

**I am illiterate, they are educated; what can I say to them?:
A playful exploration of the impact of performative presentation of case study data.**

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Abstract

How will data change if it is presented not only simply in written text but through dramatic presentation? The data for this exploration comes from a doctoral project investigating rural parents' engagement in education in Bangladesh. The data revealed not only a lack of engagement but also a major communicative gap between rural parents and teachers in local schools. Illiteracy and poverty, differences in social status and power and the impact of prevalent social discourses were identified as key, and apparently insuperable, problems. However, the study also found a rural head teacher who broke through perceived barriers by visiting parents in their homes and in market tea stalls and so created a basis for communication and engagement. This paper shares part of the data as a dramatic script. In this way it is a kind of dress rehearsal of experimentation with the use of hand puppets, overhead projections and recordings in the expectation they will allow the data to be understood as a social drama and so highlight the interplay of experiences of frustration, inadequacy, courage and hope that are the human aspects of what is sometimes seen by policy as a statistical problem.

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Biography



Janinka Greenwood is Professor of Education at the University of Canterbury, and Director of the Research Lab for Creativity and Change. Her current research focuses on teacher education and the development of criticality and the processes of change. She has a long-standing engagement with the uses for arts for learning and with arts-based research, and strong interests in learning communities, cultural difference, post-colonialisms and practice-based research methodologies.



Mahammad Abul Hasnat is from Bangladesh and recently completed his PhD in Education from University of Canterbury, New Zealand. The title of his PhD research is “Parents Engagement in Education in Rural Context in Bangladesh: Problems and Possibilities”. His research interest is in exploring how the social discourses in the rural context influence parental engagement practices. Currently, he is exploring how parents' and teachers' perceptions and practices become normative in the rural context and how the norms could be disrupted and changed. He is also keen to involve himself in project-based research work where he can contribute his knowledge and continue his own professional development.

Introduction: why play with data?

One of the affordances of arts-based research approaches is the power to bring data to life and to make it easily accessible to its intended audiences. Art is a process that engages individuals in ways that involve their emotions and visceral experiences as well as their intellects. It invites multi-levelled responses and it allows subjectivity and ambivalences. A playwright like Brecht can rigorously critique social inequalities, travesties of justice, corruption and individual cruelty and at the same time manipulate his audiences to alternatively engage with characters and be repulsed by their actions. A painter like Picasso can saturate a single canvas with fragmented images of war that evoke pain in the viewer as well as cerebral identification of the wastage of war. The way arts play with aesthetic awareness offers a communicative space that can go beyond verbal analysis or persuasion.

Researchers who draw on arts-based methods may use arts processes to elicit data, to analyse it or to present it. Sometimes two or three of these functions are integrated in the arts process. This article uses arts processes to re - present previously reported data, and to perhaps find further layers of analysis in the course of doing so. Similar approaches may be found in the work of Owen (2009) who engaged a composer to set to music data from his British study of school closures and in that of Belliveau (2015) who presented a keynote at the IDEA conference in Paris where he performed a discussion of his work in teaching Shakespeare to elementary school students. Presented as a community opera Owen's transcriptions of interviews with parents, teachers and local authorities about a school threatened with closure became a swelling debate between policy decisions and small people's hopes. By slipping in and out of role in his keynote Belliveau not only vividly illustrated the processes of his work with the children, he also challenged the static and authoritarian nature of conference proceedings.

The data we propose to play with here has already been reported in a doctoral thesis (Hasnat, 2017). It emerged from an investigation of rural parents' engagement in schooling in Bangladesh. By presenting a portion of the data dramatically we hope to reaffirm the humanity of the data, the ways it represents, albeit anonymously, real people's hopes, problems, frustrations, fears and courage.

Very many of the parents interviewed were illiterate. The total literacy rate of this region is about 46.8% percent of the population. In addition, while the teachers interviewed were literate they are very unlikely to read an extensive academic report in English. Therefore the very people the study is about are excluded from the audience of reported findings, be it in the form of the thesis or of ensuing journal articles. The idea of playing with the data comes from a search of how the local people could be reached by a report and could be encouraged to further discuss the findings. We see this writing as a kind of experimental rehearsal for real presentation back in the field.

The word play has several wonderful layers of meaning: as a noun it can denote a dramatic artefact or childlike fun-filled exploration; as a verb it can represent thoughtful arrangement and re-arrangement of forms or ideas or the act of making an instrument come to life. We use the word with all those embedded connotations. The original research that produced the data is the work of Hasnat, and the concepts for dramatisation come from Janinka. The playing is something we are both engaging in.

