said, and questioning people, over some length of time. (Becker and Geer 1957, cited in Denscombe 2010, p. 206)

That was specifically my goal: to enter each school and establish close relationships with the children and teacher(s), allowing them to recognize my role as a researcher (Robson 1993; Denscombe 2003). Establishing close relationships was necessary for this inquiry as it dealt primarily with children, with whom building rapport became essential (Lewis and Lindsay 2000). When I observed, I used unstructured methods in the field with no preconceived notions as to the discrete behaviors I might observe.

I picked up what was important and determined how to focus on those aspects as "the field" unfolded in front of me. I observed for a total of 28 hours covering seven full class sessions at School "U" and 16 hours covering four full class sessions at School "M." An important point to mention here is that even if my goal was to capture the essence of the organically flowing classroom as an outsider, the extent to which this was possible must be questioned. For example, at times the students and teachers behaved in prescribed ways. At School "U," the teacher disciplined her students often. At both schools children were admonished quickly for bad behavior. This indicated to me that the school staff, although involved and excited in the project, may have felt a sense of discomfort at times owing to my presence.

Photovoice

Increasingly, qualitative researchers have embraced visual methods, especially photography, as a means to create, represent, and disseminate knowledge (Schell et al. 2009). There are various photographic methodologies, and in my research I used Photovoice, a form of visual inquiry that emphasizes the role of participants, which are usually people with little money, power, or status, to take and use photographic images to engender collaborative reflection on local phenomena. When working with children, the methodology of Photovoice must undergo slight shifts, however. Often social constructivists working with children utilize Photovoice to emphasize the role of participants in taking and using photographic images. However, it is not always clear whether those types of research can directly result in facilitating social change at grassroots and policy levels. In my research, I approached Photo-voice in this manner, wherein the participation of children in actually taking photos were most emphasized.

At the schools, as a facilitator, I conducted a Photovoice project within one week at each school. During this task, my goal was twofold. The first goal was to discover what pupils considered important aspects in enjoying their school life and feeling included in their environment (Cook and Hess 2007). The second was to discover what pupils considered unimportant in enjoying their school life and what made them feel excluded from their environment. As this was an inquiry into inclusive education, I did not exclude any pupil from participating in the Photovoice project (unless he or she chose to be excluded). However, soon into the project, I realized that, overall, a majority the children were not comfortable taking photos of

things they disliked. In order to gather knowledge on children's dislikes, I therefore had to adjust my methodological plan and adopt free-associative writing methods, which are described later in this chapter.

The photo sessions consisted of several steps. Using digital mobile phone cameras it involved asking children to take practice photos, taking the actual photos, and disseminating and discussing the the photos. The whole process was monitored closely by the teacher and me. Further into the project, some "experts" emerged among the groups of children, and pupils helped one another to take the photos. Child expertise was encouraged, keeping in mind the PAR framework.

At each school, although similar steps were followed to conduct this activity, the Photovoice experiences were different, and I faced some challenges along the way. One challenge that impacted my work extensively came out of School "U."

In the small, approximately 336-square-foot room of School "U,"[5] it was not possible for the children not to impact one another's work. Therefore, as each group took photos on the same day, I noticed some stark similarities between the photographs. Thus, the relative independence in each child's thought process during the Photovoice project at School "U" is questionable. Whether a photo truly depicted a child's personal choice is not clear. For example, when one participant, from Group *Surjo Mukhi* (Sunflower), took the first picture of his favorite item at school—a lesson he liked called "*Mou Macchhi*" (Bumble Bee)—almost all members of his group felt compelled to take similar photos of lessons they liked. Hence, during the photographing process, even when requested to focus on items outside the lesson books, the children in this group chose not to do so. To overcome this obstacle, during the reflections, together we focused on thrashing out the reasons, meanings, or application of the photos to their school's experience. I asked the children if their photos meant something in relation to their school experience. As the children wrote in their reflections and explained later on, often they did. The children mentioned how the lessons they photographed inspired and impacted their behavior both in and out of school.

