Literacy Research in Indian Languages (LiRIL)

Key Findings of a Study of Literacy Acquisition in Kannada and Marathi (2013-2016)

LiRIL PROJECT TEAM

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INTRODUCTION

Early literacy instruction is in urgent need of attention in Indian educational contexts. Many of us know about the poor reading levels of students across India (due to the work of ASER), but this has not been studied in enough detail to understand why reading levels are so low. Until now, there is not much research on how early literacy is taught to students, or how they progress in learning to read and write in Indian languages and scripts. This is especially true in underprivileged settings.

The Literacy Research in Indian Languages (LiRIL) project was designed to provide a much-needed mapping of practices, issues and challenges that arise in the teaching and learning of early reading and writing. It was conducted in two socioeconomically underprivileged sites, Yadgir (Karnataka) and Wada (Maharashtra). A cohort of over 700 government school students was tracked over three years (from Grades 1-3) as they learned to read and write in Marathi and Kannada.

KEY RESEARCH AREAS

Curriculum and Classroom Dynamics

Classroom transactions, curricular materials, teacher beliefs and knowledge were analysed to understand contexts of literacy acquisition.

Literacy Acquisition

Children's acquisition of literacy was tracked through Grades 1-3 in Kannada and Marathi. Lower order skills (*akshara* recognition and writing, word reading and writing) and higher order skills (comprehension and composition) were examined.

Marginalized Learners

We sought to understand the specific challenges faced by the most academically and socially marginalized students in the classroom.

Where We Worked

Both sites selected for the project are in socio-economically disadvantaged districts: Yadgir block, Yadgir district, Karnataka; and Wada block, Palghar district, Maharashtra.

Figure 1: LiRIL Project Sites.

Yadgir block's population comprises 58% OBCs, 24% SCs and 12% STs, while 5% are Muslim or Christian. Linguistically, while the northern dialect of Kannada is the majority language, Telugu and Urdu are also spoken by a small percentage of the population. A base-line study commissioned in 2009 by Tata Trusts found that about 44% of the population of this district are registered as Below the Poverty Line.

Wada block, Palghar district is home to the Katkari, Malhar Koli and Warli tribes. These three tribes, classified amongst the primitive tribes, together form nearly 70% of the population in the area. The student population we worked with consists of 87% ST and 7% OBC students. Linguistically, while tribal languages differ from standardized Marathi, the school language is comprehended by these communities. 29% of the households of the district are registered as Below the Poverty Line.
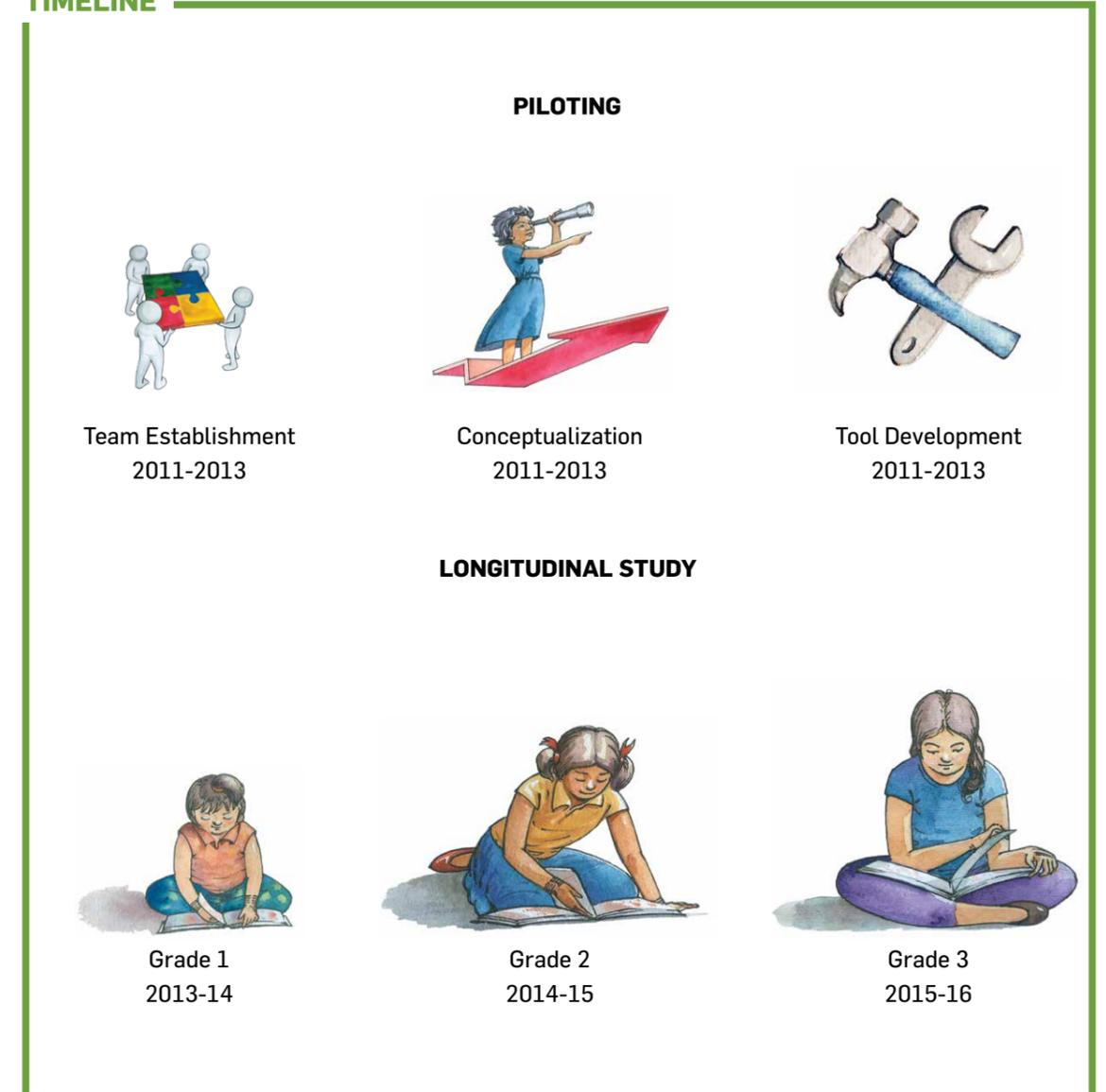
TIMELINE

PILOTING

Team Establishment
2011-2013

Conceptualization
2011-2013

Tool Development
2011-2013

LONGITUDINAL STUDY

Grade 1
2013-14

Grade 2
2014-15

Grade 3
2015-16

Figure 2: Timeline of the Project.