Social drama, direct theatre, and human stories hidden in statistics

The connection between drama/theatre and real-life events is often made. In colloquial language we frequently talk about the drama of everyday affairs. Shakespeare's Hamlet (Act 3, scene 2, 17–24) instructed the actors he hires to “hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature: to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure”. Drawing on the construct of social anthropology Turner (1988) examined the performativeness of social processes and proposed a concept of social drama. He used the concept to examine significant periods in history and argued that “social interactions of a conflictive, competitive or agonistic type” are “processually structured” (pp. 33-5) and identified four historically recurring phases. We suggest that Turner's theorisation of social drama could be extended to include contemporary power plays between poverty and capital gain, first world privilege and third world dependency, war and

migration, forces of hegemony and movements of liberation. Some of these social dramas cross the stage where we will present out data, others lurk in the wings. Schechner (1993) developed the concept of direct theatre to explain how public events, and particularly political actions transform public spaces into “theatre where collective reflexivity is performed” (p. 83). He gave the example of Tienanmen Square where the protesting “students improvised in public while the officials, as always, rehearsed their options behind closed doors” (p. 86). He stressed that he did not use the word theatre metaphorically: people were deliberately playing out their history to an audience who they reached through the means of watching media as well as live. Numerous contemporary examples of direct theatre could be added to Schechner’s illustrative example: the refugee boats landing on the shores of Italy, the wall whose foundations are being laid between the United States and Mexico, the genuflecting rows of sportsmen refusing to stand for the flag they believe has become compromised.

Whereas some acts in the making of history deliberately seek and find the public eye, others, perhaps equally important, are played out on small unseen stages. The voices of some of the players in the shaping of history are only heard through the reports of others. The issue of rural parental engagement in schooling in Bangladesh is one such case. The investigation of the experiences and perceptions of rural parents and teachers captured some of the nuances of their stories and of the complexities that are played out in village attitudes and politics. However, in the form of an academic thesis, those voices may never be heard by the shapers of policy. An intention of performing the presentation of their voices is to bring out the personal human stories that tend to be hidden behind statistics. The scenes that follow depict the absence of constructive interaction between rural parents and the teachers of the local schools, and suggest the complex and apparently insurmountable economic and social factors that create the communication gap. They also evoke some of the reasons why interaction is sorely needed.

Scene1: The indifference of parents

There is a small stage, like a high table top. Two hand puppets lie on the table ready to be picked up and brought to life. One is dressed in a lungi; the other in a short-sleeved shirt and dark trousers. On the screen above is the image of two groups of people, a little apart and not quite facing each other. All the faces are a little blurred. One group are dressed in similar lungis; the other in shirts and trousers.

The teacher puppet, in shirt and trousers, is picked up first.

Teacher: Students of those families in which parents are communicating with the school to know about their children’s performance and providing their care at home are doing well and changing their attitude to learning. However, the numbers of such parents are microscopic; you can count them on your fingers.

The parent puppet is picked up, and stands turning slightly way. Silent.

Teacher: *(with voice showing concern)* When we find any problem with any student’s irregularity with attendance in the class or about a student’s performance then we need to make contact with the parents.

The parent moves slightly, but remains silent.

Teacher: If we can consider school as a family and consider every stakeholder as a member of this family, then we need to work together for any problems or making any functions successful.

Parent: *(in a half-hearted tone)* In some point teachers know more about my son than me. It could be because of the bustle in my life for earning money and food for my family. Communication will make me updated about my son's performance, and I will get information about any gap in my son’s learning. Then I will get a chance to fill up the gap by discussing it with his teachers. Without communicating with the teachers, it would not be possible to improve.

Teacher: (*stepping forward and speaking with energy*) We are experiencing a problem every day: some students come and then run away after a few classes. It happens mostly after the tiffin break. After the tiffin break, we find very few students in the classroom. There is a huge chance for the students to involve themselves in different illegal activities in this time.

Parent: I send my children to attend school. If they do not go to school and go to other places to play then it would not be possible for me to know about it. (*He turns to squarely face the teacher.*) The teacher can inform us. If teacher informs us, then we could be conscious and make our children aware that we are concerned about them.

Teacher: Whenever we invite parents to the school, parents do not attend on that day. Parents do not consider the importance of our school invitation compared to their work. (*He pauses, and when the parent remains silent he continues.*) During the result announcement time a tiny number of parents join us. The average percentage of the attendance of the parents is maximum five percent. Those who do not attend do not even inform us whether they will attend or not and also do not share the reason of their inability to participate.