One criticism that could be made here is the question of why I decided to stay with the Photovoice method if it faced critical obstacles in the field. Although I agree that qualitative research is about rigor, knowledge production, internal validity, and consistency, to me the strains of PAR that I drew from emphasized the importance of engagement, processes, and participant involvement. The fact that children did not feel comfortable taking

dislike photos did not negate their enthusiasm and excitement about using cameras for the photos they did want to take about their school, as photography was a novel experience for all of them. Further, creating space within the research process wherein children's choices and voices could have value and direction in the research was a paramount epistemological issue for me. Last, I could access the information on dislikes in other measures relative to the expression of a form of communication (albeit what is communicated has the potential of slight alteration), and reflexivity has been used to create transparency through that process. These are the reasons why I still utilized photos regardless of the obstacles I faced.

Questionnaire

I also used a questionnaire in the field. I considered the questionnaire a good methodological addition for getting specific answers for my research questions because, as Denscombe (2003) noted, it is "fitting in a range of options offered by the researcher" (p. 159). I based the questionnaire on three points: (1) a pre-phenomenological analysis of the photographs of children's likes; (2) a reflection on the themes considered necessary in inclusive schools as outlined in the *Index for Inclusion: Developing Learning and Participation in Schools* (Booth et al. 2000); and (3) my previous experience of having worked with BRAC students. The questionnaire, therefore, directly asked the children to reflect more coherently and specifically on thematic issues relevant to inclusive education, such as their peer relations, classroom organization, and their teacher's behaviors. A total of 50 questionnaire questions were administered over two school days. At School "U," 34 students completed the questionnaire; at School "M," 27 students did.

I administered the questionnaires in larger group settings inside each school. The classroom teacher at each school, who was familiar with the children's reading and writing level, facilitated the session. In looking at the questions beforehand, the teacher informed me that they would not be difficult for her pupils. Then we got started. I did ask the children to put their names on their respective sheets just so I could return it to them for our second session the following day. It is essential to consider that the children included their names on the questionnaire and the impact that may have had on the results. Other issues that may have impacted the results include my presence, the teacher's presence, the school as the venue, the wording of the questions, the children's tendencies to show conformity regarding answers, peer discussions, and the overall classroom setting.

Informal Focus Groups: Addas

I followed up the questionnaire session with informal focus groups, or *addas*. Hennessy and Heary (2005) explained that focus groups have several advantages over other methods, especially when working with children. These advantages include: creating a safe peer environment and replicating the type of small-group settings that children are familiar with in the classroom; redressing the power imbalance between adults and children that exists in one-to-one interviews; providing an encouraging environment for the children; and jogging their memory as they hear the contributions of others (Hill et al. 1996; Mauthner 1997). For the specific context of Bangladesh, focus groups were especially effective because they resonate with one of the most widely practiced trends of information exchange in Bengal—the *adda* (pronounced "uddah"). *Addas* can be defined as long, informal conversations held between friends—popular among people of all classes, ages, and places, including schools and colleges (Chakrabarty 1999). Framed as an *adda*, or friendly banter, and not as a simple question and answer information session, my goal was to allow group conversations to flow in a more fun, relevant, and interactive manner. Further, it worked to contextualize and make more relevant a foreign methodology while at the same time balancing out the power relationships between the participants and me, the researcher.

Two large *adda* sessions were carried out at each school. At School "U," 34 of the 36 students were present on the day of the first *adda* and 33 out of 36 on the second. At School "M," 28 out of 30 participated on the first day and 29 out of 30 on the second. In each school, two days and approximately two to three hours were dedicated to each *adda* session. During the sessions held at the respective schools, I addressed each questionnaire question in more detail. I reminded the students to also think back on their photographs during the sessions.

During the *addas*, in order to get the children to converse about their school, I had to keep the conversational space safe. With the teacher's help, I had to minimize any incipient arguments. I also had to keep the group on task, working to eliminate power imbalances and personal biases, and had to bring the conversations to a close properly. I also made sure that I allowed enough silent time and space for children to take the time they needed to respond; when they could not answer a specific topic or question, I encouraged them to make spontaneous contributions.

Each of the *adda* sessions was voice recorded. Some of the recordings had great amounts of background noise, which made the sometimes short,

curt monosyllabic words of the younger children difficult to understand. I had to go back and question those children again on several occasions. Therefore, throughout the *addas* and even afterward as I was working with children, I had to probe and ask for clarification several times in order to elicit detailed and relevant answers. Further, the children's responses often went off in tangents that had nothing to do with the topic of discussion. Therefore, throughout the process, I had to reflect and patiently weigh the given responses while also being aware of group dynamics, tensions, and sensitive moments in the activity.