METHODS

A. Quantitative

- Bi-annual literacy assessments (360 students at each site) tested
  - Concepts of print
  - Akshara Recognition and Writing
  - Word Reading and Spelling
  - Passage Reading and Comprehension
  - Prompted Writing

B. Qualitative

- Classroom observations (over 100 observations per site)
- Teacher interviews (of 32 teachers in Wada and 24 teachers in Yadgir)
- Curricular materials analyses
- Target children observations (focused observations and conversations with 24 students per site, across different achievement levels)
- Case-studies (of 2 academically and socially marginalized children in Wada, and 1 in Yadgir).

FINDINGS

What Did We Learn?

This section presents the major findings from the LIRIL project, which is organized into six sub-sections:

I.   Aims and Goals of Early Literacy Classrooms
II. Curricular Materials
III. Decoding the Script
IV. Comprehension and Composition
V.   Teacher Knowledge and Preparation
VI. Marginalized Learners

In conducting the study, we came across common beliefs/ questions that many teachers hold about early language and literacy learning. In each of the six sections, we present our results as "answers" to these beliefs.
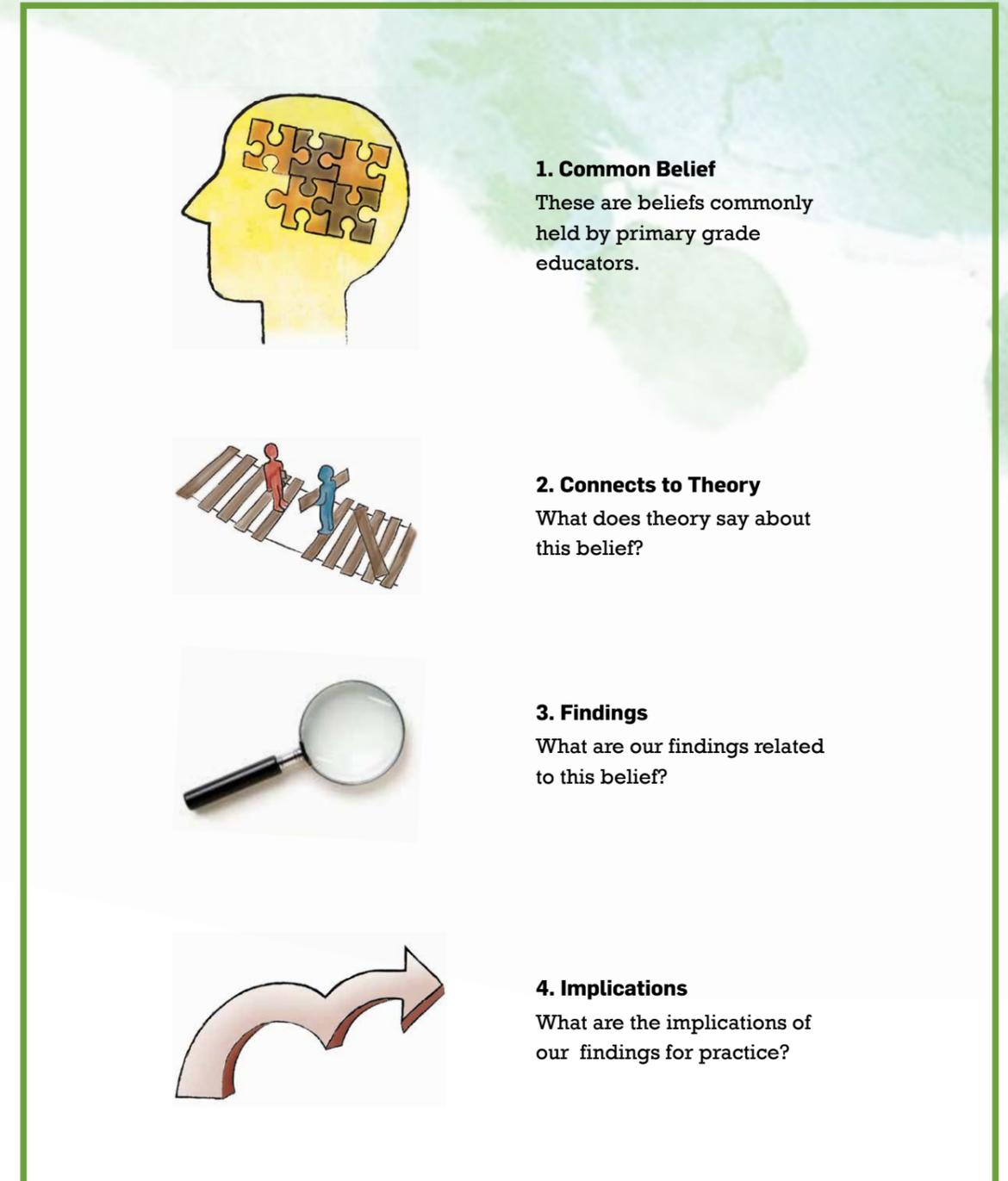
Each section is organized as shown in Figure 3.

1. Common Belief
These are beliefs commonly held by primary grade educators.

2. Connects to Theory
What does theory say about this belief?

3. Findings
What are our findings related to this belief?

4. Implications
What are the implications of our findings for practice?

Figure 3: Icons to Represent Different Sections of the Report.

i. Aims and Goals of Early Literacy Classrooms

Common Belief

"In the beginning years, we should focus on teaching children to read and write aksharas and words accurately, and in higher grades, focus on comprehension"
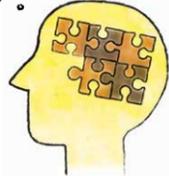
Connects to Theory

Most scholars agree that we should simultaneously teach children to make meaning, even when they learn to read *aksharas* and words (decode) in the early grades.