Parent: (*mumbling slightly*) I might not be able to respond to comments about my son's result.
Teacher: (*firmly*) When we invite parents to come for parents assembly, most of the parents do not come; they show their apathy about it. (*He looks back at the parent and then turns to face the audience.*) If parents can collaborate with us and look after their children at home then it would be easy for the students to develop their education.

There is a pause, as both look away from each other. Then the parent slowly moves forward.

Parent: Usually, I do not visit the school as I do not get time and I do not need to visit, but this time I am visiting to talk to the teachers about reducing my children's fees. I am unable to pay that amount now. Without fees, they will not allow my kids for the exam. So I am here to convince teachers to reduce how much I have to pay.

Teacher: Usually, parents do not visit the school; they visit only when their children failed to get a promotion to the next class. In visiting school, they frequently criticise us about why their children failed to get a promotion to the next class. I do not pay less money for my children, they might say; you people do not take care properly.

Parent: My daughter is studying in this school for four years. However, I have not received any invitation for any meeting or any parental assembly. If I could receive any letter, I would come. The invitation letters never come to us.

Teacher: Please look, here is my invitation letter and here is a register, where I kept the names of all those I sent letters to. It is nothing but a complaining tendency by the parents. Not only do they refuse the invitation letter, parents do not even respond after seeing the result card that we send through our students.

Parent: I do not know about a result card; my son never gave it to me. So what can I say about that? (*He turns to the teacher.*) Today I will discuss with my son to know about this and find out the reason behind this.

A further pause, then the parent continues, speaking to the audience.

Parent: I am busy with my livelihood and am busy with my work; I forgot the date of invitation, and I missed attending. After sending a letter for a meeting or any event in the school, it would be nice if teachers would remind me. Teachers can contact us or can use a mike for an announcement to remind all parents.

Teacher: Truly speaking we are too busy with our classes and already crushed under the teaching load. After conducting our classes, we lost our courage to do that. We do not get time to check with parents.

Parent: I attended different activities before. However, I did not get any constructive discussion there. Everyone delivered aimless discussion, mainly political. I have not got anything for my learning. So, I prefer to go for my work, not to attend a school function.

Teacher: Because of parental illiteracy they have an inferiority complex, and this keeps them away from school. When a parent does not know what their children are studying in the school, they cannot look after their children. They usually say to us: what will I do to go to school, as I do not know anything about education?

Parent: I am illiterate, I cannot understand what education is, and I cannot even figure out what is inside the education. That is why I never attend the school programmes.

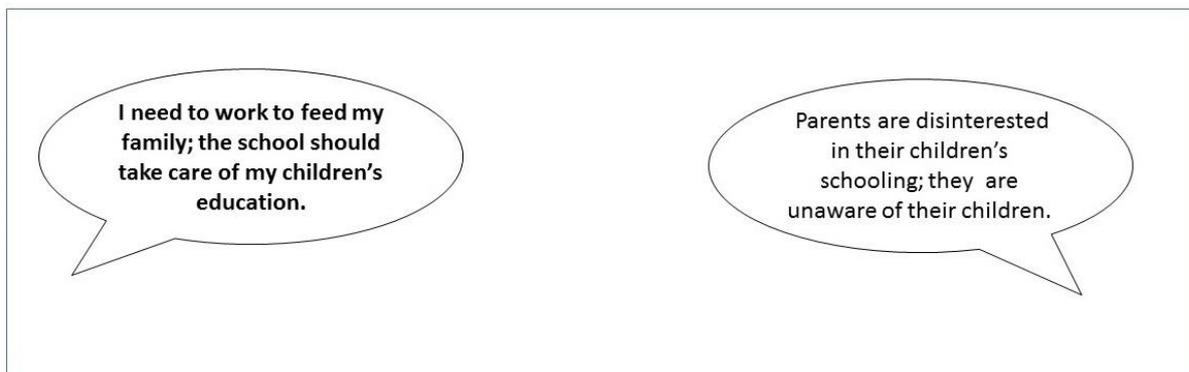
Another short silence. Then the parent speaks again.

Parent: I do not feel comfortable communicating and participating in school activities because of highly politicisation of each and every aspect. Politicians always consider their interest in the decision-making process rather than school related interests.

Teacher: Political figures are the local means for any government support for the school. We need to take their favour as they are holding power within our locality. They are the local decision makers for distributing government allocated funds for the support of any school. So if we do not involve them in any of our programmes, they will not consider giving support to our school.

At this point both puppets freeze.