Communicating Through Writing

As I conducted my research, it began to become more and more clear, during the photo sessions and the *addas*, that children wanted to have a more private and individual method of communicating. Therefore, I had to incorporate writing into the research procedures. According to Freeman and Mathison (2009), for the purpose of research with children, writing should not be defined in narrow terms. They explained that communicating through writing in research can entail responding to prompts in conventional paragraph or essay form; expressive forms of journaling, sketches, cartoons, free associative writing, and poetry; and responses to questions while sitting side by side. In the schools, the children produced different variations of pieces of writing.[6] In School "U," where I spent more time and the children were older, a greater number of pieces were produced. Moreover, the children depended more on writing in that school. In Table 2.2, I have summarized the written documents produced at each school.

Table 2.2 Written documents

School "U"	School "M"
A. Explanation of photos with reasons why	A. Explanation of photos with reasons why
B. Detailed list of dislikes at school with reasons why	B. Summarized list of dislikes at school
C. My best friend and why	C. My best friend and why
D. If we had "X" at school, it would have been good, and reasons why	D. –
E. Poems and/or paragraphs about school, and benefits of coming to school	E. –

The free associative processes A through E gave the children time to stop and think about their responses individually before answering. This was an effective mechanism, as it was not always possible to ensure the children's privacy from the two adults, the teacher and me, and from the rest of the children. Further, shy students were not comfortable speaking up. Writing allowed them to participate and contribute more comfortably and effectively. In addition, since it was given as "classwork" on a tangible sheet of paper that the children could write on, it was an effective way to get their attention and keep it there. For example, when it came to writing poems and paragraphs about school (which a single student nonchalantly suggested in conversation), the children displayed exceptional openness and creativity. Again, involving students in the research method had to do with my epistemological inclination toward PAR.

Memos

As explained by Arora (2012), memoing is a practice that helps researchers clarify thoughts about the research. Originally used in grounded theory approaches, memos can help document researchers' journeys by creating a space where researchers can reflect on their reactions after a certain methodological endeavor, expose personal thoughts and feelings, consider with their biases, and reflect on prior or current experience (Birks et al. 2008).

While I was in the field, I kept a reflective journal. This was not a method I conducted "with" participants but rather as a practice of reflexivity throughout my research process and during the writing phase. In this journal, I recorded reflective memos regularly. As I wrote the memos, usually after each methodological endeavor or classroom observation, they became a rich source of information, especially if I needed to double check and cross-reference information on emerging themes, refresh my memory on how I felt about certain situations, understand my reactions to quotes and words participants had used, or question certain incidents and what they meant for my research. Self-reflexive memoing for me is connected to PAR, especially in the Global South, where the meanings of PAR are in transition. Memoing is a useful way to assess how PAR methods actually play out in the Southern context through researchers, who are often the bearers of "Northern" tools and knowledge. If the intention of PAR is to empower participants on the field, keeping self-reflexive memos in real time can allow researchers to check back on whether, through each research process and endeavor, participants were empowered and, if not,

how the process faltered. Here researchers are the medium, as they always are, but now researchers are fully aware of the self as the medium in the research process and know how that self impacted that specific PAR process in the given research context.

Bridging the Discussion

After I conducted the observations, Photovoice sessions, the questionnaire, *addas*, free-associative writing, and memos in the field, I was left with a huge amount of data, including written words, recorded conversations, visuals, and questionnaire results. Specifically, in the major data collections, I had 65 photos, 61 completed questionnaires, and a total of 360 pages of typed data. As previously mentioned, considerations of trustworthiness and ethics were paramount when I collected these data, but a discussion on those issues is beyond the scope of this chapter. I also do not discuss the details of the intricate processes of phenomenological data analysis. Rather, in the next section, I scrutinize and reflect on an important field issue that occurred during the data collection process and has more clearly in line with PAR and reflexivity. This is the issue of "voice." This discussion is very important because my data in essence are supposed to be representations of participants' voices. My data are supposed to be a result of childrens' answers to my queries. Yet is this issue of voice as straightforward as it seemed to be in this study, or are some struggles and questions embedded within it?