Therefore, a balanced literacy classroom should address multiple goals. For example, Luke & Freebody (1991) suggest that students should be enabled to take at least four roles related to texts: (a) code breaker; (b) meaning-maker; (c) text user; and (d) text-critic.
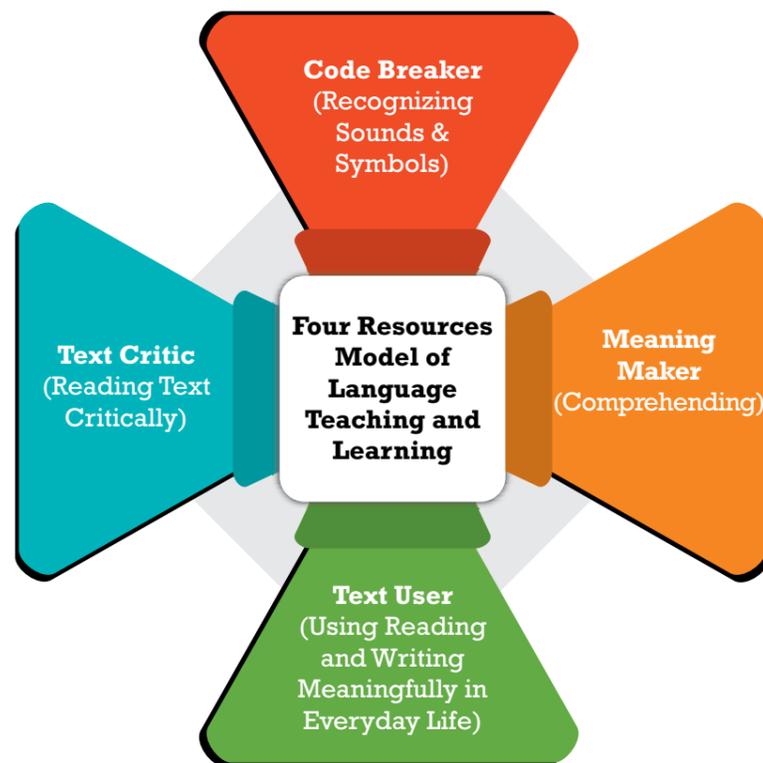
Code Breaker
(Recognizing Sounds & Symbols)

Text Critic
(Reading Text Critically)

Four Resources Model of Language Teaching and Learning

Meaning Maker
(Comprehending)

Text User
(Using Reading and Writing Meaningfully in Everyday Life)

Figure 4: Balanced Literacy Classroom: The Four Resources Model of Language Teaching and Learning.

Findings

- Most classrooms in the LiRIL study did not simultaneously attend to meaning making in the early grades. Instead, we found that the time is devoted to teaching children to recognize *aksharas* and to copy-write them, or to read isolated words and spell them, as well as read passages mechanically (Menon, Sajitha S., Apte, Basargekar & Krishnamurthy, in press).

- There are few opportunities for oral language development or collective meaning making through discussions, since children spend most of their time copy-writing.

- There are very few opportunities to engage with rich content or texts.

- Relevance for learning to read and write is not strongly established in the child's mind, and children don't see reading and writing as meaningful or useful.

Interaction between researcher and 2nd grade child (Yadgir, Karnataka) regarding picture book reading.

Researcher (R) (Holding up a picture book): "What is this?"

Child (C): This is a "copy" to read ("Copy" is the colloquial term for a notebook.)

R: What will you find inside this?

C: Words.

R: What will you do with these words?

C: Read them, then copy them down.

This child had no idea that a picture book might contain a story, or that reading might include a search for meaning.

Figure 5: An Example of Children's Understanding of Books.

Implications

- An implication of our work is that we need to take meaning making more seriously in the early grades. The relevance of literacy should be established early on, particularly for first generation learners who come from non-literate backgrounds. The different aims and goals of literacy (of meaning, communication, expression, imagination etc.) should be addressed in the early grade classroom.

ii. Curricular Materials in Early Language Classrooms

"These days, we have more interesting teaching-learning materials available. These help children to learn to read and write better."

Common Belief
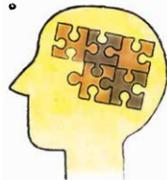
Connects to Theory

- Theory tells us that simply changing curricular materials will usually not lead to significant changes in classroom practices.
- At the same time, reform of curricular materials is one important way by which we can begin to bring about changes in the classroom (Ball & Cohen, 1996).
- Many teachers in India (as well as abroad) rely on curricular materials to provide guidance for their day-to-day teaching, such that well designed curricular materials in the classroom can definitely impact both teaching and student learning (Menon & Thirumalai, 2016).