On the overhead screen, over the groups of figures, the following two speech bubbles appear:

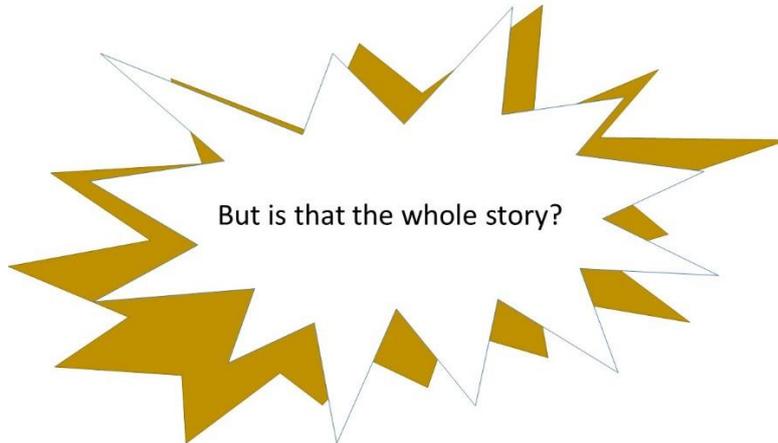


The image then gives way to the following words on a blank screen:

Yes, that's what the published research says too.

- *In Bangladesh:* low socio-economic background of parents and illiteracy block engagement in schooling (Kabir& Akter, 2014; Ali, 2011; Rasheed, 2011)
- *And globally:* Parents from disadvantaged families were less able to involve themselves with their children's schooling (Feuerstein, 2000; Desimone, 1999; Chowa, Masa & Tucker, 2013; Yamamoto & Sonnenschein, 2016) and that, as a result, students from those family backgrounds performed less well (Downey,2002), and teachers tended to perceive these parents as apathetic (O'Hehir & Savelsberg, 2014) .

The next image comes in with a flash:



Scene 2: No. Not the whole story! And it's not just about individual attitudes....

The same stage. The two hand puppets are standing on either side. Behind each one now stands a cluster of cut-out figures on sticks. On the parent's side some wear a lungi and some a sari. On the teacher's side they all wear short-sleeved shirts and dark trousers and some wear a tie.

The screen above shows the inside of a rural classroom with its open windows, worn tin roof, mud floor and eighty or so students crowded onto the wooden benches.

The teacher puppet walks towards the audience and gestures towards the cluster of parents:

Teacher: The parents in this region are so simple and dwelling in the village. They do not show any vision for their children's education, the way conscious parents do. Most are involved with their work in others' fields as day labourers. Because of their illiteracy, they are not knowledgeable about their children's education. *(He takes a deep breath with disappointment)*. Mainly they do not know what to do with their children schooling, or how to do it. Because of that, they cannot take care of their children.

The parent puppet looks up at the screen, nods slowly and turns to the audience:

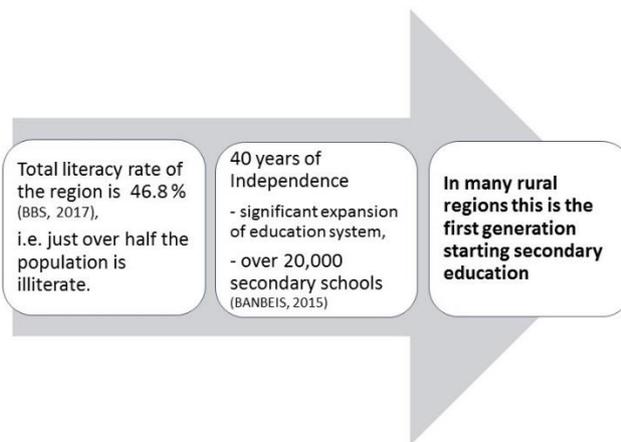
Parent: My son is going to school and learning something. That is enough for me.

Teacher: Parents have a type of fear about school and us teachers. When I met any parents, I would ask why they are not attending functions and they would reply: ‘I am not well informed about my son’s education, so what would I do if I was there? What can I say there about my children education?’