The Methodological Struggle of "Voice" and Its Relationship to PAR and Reflexivity

As a researcher working in a Southern context with children, it is important for me to reflect on and clarify the point of the "representation of voice" in my research. This is especially important because the issue of voice is intrinsically linked to epistemologies of PAR (Ahsan 2009) and reflexivity, as an important consideration on the degree of power and autonomy in any given research context. Hence, for me, voice was a methodological struggle in the field. This struggle was just as important as other research field considerations, such as methods or sampling, and at times it was even more important because, while working with children, I constantly had to be wary of what James (2007, p. 262) called the three interlocking dangers in childhood research:

1. Matters of authenticity or how children need to be "given a hand" and only then can their voices "be heard."
2. The risk of lumping children together into a single homogenous group that has "one, undifferentiated voice" and no diversity or multivocality among the children.
3. Not questioning the nature of children's participation in the study as well as the differences of power that impact how the research is conducted.

While conducting an inquiry with children, the relationship between the researcher and the participant is of utmost importance. According to the seminal work by James (2007), childhood researchers need to critically reflect on their role in the process of representing children's voices in their work. James suggested that the way to do this is ~~be~~ to "[revisit] … in whatever cultural context, and in relation to any child, [the] relationship [that] defines who [children] are, how we as adult researchers understand them, and how they understand their own experiences" (p. 270). In other words, researchers need not only to represent children's voices but also to explore the "authenticity" of that voice by further scrutinizing the realities of the exchange that occurred between researcher and participant allowing for the "emergence of the voice" in the first place. Moreover, in childhood studies, we must be able to deconstruct the very notion of "voice" and be aware of how much autonomy, rationality, and intention the child's speaking voice actually has (Komulainen 2007). Voice, according to Komulainen (2007), is actually social and co-constructed rather than individual, fixed, straightforward, linear, or clear. Voice definitely is shaped by a multitude of factors, such as our use of language and assumptions about children, the institutional contexts in which we operate, and the overall ideological and discursive climates that prevail (Spyrou 2011; Komulainen 2007). Last, but importantly, as explained by Spyrou (2011) and by Jackson and Mazzei (2008), it is almost impossible to grasp voice and represent its essence due to the problem of "authenticity." The problem rests largely on our wrongly held assumption that it is possible to capture the authentic essence through words people speak. The best we can do as researchers is to reflect on the power relations and contextual realities that led to the words in question to be spoken and to present them transparently. The issue of the representation of voice in my study can best be illustrated through three examples from the field. Each example draws on a different aspect of the process. The first is one of gaining access, the

second is related to the use of a certain method, and the third is an example in which power relations were switched. All three examples highlight the organic and constant manner in which the issue of voice permeated this study and how, at certain times, it was not possible for me to separate it from my methodological process.

Children's Voices Getting Lost in Negotiating Access

The first salient episode that impacted the representation of voice was the process of negotiating access. In order to access both the schools and the pupils within the schools, I had to negotiate and renegotiate my terms of access with the adult gatekeepers, including officials at BRAC's head office, several program officers overseeing each school, and classroom teachers. In total, at the two schools, I had to negotiate access with six gatekeepers from BRAC's side (not including the parents) in order to approach the children. The parents also had to be consulted as I was working with children below the age of 18. The process of gaining access through various hierarchies of adult gatekeepers impacted the "authenticity" of the children's "voice." As mentioned by Ahsan (2009), in her own work, this same process of negotiating access to children's voices through multiple adult gatekeepers made the young people vulnerable not only to feeling disempowered in their choice to be a part of the project but also greatly filtered how they voice themselves, or what information they impart to the researcher in the project. This struggle to identify the authentic voice, and whether that is even possible, can be illustrated by reflexively discussing some examples.

