Experiences of (Non-) Participation of Saora Children in Odia-Medium and MLE Plus Schools

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Experiences of exclusion or inclusion depending on whether children’s linguistic and cultural resources are included in the classroom processes shape their experiences of belonging to the classroom communities. The classroom practices of two schools, Odia-medium and Multilingual Education (MLE) Plus schools are studied to show how conventional teaching and learning practices of Odia-medium schools reduced learning to memorisation, repetition, and copying. Saora children who entered the classroom as novices could neither learn to competently use their everyday linguistic and cultural resources or the school resources to participate in academic discourses nor could they engage and connect to academic concepts and emotional resources in the classroom. On the contrary, the teaching and learning practices in the MLE Plus classroom founded on children’s everyday linguistic and cultural resources opened spaces for interactional engagement as well as conceptual learning. The sense of belonging to the classroom community and participation in the academic discourses developed a community of learners in the MLE Plus classroom.

Keywords: participation, non-participation, learning, classroom practices, Odia-medium school, Multilingual Education (MLE) Plus school

Introduction

The blame of experiences of non-participation in educational process is often borne by the children belonging to minority and tribal communities. It is either the children who are accused of “being shy, reserved, lacking motivation to learn, and being low on intelligence” or their communities are held responsible for not providing intellectual stimulation to children due to their impoverished cultures (Ganguly & Ormerod, 1980, as cited in Sridhar, 1996; Malik, 1979, as cited in Sridhar, 1996). When learning is assumed to be the resultant product of the individual cognitive processes, the blame of failure falls on the victims rather than the social structures and practices that prevent children from participating in academic activities in the classroom. Socio-cultural theories of learning clearly show that learning is tied not only to cognitive processes, but also to socio-cultural processes (Cole, 1996; Greeno, 1997; Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lee, 2007; Rogoff, 1993). Individuals learn by participating in social practices. In situated cognition perspective, learning is as much about shifts in participation in social and cultural practices and activities as it is about shifts in ways of thinking (Lave & Wenger 1991; Rogoff, 1993; 2003). Knowledge is not something that has stable
and individual characteristic; it is rather co-produced by participating and living in the social world. This brings us to the question that can tribal children participate and co-produce knowledge in the social world of school without having their linguistic and cultural resources included in the classroom?

Annamalai’s (1999) study highlighted that the tribal children in the Ashram (residential) schools were explicitly told to forget about their culture, speak the mainstream language, dress in mainstream attire, and relish mainstream food. The authors argued that this left tribal children with a sense that their culture was “backward” or “confining” in every sense. This created a universal exclusionary teaching and learning practice for tribal children that prevented them from engaging in the practices of interaction, adaptation, and reflections (Boaler, 1997; Greeno & Middle School Mathematics Through Application Project Group (MMAP), 1998). Boaler (2000) argued that students not only learn methods and processes in the classroom, but they also learn to be learners and their learning of content knowledge cannot be separated from their interactional engagement in the classroom. The content knowledge and interactional engagement mutually constitute each other at the time of learning. The exclusion of tribal children’s linguistic and cultural resources not only deters investment of their learning energies in meaningful participation in classroom communities, but also negatively affects the social ties and relationships that foster engagement in classroom practices. In addition to this, the subject matter taught in classroom communities is a completely different epistemic system that creates incompatibility with other communities of which the child is a part (i.e., family, neighbourhoods, communities, workplaces, etc.). This separation of self from the classroom practices creates experiences of non-participation among tribal children.

In order to make classroom practices more meaningful for tribal children, the government of Andhra Pardesh and Odisha initiated Multilingual Education (MLE) programs on an experimental basis in select schools. MLE programs strove towards not only bringing the children’s language, but also their cultural practices and knowledge into the process of education. The MLE Plus intervention, funded by Bernard van Leer Foundation (BvLF), started in April 2007 simultaneously with the MLE program of the government of Odisha with the initiatives of Mohanty and Panda (2007). MLE Plus seeks to add value to the governmental MLE programme through several measures (Dhal & Mishra, n.d.). The MLE Plus initiatives involve:

(a) Monitoring children’s transition to school languages based on strengthening their mother tongue; (b) increasing the cultural inputs into language as well as mathematics, science, and environmental studies curricula through ethnographic analyses and planned activities; (c) facilitating community involvement and initiatives; and (d) augmenting support to the teaching learning processes and children’s learning activities. The community awareness and involvement is particularly crucial since most of the tribal children are first generation learners. The MLE Plus initiative has sought to develop community interests in children’s schooling by developing community reading and learning resource centres in which oral traditions (such as storytelling, songs, and rhymes in the community) are linked to written texts. (Panda & Mohanty, 2009, p. 301)

The present paper examines whether the classroom practices in MLE Plus and Odia-medium schools open or foreclose spaces for Saora (a tribe in Odisha) children to participate and learn in classroom communities.