Findings

- We closely analysed the Balbharati textbooks for Grades 1-3 (Maharashtra). Balbharati is a textbook based curriculum.
- We also analysed the Nali Kali curriculum (Karnataka) which is a multi-grade, multi-level (MGML) activity based curriculum.
- Even though these two curricula appear to be very different, we concluded that the differences are mostly at the surface level, for example in the domains of classroom organisation and grouping, types of teaching learning materials, the role of the teacher and the approach to teaching *aksharas* and word reading.
- Despite these differences, the focus areas of both curricula are very similar: they both emphasize lower order skills and rote and repetition.
- Student learning levels in reading and writing are poor at both the sites. It is poorer in Yadgir where Nali Kali curriculum is followed, as compared to Wada (Balbharati curriculum).
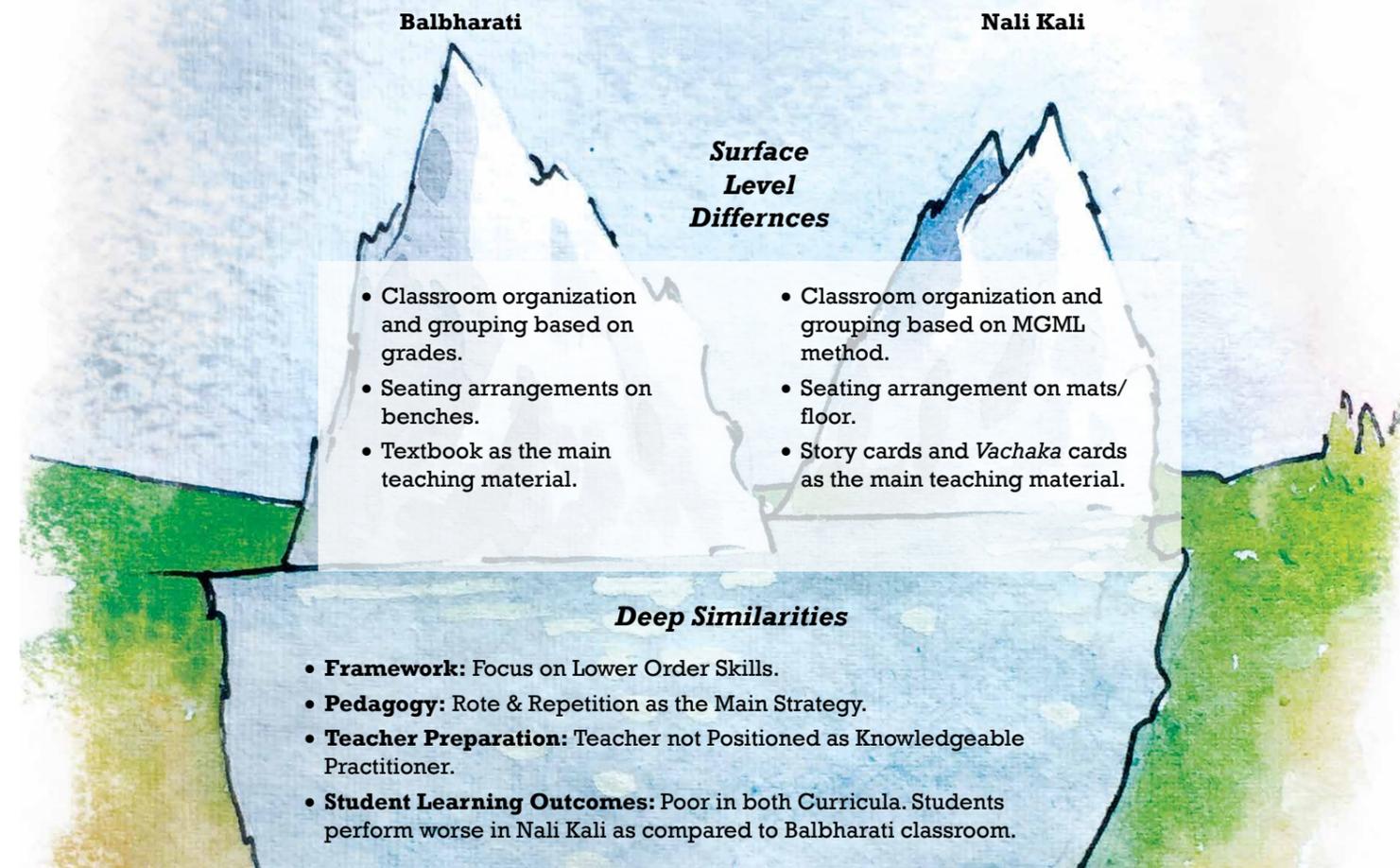
Balbharati　　　　　　　　　**Nali Kali**

Surface Level Differnces

- Classroom organization and grouping based on grades.
- Seating arrangements on benches.
- Textbook as the main teaching material.

- Classroom organization and grouping based on MGML method.
- Seating arrangement on mats/ floor.
- Story cards and *Vachaka* cards as the main teaching material.

Deep Similarities

- **Framework:** Focus on Lower Order Skills.
- **Pedagogy:** Rote & Repetition as the Main Strategy.
- **Teacher Preparation:** Teacher not Positioned as Knowledgeable Practitioner.
- **Student Learning Outcomes:** Poor in both Curricula. Students perform worse in Nali Kali as compared to Balbharati classroom.

Figure 6: Similarities and Difference in Nali Kali and Balbharati Curriculum.

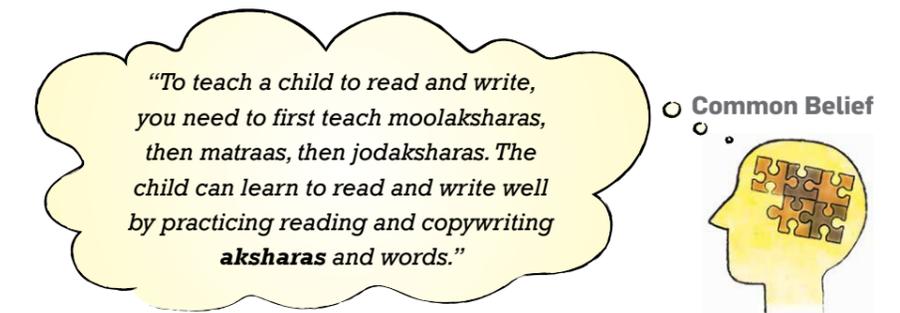| WADA, GRADE 1	YADGIR, GRADE 1
Teacher (T) had written on board –	**Child (C)** started reading card 29 to the teacher. T prompted him to start from the heading and Card no.
नी (ni), सी (si), की (ki), मी (mi), ळी (li), बी (bi), दी (di), घी (ghi), वी (vi), ती (ti), झी (jhi), री (ri), डी (di), ची (chi), जी (ji), टी (ti), ठी (thi), णी (ni), पी (pi), फी (fi)	**T** – swarachinheparichaya [vowel recognition]
T – First I will read and then you read. He read each cluster pointing at them. Children (C) in chorus repeated after him.	**C** – swarachinheparichaya [repeating]
	T – swarachinheparichaya [repeating]
T:- नी Ni	**C** – swarachinheparichaya.
Children (C):- नी Ni (in chorus)	**T** – Mailugallu (reading the word)
T:- की Ki	**C** – Mailugallu (repeating)
C:- की Ki (in chorus)	
This continued till फी - Fi.	

Figure 6: An Example of Rote and Repetition as the Teaching Method

Implications
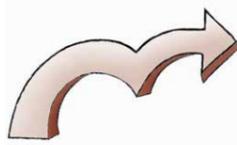
- A clear implication of our work is that efforts at curricular reform should address deeper issues related to early language and literacy and not focus only on types of Teaching Learning Materials and methods of classroom organization.

- The idea that literacy is learned in sequence (first decoding, then comprehension) needs to be re-examined.