The adult gatekeepers, especially the classroom teacher and the program officers, usually were present during most of my research exercises. Their relationship and views of the children in the classroom impacted the children's words, and this occurred in slightly different ways in my first visit to both schools "U" and "M." Twice after the children were introduced and we spoke briefly to get acquainted with each other, the program officers who knew about my project launched into a speech. These speeches, by different men, consisted of the topic of how I had arrived from "a faraway land, Canada," "all the way" to listen to what they, the children, have to say about school. On both occasions the men mentioned how special this ought to make the children feel. At School "U," the program officer said, for example, "Do everything you can to help *Apa* [Apa means "older sister" or "respected sister" in Bengali] out. Answer her when she

asks a question." I remember stepping in to say that no one was required to answer anything; however, he went on to explain in front of the class that, "after all," they were Grade 3 children who must often be reminded what their purpose will be in this project and that if they did not answer me, why would I work with them? Then he turned to the pupils and said, "Won't you all speak to Apa?" At that point, all children nodded that they would. In the field, I could not prevent such "intrusions," as they were all conducted out of goodwill on part of the people who granted me access in the first place. They felt they had the right to exercise their positions, which often entailed helping me along the way and mediating between me and the children. Hence, while gathering my data, I had to be aware of how much authenticity, autonomy, rationality, and intention the child's speaking voice actually had (Komulainen 2007). How much of any of those four aspects can a child actually have when he or she feels compelled to speak on a topic? In a culture such as Bangladesh's, where obedience is highly valued and children's positions in a community are often based on their degree of obedience to their elders, how much authenticity or autonomy does the looming ideology of obedience allow? If instructed to participate by the program officer, does a child really have autonomous power to decide not to be a part of my project? In other words, Ahsan's (2009) point is that negotiating access to children's voice through multiple adult gatekeepers makes young people vulnerable in significant ways that impact the very outcome of the project's findings; I faced this reality throughout my fieldwork. Therefore, I had to continuously question how I could gain access the children's authentic voice and whether my research methodology needed to be tweaked along the way. This is where tools of PAR were most useful. I tried to read children's stated and unstated words, intentions, and language in order to incorporate some of what they wanted. Beazley et al. (2009) well explained the situation:

> We have found through experience that the best action-oriented research results from a process in which all researchers (including children) have a stake in all aspects of the research, from identifying the topic to writing the report and disseminating the results. Yet, when children are included as researchers or even as research assistants, the question arises "Where should the adult researcher position him/herself in the process of children-focused, rights-based research?" Positionality is [an essential issue] … there is always a role for adults in research with children—even if children are involved in all aspects. [Others] challenge the idea of adopting the role of "atypical" or "incompetent" adult. (p. 375)

Hence, working with children within the PAR framework in the Global South is complex and messy. There is no one formula that researchers can use; rather, they must adapt and hone in on each specific context in a continuous struggle and opportunity as they embark on this journey.

Quiet Voices Getting Lost in the Crowd

When I entered the field, I assumed that the design of my informal focus groups—*addas*—would work effectively to capture pupils' voices in an informal and playful manner. Although the methodology was largely successful in providing a communal way for pupils to come forward, as it encouraged spontaneity and "group-force" (Sawyer 2006), there were some disadvantages: (1) how authentic can individual voices be when "group-force" is present, and (2) can shy students feel comfortable enough in groups? For example, one very outspoken pupil, whom I will call Roni, age 10, was often seen "leading" the conversation in his *adda* group, and, although his voice was represented in the group, what he said impacted his friends and made some of the girls feel uncomfortable. When Roni first said that he looked forward to come to school because it gave him an opportunity to interact with his friends and also sing and dance, somehow this became the reason of the majority of the students in that group. For some other students, once Roni contributed, they could not do the same because they stated that they did not have such a "good story" for coming to school and were "scared of talking" since they had nothing interesting to add. For such students, I had to switch to writing.

Oppositional Model of Voice: Choosing Cameras

Another example of my struggle with the representation of voice occurred during my decision regarding the use of certain cameras. However, this occasion was distinctly different from the previous one and allowed me to question the oppositional model of the power of voice (Gallagher 2008) in which power is seen as a commodity held by the dominant adult group and not by the subordinate children. This conceptualization masks the complex and multiple ways power is exercised as well as its impact on voice in the research field. Thus, it is possible, at times, for children to have greater control over the research process when they appropriate their autonomous and authentic voice for their own interests (Ahsan 2009), regardless of the researcher–participant dynamic. Also, like Ahsan, since I

was in the field as a native young female attempting to take on the role of a friendly adult employing participatory and artistic research techniques, I sometimes was in a position in which the children ended up exerting control over me. This was most apparent when the use of cameras came into question.