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1 MLE is a program, starting from the language of the child and gradually, moving to languages of wider communication. Mohanty, Panda, Phillipson, and Skutnabb-Kangas (2009) defined MLE as “Use of two or more languages as media of instruction in subjects other than the languages themselves and with (high levels of) multilingualism and, preferably, multiliteracy, as a goal at the end of formal schooling”.

2 The idea here is to develop a sense of continuity between oral and written practices by collecting folktales, stories, and songs from individual community members and transcribing them into written texts with authorship and photographs. These and other reading resource materials go into community resource centre for parents, children, and other adults in the community.
Wenger’s (1998) theory of Community of Practice (CoP) is employed to examine the learning and participation of children in Odia-medium and MLE Plus classrooms. Learning is seen “as change in ability to engage in practice, the understanding of why we engage in it and the resources we have at our disposal to do so” (Wenger, 1998, p. 96). The paper draws on Wenger’s idea of trajectories of participation, i.e., “peripheral” and “marginal” to explain the experiences of participation and learning.

Methods

The data used in this paper is a part of the first researcher’s Ph.D. study. One MLE Plus school and one Odia-medium school in Gajapati district of Odisha, where 99% of the students were Saora children, were selected for the study. Both students and their teacher participated in this study. The researchers have given fictitious names to the teacher and the students to maintain the anonymity of the participants. Data were collected using qualitative methods which included non-participant classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and field notes. Classroom observation emphasised on teaching and learning practices, i.e., how the teacher introduced a concept, connection building, the nature of participation in classroom activities, the nature of interactions in the classroom, etc.. The video recordings were taken for 120 teaching hours covering the teaching and learning practices of different subjects and these video recordings were later transcribed and translated first in Odia and then in English. The participants were asked to speak in the language they were comfortable during the interview and focus group discussion and these were audio-recorded. As the researchers were not fluent in Saora, so, a helper from the community who was fluent in Saora, Odia, and Hindi facilitated on-the-spot translation during data collection and transcribing and translation of audio and video recordings at later stages. Discourse analysis was used as a technique to analyse classroom discourses and the findings that emerged from this analysis are discussed in the following section.

Findings

Valuing “Language of the State” and “Materials Provided by the State” More Than Children

As evident in the interview transcripts of the teachers and in the classroom practices, the top priority in Odia-medium school was to ensure that Saora children learn to speak and write in Odia. Mohan (a teacher) was aware of the fact that Saora children struggled to understand and speak in Odia, but, for him, submersing them in Odia was the only way to ensure that they learn the language.

Saora is their language and children know it. We do not need to teach it in school. In school, they need to learn Odia, the language of our state. I force them to speak only in Odia, so that children learn to it…. Children need Odia for social and economic growth. They cannot grow with Saora language and culture. (Interview with Mohan, November 10, 2012)

Mohan’s statement clearly reveals that “language of the state” was positioned higher than the “language of the child”. This positioning of the languages was reflected in the classroom design and the pedagogic practices. This section discussed in detail how Saora children’s language was positioned in classroom resources (physical) and the following section highlights the same in pedagogic practices. A pervasive feature of the classroom design in the Odia-medium school was blankness: blank walls, book shelves, soft boards, and blank faces of children. Mohan excluded Saora language and artefacts from the classroom design on grounds of it being unsuitable for the purpose of teaching and learning for Saora children. While Odia, the “language of the state”, dominated the classroom discourses, the teaching/learning materials (TLMs) provided by the state in Odia and
English were considered too precious to be used by the children and the teacher in the classroom except under the careful surveillance of the latter.

I never keep the books and TLMs in the classroom as children steal or spoil them by mishandling them. All these materials are quite expensive, therefore, I always keep them locked in the office and give them to children under my supervision. (Interview with Mohan, November 10, 2012)

This statement clearly reveals that the TLMs were more valuable to the teacher than engaging children in teaching and learning practices with the help of these artefacts. The TLMs that were provided by the state entered the classroom with the teacher and left the classroom with him. The teacher’s fear of children stealing and spoiling the TLMs reveals the distrust of the teacher in Saora children. Children too sensed this distrust and preferred to stay away from both the TLMs and the teacher. Vikhyat, a student in the Odia-medium school, reported that “Who could dare to speak and touch things in presence of Mohan Sir? If he saw us doing so, he would have beaten the hell out of us. We are very scared of him”.