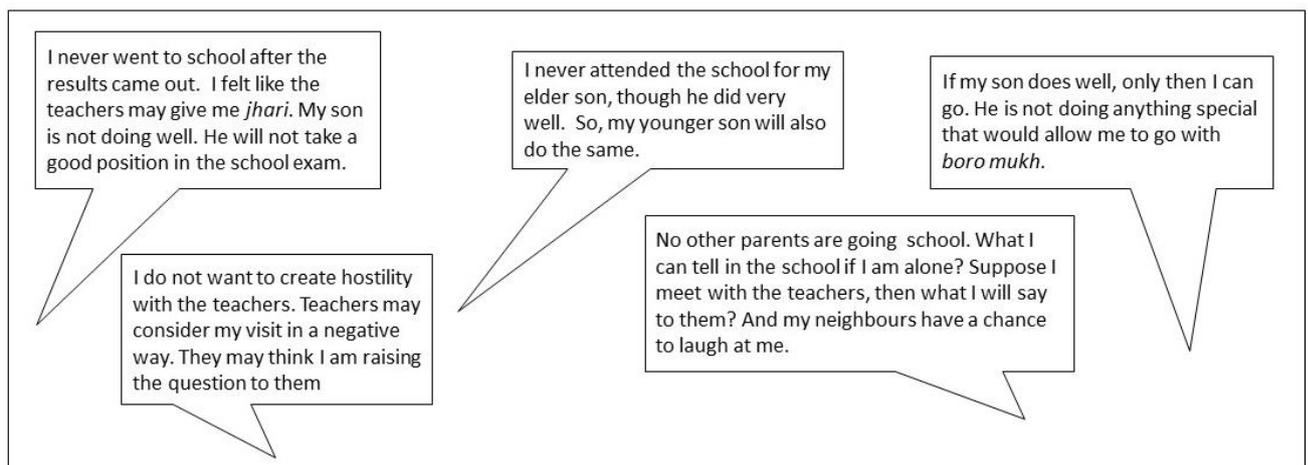
He looks up at the image of the students in the classroom and then at the cluster of parents and shakes his head.

Teacher: Rich and conscious parents have migrated to the urban areas.

The following flashes up on the overhead screen:



The overhead image changes to a cluster of villagers with the following speeches bubbles appearing one by one:



The parent puppet nods as each of these speech bubbles appears and indicates the speaker in the cluster behind him. He turns back to the audience and says:

Parent: I cannot maintain the school environment, as I am a man of the field. That is why I stay in my own area. (*He pauses for a long moment and then continues.*) How can I go to the school, meet with the teachers and introduce myself saying ‘I am father one of your students’? Is it possible? If they call me, only then can I go there.

Teacher: (*pointing to one of the group behind the parent*) Look at him; he is a shopkeeper, selling fruits in the street. It is the first time he is sitting in front of me. He is not feeling comfortable about seating in front of me. That is why he is not talking too much.

The parent puppet nods in agreement.

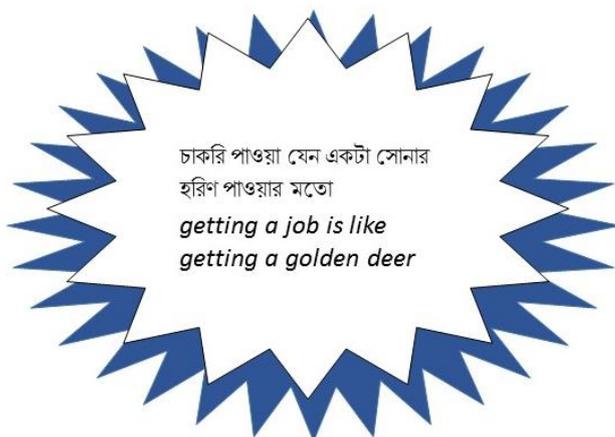
The overhead screen displays the following words:

parents feel helpless
embarrassed to face teachers
they do not know
what their children are meant to be doing
teachers
are the learned persons in society
how can parents reply to the teacher's knowledge?

Parent: Higher education is so expensive in our country, and I am not able to bear those expenses. At the same time, my son will not be a judge or a barrister. My son is going to school and learning something. That is enough for me.

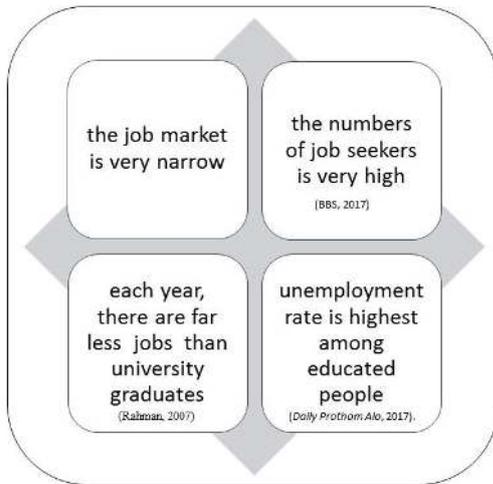
Teacher: A few parents are trying to educate their children, overcoming their financial struggle. But some fail to continue their children's education and have to stop in the middle because of not being able to bear educational expenses.

The overhead screen flashes:



Teacher: A certificate is needed to get any job now in our job market. At least a class eight certificate. So, many parents send their children to school up to the level eight. After that they can get a job in the garments sector. (*He pauses, looks towards the parent cluster, and continues.*) Some students attend class only just before exam time and then sit for the examination. They only want to get promotion to the next class and get a certificate.