I entered the field with disposable cameras with which the children could snap pictures, which would later be developed and shared in the classroom. However, after entering the first school, "U," and trying to use those cameras, one of the older students, whom I will call Robi, age 13, asked, "Apa, your phone doesn't have a camera?" I replied that it did, and he said, "Can I use your phone camera? I have a camera in my dad's phone I have used it before."

At first I was hesitant to allow the children to use my phone and my iPod; however, they were not sufficiently motivated to participate actively when using disposable cameras. They did not overtly state their disdain for the disposable cameras but rather displayed it, looking at me in confusion when I insisted that they be used. Perhaps they did not like the yellow paper covering on the cameras, or the fact that they could not see the picture(s) they took instantly. Furthermore, they found it somewhat flimsy and hard to use.

Much like what happened to Ahsan (2009), I experienced a moment where the young people's power and voice overpowered my own. They appropriated the situation to fit their own preferences, and as we reverted to using my phone and iPod cameras, I saw how I started to gain a sense of camaraderie and rapport with them. Further, these cameras allowed the children to have much more control over the photography activity, wherein they had more of an instant say as to whether they wanted a certain picture to represent their likes in the classroom. If they disliked a certain photo, they could take another one right away. In short, the decision to use the phone or iPod camera was made by the children (almost covertly) but still demonstrates that within the organic dynamics of certain research processes and contexts, the tables can be turned on the exercise of voice.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I outlined in detail my research with children at two BRAC primary schools by utilizing an aspect of PAR and the tools of reflexivity. I addressed issues such as context, worldviews, and methods

of data collection in the struggle to locate children's authentic voice in research. It is clear that, regardless of the rigor of the method used, finding authentic voice is an elusive and complicated endeavor. As I explained earlier, I did not unpack my findings or extend deeply into my analytical framework utilizing Tagore's humanistic approach to research.

Through my reflexive journey on each research issue and decision, my goal has always been to remain transparent and engaging in order to illustrate the organic and multifaceted relationship that research requires of both "doer" and "knower." It is never an easy path to tread and the process is often messy, filled with ups and downs, limitations, and struggles. Nevertheless, the goal for me as a researcher was always to take problems in stride and move forward to unearth children's perspectives on their inclusive experiences at their respective schools. This is an important endeavor because working through reflexivity with children in Southern contexts, framed within PAR, is rare. Hence, this study contributes to the body of work that some scholars are exploring. Further, it depicts the messy and often compartmentalized but at the same time flowing aspects of research in which complex terrain is simultaneously bound and broken. Especially in cases of PAR, where power, participation, and voice intermingle in new and novel ways, breaking through ceilings of what used to define research, today there is fertile ground for understanding who plays the major role in defining research outcomes and impacting what we explore, find, analyze, and then share with the world.

Notes

1. As defined by the Center for the Global South of the American University (2016), the Global South can refers to the nations of Africa, Central and Latin America, and most of Asia:countries that currently face great political, social, and economic challenges and generally are "poorer" in the sense of their gross domestic products. Further, most of the countries of the Global South share a colonial past and are not in dominant positions in international developments but rather have less developed or severely limited resources. Hence, the populations of these nations bear the larger share of the brunt of poverty, environmental degradation, human and civil rights abuses, ethnic and regional conflicts, mass displacements of refugees, hunger, and disease (Singal 2004).
2. BRAC is the largest nongovernmental organization in the world and currently is active in diverse fields, such as education, health, women empowerment, and sustainable development. Its main aim is to alleviate poverty in the Global South.

3. "Friendly banter or conversations" in Bengali.
4. Bengali word for easy flowing but informative conversations between friends.
5. The room of School "M" was not substantially bigger. However, the problem of groupthink did not impact the sessions at this school as the students made a list of their liked items individually first and then photographed those items. I initiated this small change due to the obstacles I had faced at School "U."
6. The order in which the "written documents" were carried out is needs to be considered. They are presented at a certain juncture in the thesis, but in the actual research process, they were conducted as and when gaps came up. Fieldwork is rarely a linear process. For example, soon after I identified the children's preference not to take photos of their dislikes, I asked them to write about it before moving on to other activities. Even after the *adda* sessions, children wrote about who their best friends were and why. At each school, the order in which the written "assignments" appeared also differed.

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