- Even though both curricula analyzed teach *aksharas* in "new" ways, the emphasis is still on reading and copy-writing *aksharas* and words. This, itself, needs to be questioned.

- We need to give more importance to certain aspects of early language and literacy. Oral language, meaning making, writing for expression and communication are not given importance in the classroom.

- While reforming curricular materials, it is also important to consider how to guide teachers in the use of the materials – is a rationale provided? Are alternative pedagogical methods/activities provided? Does the material give the teacher options to try out their own ideas? Is there scope for teacher autonomy?

- Teachers need to be given a sufficient knowledge base, helped to understand the rationale behind the curriculum, and be given opportunities to be a part of the process. Addressing these aspects is necessary for meaningful curricular reform.

iii. Decoding the Script

Common Belief

*"To teach a child to read and write, you need to first teach moolaksharas, then matraas, then jodaksharas. The child can learn to read and write well by practicing reading and copywriting **aksharas** and words."*

Connects to Theory

- Contemporary theories of early literacy tell us that learning to decode the script does not happen automatically by being exposed to a rich print environment. Children need to be taught to decode in an explicit and systematic manner. Awareness of the sounds of spoken language should be emphasized (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998).

- The relationships between letters *(aksharas)* and their sounds should be taught clearly. Children should have opportunities to practice these letters and sounds in the context of words and passages.

- Children should also be encouraged to "solve" unknown words, instead of learning to read and write words by rote.

- In the early years, children also learn a lot about the functions and uses of written text. These are referred to as Concepts of Print.
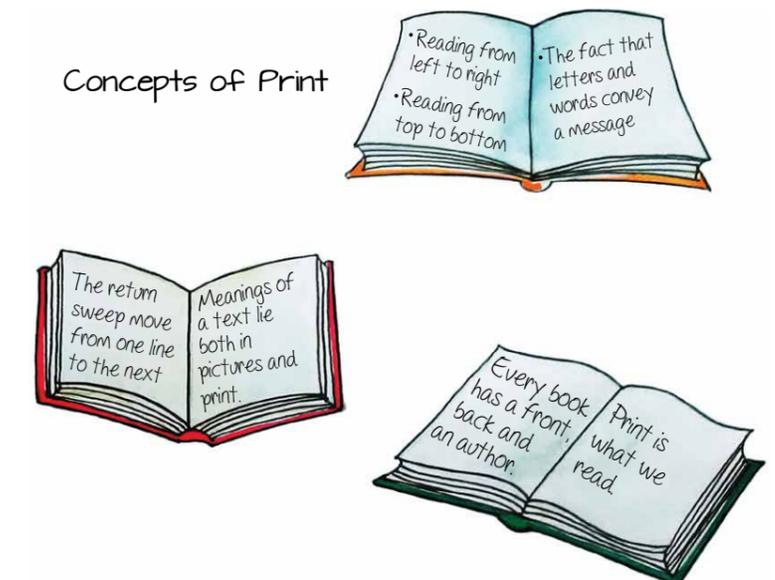
Concepts of Print

- Reading from left to right
- Reading from top to bottom
- The fact that letters and words convey a message
- The return sweep move from one line to the next
- Meanings of a text lie both in pictures and print.
- Every book has a front, back and an author
- Print is what we read

Figure 6: Concepts of Print.

- We found that despite the large amount of time spent in teaching children lower-order skills, many children in our sample were not good at *akshara* recognition, or with word and passage reading, even by the end of third-grade.

Akshara Reading

Moolaksharas   **Matraas**   **Jodaksharas**

Wada 78%   Yadgir 77%   Wada 56%   Yadgir 49%   Wada 32%   Yadgir 22%

Figure 7: Akshara Recognition: Average Percentage Scores by the End of Grade 3.

- While most children can recognize many *moolaksharas* by the end of Grade 3, they are still learning *matraas* and *jodaksharas.*

- Classroom observations showed that teachers taught children the script largely through copy-writing/dictation.

- The symbols of the *aksharas* were emphasized more than their sounds.

- Both curricula followed a sequence of teaching first *moolaksharas*, then *matraas*, then finally *jodaksharas*. This meant that children spent the first 6-8 months of first grade reading unfamiliar words (selected because they do not have *matraas*). Therefore, first language learners could not make connections between the language they spoke and the language of the textbook/curricular materials. This impacts their ability to read with meaning. It is also demotivating to learn to read in such a context.

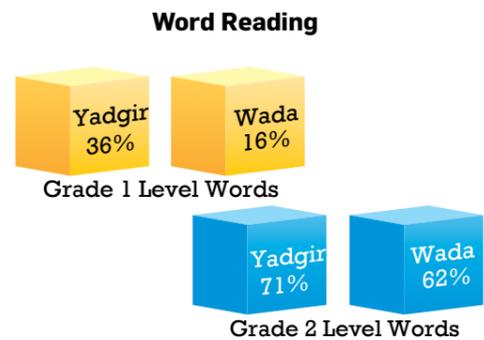(An example of this situation is given in Figure 10)

Word Reading

Yadgir 36%   Wada 16%
Grade 1 Level Words

Yadgir 71%   Wada 62%
Grade 2 Level Words

Figure 8: Word Reading: Percentage Students who are NOT ABLE to read Grade 1 Level (Orange) and Grade 2 Level (Blue) Words at the End of Grade 3.

Passage Reading

Yadgir 72%   Wada 28%
Grade 1 Level Text

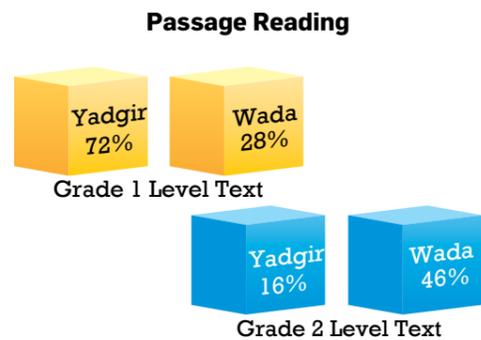Yadgir 16%   Wada 46%
Grade 2 Level Text

Figure 9: Passage Reading: Percentage Students who are NOT ABLE to read Grade 1 Level (Orange) and Grade 2 Level (Blue) Passages at the End of Grade 3.