The overhead screen flashes:

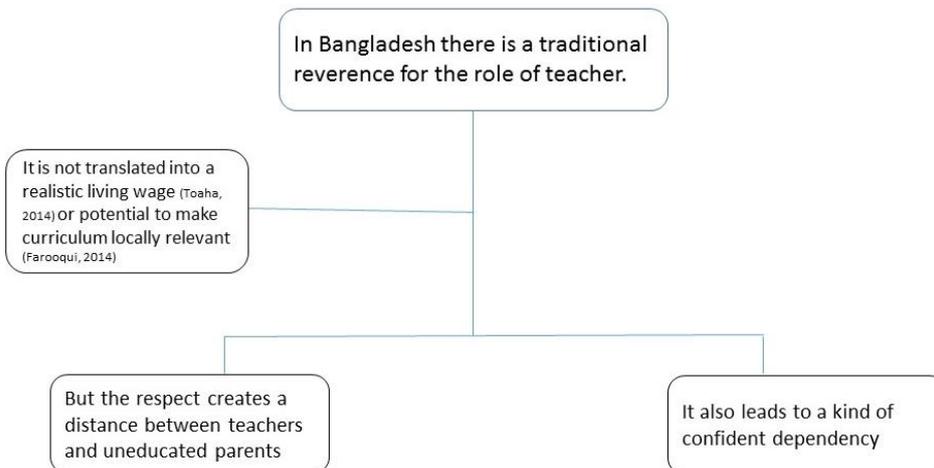


Parent: My neighbour's son began higher education and failed because his father could not bear the expenses. He had to come back to the village and he now work beside his father.

He looks up at the overhead above, shakes his head, looks at the cluster of parents around him, looks at the cluster of teachers, turns back to the audience and says with an assumed confidence:

Parent: Maybe my son is doing well, and that is why teachers are not complaining to me. When everything is fine, then I do not need to go to school.

The overhead screen flashes:



Parent: Teachers are *Shikkha Guru*. They teach everyone education, etiquette. That why I always feel scared to talk to them, in case I do any wrong. I entrusted my son to the teachers. They will do everything, whatever they need for my children's education. I am only concerned about if they misbehave in any way.

Teacher: Parents' expectations are all teacher centred. Parents desire that teachers be more than enough for taking care of their children's educational needs.

Parent: Sir, you are our people, and you are there for taking care of my son. I am hopeful you people will look after my children.

Teacher: They are firm in insisting that they are not able to do anything because they do not have education themselves

Parent: What can I do for my children's education? It is the teachers' job and let them do it. I hope teachers are playing their role, and will be doing their job for the benefit of my children as well.

Teacher: We face a problem when any student fails to get the promotion to the next class. Parents come to school and force us to allow those failed students into the next class. They claim that it is not their doing that their children are been unable to get the promotion. Parents blame us for their children's results.

The overhead screen brings up the following words:

Perhaps there is too great a gap
between the goals of schooling
and the experience of rural parents...
Perhaps engagement is not possible...

Perhaps the gap is inevitable
because of the extent of educational change...

Policy asks parents to engage,
but where are the resources to teach parents and schools
how to engage?

This is not a problem that exists in Bangladesh alone.

*The Parent and Teacher look at the screen, look sadly at each other, and nod.
However, the screen flashes again:*

BUT
there are problems with schools
and problems with young people

These need parents and teachers and the wider community

What will happen if they can't work together?

Scene 3: The cries of need

The same small stage and overhead screen.

The parent and teacher puppets stand to the sides to the stage. The focus is on the overhead screen where a series of scenes are portrayed in captions and succession of images. The parent and teacher add occasional comments.

*The screen shows the following title: **Limited scope for teachers to reach all students***

It is followed by a succession of images showing the crowded classroom, the school closed because of flood, an Eid celebration, crowds of students and their parents coming to the examination halls.

Teacher: *(indicating the succession of images)* You can have a look our academic calendar, where you could see that we spend most of the time on holidays, internal examinations and celebrating different formalities of school programmes. Within this short period, we cannot get enough time to finish our syllabus.

Parent: *(thoughtfully)* During the time of the flood, it overflows the school premises. The school remains closed. Students could not get to school anyway because the routes have been flooded.

Teacher: do not get enough time to repeat my lesson for the second time. So, in order to remember any topic of a subject, students need to study at home. There is no any other alternative. Students' absenteeism increases when they do not understand any topic from the lesson. They lose interest to attend school. Sometimes they would end up by dropping out.

*The overhead screens shows a new title: **Young people are out of control.***

It is followed by a succession of images showing boys watching television at a tea stall late at night, boys smoking and joking, a group of boys teasing a nervous-looking girl.