This is an interaction between a teacher and a 1st Grade child in Yadgir, Karnataka. The card used during this transaction shows the picture of an elephant.

(Teacher points to the card).

Teacher (T): What do you see?

Child (C): "Aane" (commonly used word for elephant)

(T looks puzzled because she realises that "aane" is correct but the answer does not fit the milestone *aksharas*).

T: Yes, "aane" is correct, but there is another word, and that is called "salaga" [tusker]. (The word "salaga" is used in the curriculum, because it is easier to spell than aane; it also models the *aksharas* currently being taught.)

(C does not respond)

(T makes C repeat after her, then goes through three pictures on the same card. Finally, she comes back and points to the elephant picture again.)

     T: What do you see?

     C: "Aane".

     T: Yes, correct, but I said "salaga" is another word.

     (Makes child repeat after her, then goes through the other three pictures and points to the elephant picture again.)

     T: What do you see?

     C: "Aane".

T: I said say "salaga" (impatiently).

(Makes child repeat after her, then goes through the other three pictures and points to the elephant picture again.)

T: What do you see?

C: I don't know.

(Teacher moves on to next student.)

Figure 10: An Example of Curricular Focus on Script over Meaning

- Figures 8 and 9 show children's performance in word and passage decoding. These figures clearly show rather poor performance in word and passage decoding.
- This leads to the next question, "Do all children perform poorly? How are different children affected?" In order to address this question, we divided the sample into fifths, based on their performance on the LiRIL battery. Each of these "quintiles" represented 20% of the sample (Q5 the top 20%, Q4 the second top 20%, and so on). Here we show each quintile's performance over time.
- We found that the top quintile enters school in Grade 1 with some knowledge of concepts of print, *akshara* and word reading and writing. By and large, these students continue to progress at a more rapid pace than their other classmates.
- Worryingly, students in the bottom two quintiles (Q1 & Q2) show negligible growth.
- Figure 11 shows the performance of different quintiles in Yadgir on a Word Reading task.
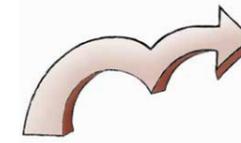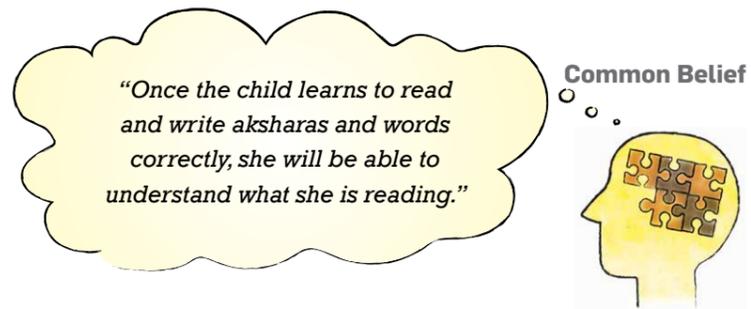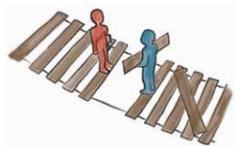
- An implication of our work is that we need to re-think how we teach children to decode the script. Even though most of the time in the early grades is spent teaching children to decode, children are not learning very well. Many educators assume that because Indian scripts are regular in terms of the correspondence between symbol and their sounds, students will find it easy to read once they know all the *aksharas*. This is far from the truth!
- Many Indian scripts have a large number of symbols (*moolaksharas*, *matraas* and *jodaksharas*) and complex rules for joining one to the other (in certain scripts like Kannada). Children may need to learn these over several years. Curriculum designers, however, often assume that *akshara* learning is complete by Grade 2. The need to review *aksharas* beyond Grade 2 is one of the implications of our work.
- Further, rather than just copy writing *aksharas*, teachers should emphasize the sounds of the *aksharas* so that connections between the symbol and sounds are easily made.
- *Matraas* can be introduced along with *moolaskaharas* from the beginning of first grade. Meaningful and familiar words can then be used in the curriculum.
- When children begin to learn to read and write, they should be encouraged to experiment with spellings, or, invent their own spelling, based on sounds. This strengthens children's awareness of the sounds in words.

Figure 11: Performance of Different Quintiles on Word Reading Over Time.

iv. Comprehension and Composition

Common Belief

"Once the child learns to read and write aksharas and words correctly, she will be able to understand what she is reading."

Connects to Theory

- Theory suggests that children should be taught to see reading and writing as meaningful, inter-related activities from the beginning (Sinha, 2012; Jayaram, 2016).
- Reading aloud a wide variety of texts, including children's literature, using discussion-based approaches, and modelling comprehension strategies can all support meaning-making.
- Writing to express and communicate using invented spellings and drawings is important to meaning making.
- Children need to be encouraged to form their own understandings as they interact with text, instead of only being dependent on the teacher.
- Teachers can teach specific comprehension strategies to help with this process.

Findings: Comprehension

- We found that most children in our sample were not good meaning-makers, even in Grade 3.

- How many students cannot answer even a **single question** correctly on a grade level passage?
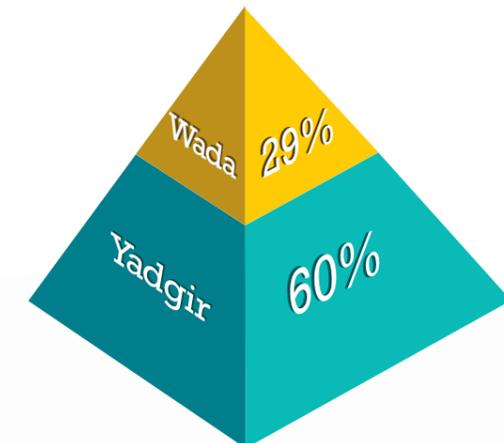

Wada 29%

Yadgir 60%

Figure 12: Passage Comprehension: Students who scored zero on grade level passage at the End of Grade 3.

2. Why does this happen? We have found several reasons:

- Many children do not see connections in what they read – they read words mechanically without a larger search for meaning. Even when given a picture book, they see each picture as isolated from the other picture.

This is an interaction between a researcher and a 2nd Grade child during a text engagement task, in Wada, Maharashtra.