Teacher: *(indicating the images)* I can see my students are spending their time outside at the tea stall and watching TV at night. Sometimes I turn up there and then they leave the place.

Parent: Every day I return in the evening from my hard work, feel tired, and do not get that head space to check on my children activities.

*A new title is seen on the overhead screen: **Students' irregular attendance***

The succession of images that follows a classroom with some empty seats, harvesting, a boy helping his father pull a cart to the market, A girl helping her mother cook, another boy with his father on a small boat loaded with produce, a village marriage ceremony. Parent and teacher watch.

Teacher: As a result of students' irregularity they are staying in the race behind any lesson. I can see irregular students failed to interact and receive the lesson that I discuss, because of lack of the previous lecture.

Parent: At the harvesting time the landowner asks me to bring my son to work.

Teacher: Some families from here go to Sylhet district for employment with their sons, sometimes with their whole family. After finishing their work, they return home with cash and crops as their wages. At that time students cannot attend school. It becomes very tough for us to do anything effective. We close our school and utilise the rest of the day for our family needs. But this time impacts on our whole academic period.

Parent: Sometimes I send my son for work, but not every day. When my job giver needs additional support and asks for my son, then I bring him to that work. His little contribution has helped my family a lot.

Teacher: When a parent can see that he does not need to pay educational expenses and on the contrary his son is contributing his family and he is getting relief from financial pressure, then he wants to see his son continue working rather than sending him to school.

*The overhead screen shows a new title: **Child marriage***

A succession of images show a group of young girls in the classroom, a village marriage, a young girls washing pots, cooking, hanging clothes on bushes to dry.

Teacher: Most commonly parents cannot bear the educational expenses for their daughter; they decide to cut down the expenditure. A young daughter is in high demand for marriage so parents decide to marry off their daughter when they receive an offer from a good family.

Parent: My neighbours and other community people criticise me for my daughter's literacy. They ask me: are you planning to make your girl a barrister? Do not keep your adult daughter with you!

Teacher: Some parents decide to arrange a marriage for their daughter to save her from eve-teasing.

*The overhead screen shows a new title: **Eve-Teasing***

A succession of images show a group of young girls walking to school, a group of boys laughing among themselves, boys calling out to the girls, a boy with his hand on his heart talking to a girl who looks nervous, a couple of boys with mobile phone cameras snapping photos of girls.

Teacher: Good looking girls are mostly affected by the eve-teasers. Sometimes the boys take a picture or a video without getting permission. They may pull at a girl's scarf, and even make proposals of love. Parents also do not feel secure about sending their daughter to the school for that reason.

Parent: My daughter was receiving a proposal for love from an eve-teaser on the way to and back from school. When eve-teaser did not get any positive response from my daughter he came to me and wanted to marry my daughter. He was not doing anything so he could not take responsibility for my daughter. Naturally, I refused his proposal, and then he became angry with me and said he would look at me further. To avoid any other further incidences I took my daughter to her grandfather's house and arranged her marriage with a suitable groom.

*A new title comes to the overhead screen: **Addiction***

The images that follow show boys offering each other cigarettes, smoking with older men at a tea stall, lounging back in a classroom bench, outside the school laughing among themselves as they smoke.

Teacher: In the classroom the students who are addicted to tobacco look different. Most of them cannot follow my lectures, and they create a disturbance in the classroom.

Parent: My son does not smoke. I cannot accept that blame.

*A new title appears: **Above all there is a matter of money***

The images that appeared before in this scene are circulated again, in random order. They are interspersed with the following captions:

To some families, education seems like laughing at low level

ক্ষুধার রাজ্যে পৃথিবী গদ্যময় পূর্ণিমা- চাঁদ যেন বলসানো রুটি

The world is devastated by hunger that is rendered so matter-of-fact that the full moon looks like grilled bread

Pressure piled on pressure (মরার উপর খাড়ার ঘা)

The images continue as the parent and teacher speak.

Teacher: Besides the support from the government, students need other support from parents when they are enrolled in school. There are expenses like paper, pen, examination fees, session charge, supporting books and so on. Without that students cannot continue their study properly.

Parent: When I have failed to provide very basic requirements for my children's educational needs, such as good clothes, food, books, pencils, guide books, and examination fees, then how I can provide private tuition for my son? In this region, I have seen that without attending any private tuition no one can get a good result.

Teacher: In the morning I spend two hours with fifteen students in each hour for teaching them privately. I lose my energy there. When school time starts, I can manage the first two hours; after that my body and brain do not allow me to give my full effort in the class lecture. Because I know that after school time I will be involved with tuition.