When shown the wordless (picture book) of 'The Story of a Mango' (Deb, 2013), and asked to describe the pictures, Jyoti [student names changed] responded by labelling each of the elements in the picture, rather than looking for what is happening. She said, **"tree", "leaves", "mango", "boy", "girl".** When the researcher prompted her to say what else could be seen in the picture, she chose to label the elements even more finely by looking only at the girl in the picture and saying, **"hand", "hair", "frock", "face", "nose", "bangles", "ear", "eye" , "eyebrow!".** The child was evidently not looking for a story in the picture.

Figure 13: Children's understanding of a Narrative Text - I

- Therefore, children also struggle with sequencing events in a story.

On the next page of 'The Story of a Mango', some children "read" the picture on the right-hand page of the book before looking at the picture on the left. One child, Sonal, also in 2nd Grade in Yadgir, narrated the story as follows:

"The mango fell down from the tree [first, reading the picture on the right page]. **The boy and the girl took aim at the mango with their sling"** [next, reading the picture on the left page].

Figure 14: Children's Understanding of Narrative Text - II

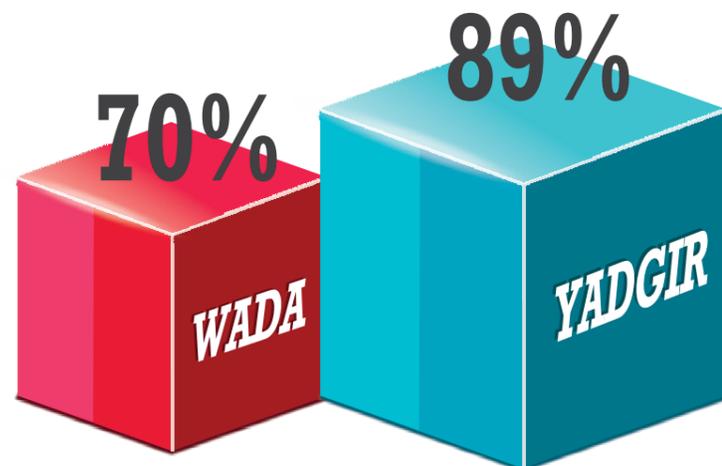- Children have difficulty with making inferences

70% WADA

89% YADGIR

Figure 15: Passage Comprehension: Percentage Students who could not Answer Inferential Questions by the end of Grade 3.

- Children struggle with vocabulary. Many children who came across a new word from an unknown text were unable to guess its meaning from context.

3. **During classroom observations, we noticed that opportunities for meaning making are missing in many classrooms. Where observed, it takes a few forms: (i) Connecting the lesson to the child's life outside of school (rare); and (ii) "Samjhana" method (more common) where the teacher explains the passage sentence by sentence to the children.**

The following is a brief excerpt from the teaching of 'The Story of our Roti' from the Balbharati Grade 2 textbook (Desai, 2013). This is taken from our classroom observation notes, in Wada, Maharashtra.

Story synopsis: When Sharad wastes half of his roti, his grandfather addresses this by telling him about the laborious processes involved in growing *jowar (sorghum)* and making sorghum to impress upon him the amount of work that goes in vain with food wastage.

This teacher takes two days to teach this story. On Day 1, she spends 30 minutes to explain page 1. On Day 2, she explains Page 2 taking ten minutes. Then she takes five minutes to explain the chapter's questions and gives the students a dictation activity. Finally, she asks the students to copy write the whole story and to memorize it.

What follows is a short extract from the transcription of this teacher's class.

Textbook: On the field, cutting of *jowar* was going on.

Teacher: On the field, cutting of what was going on? Of *jowar*. In our area, *jowar* is not seen. But *naagli* is there, no? On *naagli*, a small *gond* (flower) comes. Similarly for *jowar*, you can see, *kanis* (flower) comes. And then it is cut and then its *jhadni* (threshing) is done, and then the *jowar* is taken.

Look [reading the next line] "Grandfather started working. Sharad went to sit under a tree in the shade." Look, grandfather went to his work. The cutting of *jowar* was going on, na? He went there. And where did Sharad sit?

One child: Under the tree.

Teacher: Under the tree in shade.

The teacher's detailed description here does not enable the child to easily follow the story (the teacher talks more than she reads). Attempts at connections to the child's life are forced and superficial.

*Figure 16:* Comprehension Strategies: An example of 'Samjhana' Method.

- As part of the LiRIL writing assessment, a simple, familiar picture prompt was provided and children were asked to write and/or draw in response to the picture. Their writing was assessed in terms of: text length, printing, spelling and punctuation, ideas and organization, voice, sentence fluency and grammar, and a total score was calculated.

17% YADGIR

33% WADA

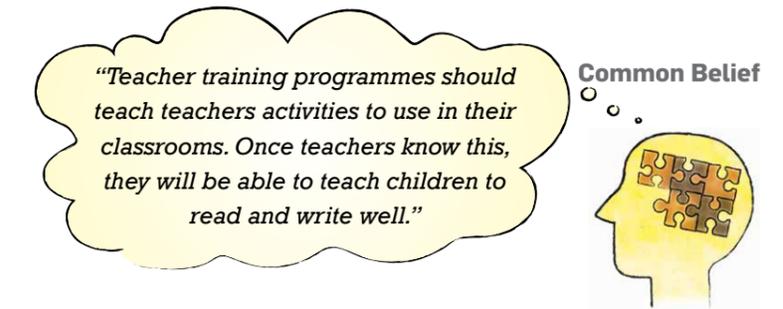*Figure 17:* Percentage Scores on a Prompted Writing Task at the End of Grade 3.

- Classroom observations revealed that opportunities for writing are largely restricted to copy-writing and dictation.
- Teachers' feedback on writing is also restricted to spelling mistakes and handwriting.

Implications
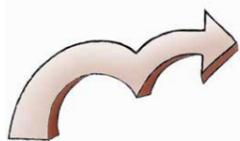
- An important implication of our work is that it is critical that making meaning be seen as central to learning to read and write.
- Pedagogical suggestions include: (i) providing opportunities for rich discussions; (ii) providing opportunities for free and guided writing in the early grades; (iii) discouraging copy-writing as a favoured pedagogical tool; (iv) teaching children strategies for comprehending texts.
- Along with this, teachers' own beliefs and knowledge related to early language and literacy need to be addressed to enable them to see meaning making as central to learning to be literate.

v. Teacher Beliefs, Knowledge & Preparation

Common Belief

"Teacher training programmes should teach teachers activities to use in their classrooms. Once teachers know this, they will be able to teach children to read and write well."

Connects to Theory

- Theory suggests that teachers need knowledge about general pedagogical strategies, as well as knowledge specific to what is being taught (in this case, early language and literacy) (Shulman, 1986).
- Theory also suggests that teachers should be enabled to be autonomous and reflective practitioners.

Findings

- Our findings suggest that teachers lack specific knowledge of how to teach early reading and writing.
- For instance, teachers attributed children's difficulty to comprehend texts to their innate capacities and home environments. They were not able to identify sources of difficulties within the text, for example, understanding implicit versus explicit ideas.
- The rationale behind curriculum or curricular revisions are not explained to teachers, except in general terms (e.g., joyful learning, learning without fear, etc.)
- In the absence of specific inputs related to early language and literacy, teachers teach from a seemingly unexamined set of beliefs about these aspects, possibly derived from their own experiences as students. As described earlier, they believe that literacy is acquired sequentially (first decoding, then comprehension), that scripts are mastered through rote and repetition, and that children can be taught to understand only through explanation of the passage in the classroom.
- Teachers' own comprehension of a newspaper article showed that most of them were able to answer only direct/explicit questions, but not questions that required inferencing.

Teachers were given a hypothetical example of a child who could answer explicit, but not implicit questions, and were asked to explain the child's problem. Most teachers were not able to identify why children had more difficulty with answering implicit questions over explicit questions, or how to help them.

T

"If her capacity to remember is low, then it would be difficult to comprehend."

T

"Maybe, they didn't study at home. If they don't study regularly, they tend to forget."

When asked what they could do to help the child understand the implicit aspects of the text, most teachers could name only one strategy, "Samjhana". Thus, teachers are not aware of the strategies that can help children to become "Making Makers" instead of 'Meaning Takers''.

T

"Some children do not make meaning while reading. If we can help them by explaining the meaning clearly two-three times, they will be able to answer the questions."

Figure 18: Teacher Knowledge: Addressing Lack of Comprehension.

Implications
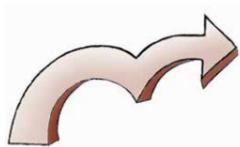
- An implication of our work is that teacher preparation programs as well as teacher continuing professional development programs need to include a specific focus on theory and pedagogical methods for teaching early language and literacy.

- Currently, preservice programmes discuss general language learning theories with their students, but do not equip teachers-to-be with understandings about the goals and aims of early language learning curricula, or specific strategies for teaching or evaluating different aspects of a rich language and literacy-based curriculum.

- Inservice programme provide refresher courses on classroom management strategies, or superficially introduce teachers to new curricular materials. In neither case, are teachers provided with a deep understanding of curriculum, pedagogy or assessment related to early language and literacy.

- Strong beliefs that teachers hold about students, especially marginalised learners, are rarely addressed in teacher education programmes.

vi. Marginalized Learners

"Children will lag behind in writing if their parents are uneducated. This could be genetic or due to poor culture at home. There is nothing much we can do about this."

Common Belief
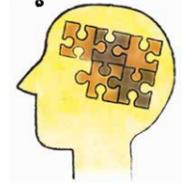
Connects to Theory

- Theory tells us that socially and academically marginalized first-generation learners are likely to experience serious difficulties in school due to differences in home and school cultures and languages (Heath, 1982; Velaskar, 2005).

- The child/family must be able to appreciate that schooling can be relevant to their lives in order to benefit from it.

- Viewing the child's family as "deficient" does not help in making the schooling experience more meaningful or enjoyable for the child. Instead, supportive curricular and pedagogical strategies must be used (Moll, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992).

Findings

- We find that the most socially and academically marginalized children in our sample experienced serious difficulties in their lives that disrupt their schooling on a routine basis – e.g., through seasonal migration.

- When in the classroom, these children experience difficulties with the school dialect. One boy, when asked about the difference between his home and school languages said: "At home we speak Kannada, but here, we learn English!" He had not realised that what he was learning at school was a different dialect of Kannada! Figure19 shows the terms used by teacher to describe children's home languages as compared to school language.

- School based literacy/learning is not experienced as a relevant or meaningful activity in children's lives.

- Teachers do not recognize the validity of children's home languages and use dismissive/ derogatory terms when talking about their home languages.

School Language	Home Language
Language of the textbook	Spoken dialect
Pure	Impure
Our language	The villagers' language
The language of the educated	Mistakes

Figure 19: Terms Used by Teachers to Describe School Versus Home Language.

- Teachers discuss the capabilities of these students and their communities in ways that reinforce prejudices, rather than counter them.

- At home, many of these children are responsible for taking care of their younger siblings and various household chores. They are treated as responsible individuals.

- At school, these same children are often viewed as dependent and/or immature. For a child who is treated as a contributing member at home, this could be a source of confusion.

Implications

- An implication of our work is that we need to consider carefully how to make formal schooling more relevant to the lives of socially and academically marginalized learners. How can the motivation, emotions and interests of these learners be aroused towards schooling and literacy?

- The child's language/dialect needs to be welcomed and used in the classroom.

- The child's roles/interests/capabilities outside the classroom can be considered in designing in-school activities.

- Systems for coordinating between the home, the village school, and the school at the site of migrations could be maintained, so that migrating children are tracked (to the extent possible) and continuity of schooling maintained.

- Teacher preparation must sensitize teachers towards the lives of culturally marginalized learners in their classrooms, and ways of working empathetically and effectively with their communities, families and them.

An excerpt from a teacher interview, Wada:

There is lack of knowledge…parents go to work and do not pay any attention to their children… [they don't bother to check whether the child is studying or not]. 90% of the children are like that. As teachers, we can push them to come to the mainstream, by doing some language related activities. But there are some children, who know absolutely nothing about education."

Figure 20: Teacher Interview: Teacher's View on Readiness for Education

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