Parent: My son always requests me to send him to any teacher for private tuition, as he is facing problems and not getting full support from the teacher in the class. He expects everything will be okay if he can work with any teacher.

Teacher: I involve myself in teaching privately because of some extra money, for surviving in this society in a right way.

Both parent and teacher look up at the screen together and then at each other.

The teacher slowly turns back to the audience and begins to speak hesitantly and thoughtfully.

Teacher: Still I can realise the gap between both teacher and parents, and we are blaming each other. Without filling the gap, expecting a response from the parents will not be possible.

Back to the authors

Our play stops here, but the research did not. In a final group discussion involving parents and teachers, suggestions evolved about how to improve communication and about ways to engage parents that were meaningful to them and that fitted their need to earn a living. Whether the suggestions would be translated into practice was still to be seen. However, the discussion in itself proved that, despite all the entrenched differences, effective communication between rural parents and teachers was possible.

The research also found the case of one head teacher in the district who had already taken an extensive personal initiative to go out to parents instead of simply expecting them to come to the school: he talked with them in market tea stalls and visited them in their homes. He engaged them in dialogues about their everyday lives as well as about the schooling of their children. Leading by example, he involved his teachers and his school committee in the process of meetings. He showed that illiteracy need not be an obstacle to parental involvement in education and, working within the cultural traditions of the community, he made sure all parents were welcome and respected at the school.

In shaping this article, we talked about how much to include in the dramatisation. We played with different possibilities, including ways of bringing the head teacher and the motorbike he rode around

the community onto the stage to tell his story. And perhaps there may be a sequel where he does so. In the meantime, however, we decided to end the script with the problem. While government policy in Bangladesh calls for parental engagement as means to extend and improve schooling, in practice there is very little engagement, particularly in the rural regions which contain about over two thirds of the population. The absence of engagement is recognised, but the causes have not previously been explored in any detail.

In as much as the writing of this article is an exploration of a way the research can be shared in Bangladesh rural communities, and perhaps elsewhere, we thought it more useful to let the voices and the socio-economic realities stand on their own without resolution. Perhaps audiences might then join the debate. Perhaps we could develop some kind of forum theatre where audiences could explore their own preferred strategic interventions. And if needed, the head teacher could still eventually rev up his motorbike and ride in.

The advantage of play is that it allows further possibilities.

So what does this way of approaching the data mean?

We have already suggested that this dramatisation of the data can serve as a dress rehearsal for presenting the data and the ideas arising from it to audiences who are closely concerned with the issues but are unlikely to read an academic document. However, this particular play with the data is appearing in an academic journal: does its form have any value for the journal readers? We believe that it has.

Firstly, it is an embodied reminder that research is not an abstraction but rather that it is a capture of the needs and voices of real people. Academic conventions require processes of analysis and interpretation, often through the lens of a particular theoretical position. The thesis in which this data has been originally reported proposed that a theory of social discourse (Gee, 1992) would illuminate how a community's discourses circulate to reinforce particular ways of talking and believing, and argued that this was happening not only in the rural context but also at the national administrative level. Such theorisation is indeed useful as it allows the researcher to probe further and examine the issues of poverty, first-generation-schooling, and dysfunctional practices that underlie the surface content in the statements made by teachers and parents. The dramatisation here takes a different approach: it brings the participants onto the same stage so that they can face each other and so allow an imaginary dialogue to evolve. The academic theorisation is valuable but it can give the impression that the problems are rendered manageable by being encapsulated in the theory. This dramatisation keeps the positional arguments alive and emphasises that they are the expressions of real people who are still living with the experiences they are describing. It also suggests that it is these real people on the ground who can address the problems they experience if they can find the means to trustfully communicate with each other. And they will probably do it without recourse to theory.

Secondly, our dramatisation is an invitation to further play by readers, just as it is hoped that future audiences will want to interject with questions or accounts of their own experiences and to improvise further developments. Academic writing tends to assume an authoritative tenor and so may not allow enough space to allow the reader or the audience to enter into the text. Issues of parental engagement in schooling are important in most of our societies, not only in rural Bangladesh. In New Zealand, too, there are on-going and important debates about how much say parents should have in education and about what areas they should have a say in. There are also concerns about which parents in our community are empowered to have a say, and questions about how schools can create better opportunities for engagement by all kinds of parents. The issues presented in this article may in themselves provoke questioning and opinions about parental engagement in New Zealand, and in other countries where this journal is read. We hope that the accessible way that they are presented through this dramatisation will facilitate the questioning and debate.

And finally, we hope that this approach, while preserving a respect for the research, allows readers to enjoy the reading process.

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