Vikhyat’s statement was supported by other students’ nods in an informal discussion. This shows how scared children were in the presence of the teacher and how teacher’s punitive actions hampered their interactional engagement with the teacher and the TLMs in the school. Another element that hindered children’s interactional engagement was the explicit rule to “speak only in Odia” in school premises. Not only were children instructed explicitly to use Odia in school, but classroom observations revealed that if children tried to speak in Saora in presence of the teacher, they had to face severe consequences. For instance:

While solving problems in a math class, Rahul, oblivious of the presence of the teacher in the classroom, asked Vikhyat to pass his notebook in Saora. Within seconds, Rahul received a tight slap on his head and was scolded for using Saora in the classroom. The teacher yelled at Rahul saying, “Why were you talking in Saora? Speak in Odia. All of you sit at a distance and do not talk while doing sums”. Rahul trembled with fear and got back to work with tears in his eyes. Seeing Rahul being scolded for talking, other children too distanced themselves from each other and quietly worked on the problems. (Classroom observation, November 10, 2012)

This made Odia not only the medium of instruction, but also the language that was made mandatory for interactions in the classroom. The teacher not only decided how children will speak, but also when they will speak. The explicit alignment in these statements and the structure that operated in the classroom reveals that the teacher was positioned as the sole authority who governed the rules and norms that operated in the classroom. Mohan by neither using nor allowing children to use their language in school premises, by making TLMs inaccessible to children, and by controlling their interventions in classroom processes, reduced children to subservient beings in the classroom premises. Distrust and asymmetrical power relations resulted in establishment of traditional hierarchical student-teacher relationship in the classroom community. This led to unequal distribution of resources in the classroom. Exclusion of Saora children’s linguistic and cultural resources and only giving importance to Odia language and knowledge system reproduced the language hierarchy and status quo that existed in the society in the classroom. The multiple ways in which “language of the state” and “TLMs provided by the state” was preferred over Saora children, their language and learning in classroom made Odia the social good (i.e., language of prestige and power) in the classroom community. It systematically reinstated the marginal status of Saora language within the boundaries of school and educational process of Saora children. By re-establishing the linguistic hierarchy in the classroom structure, the Odia-medium school positioned Saora children in an unfavourable position as a learner to begin with and
unequal distribution of resources reduced the possibilities of participation and engagement in the classroom community.

**Foregrounding Saora Linguistic and Cultural Resources in MLE Plus Classroom**

In the MLE Plus school, the walls narrated Saora folktales and embraced Saora art. Each corner and wall of the classroom was devoted to a discipline, i.e., science, math, language, and art. Science wall and corner, besides having charts and posters of scientific concepts in Saora and Odia language, endorsed local artefacts like different types of soils, seeds, replica of Saora agricultural instruments, clay animals, etc. The math wall exhibited various handmade charts dealing in mathematical concepts, like Saora and universal number system, addition and subtraction, counting, division, money, etc. The table in the math corner is full of geometrical shapes made in clay or wood, handmade abacus instrument, handmade weighing scale, seeds, sticks and stones, scale, and measuring tape. The floor of the classroom was also utilised to bring in local matrix games. The language corner had lots of flashcards with pictures and words painted on it; handmade Saora alphabet charts, story books in Saora and Odia, pen, colours, etc. were kept neatly in the language corner. The art wall and corner proudly displayed children’s drawings, paintings, and their handicrafts. Various photographs of children and community members were also displayed on the art board. Inclusion of local artefacts and involvement of community’s resources created a sense of identification in Saora children with the artefacts and classroom as a space.

While I was observing and capturing the TLMs in the classroom in my camera, Beeju and Galiyas approached me and took me to the soft board to show their paintings and proudly said “Mera” (mine). In the meanwhile, few girls also came and started to show me their photos and photographs of their family members displayed on the board. Elizabeth pointed towards a photo said “Yeh mera maa baap” (This is my mother and father) and smiled. (Field notes, October 16, 2012)

Not only were children made a part of the classroom design, but were also included in the process of preparation of TLMs like chart papers, painting games on the floor, collecting different kinds of seeds, pebbles, sticks, and soil, making toys from clay, and so forth. As the teacher and children participated in classroom arrangement and produced TLMs, it not only gave all of them a sense of ownership of that material, but also resulted in transparency of resources. The teacher knew why certain kind of TLM was created and how it could be used as a tool to engage children in teaching and learning practices. Children, while preparing this material, also got an opportunity to explore and learn how these materials could scaffold their participation and learning. Local production of TLMs not only reduced the cost, but also enabled children to see links between the artefacts used in classroom and their everyday life. For instance, when children were inquired about if they could use concepts learnt in school at home as well, they came up with a wide range of responses.

“Yes, when I take out the cows to field for grazing I use counting to keep a check on them” said Beeju. Elizabeth informed that “Sir, taught us this game on water and land animals and now we play it not only in class but also in our houses”. Kartik reported that “Like in market activity in the classroom, I know how to buy things and how much money to give to vendors in Serango market”. (Focused group discussion, October 18, 2012)

These responses clearly reflect that children not only used the artefacts and concepts learnt in the classroom to solve problems, but could also see its application in their life. This made classroom learning more meaningful for children.

In the MLE Plus school, free access to TLMs nurtured the interaction and engagement of children with the artefacts in the classroom. Children were observed to explore the math, science, and language corners left-right
while working on their tasks and playing; children talked and discussed about the material, created their own games with the material, and innovated new meanings and uses of these artefacts.

A grade 2 child was completing his homework in the classroom and was struggling with writing “multiplication tables”, he looked here and there to seek help from his classmates but no luck. All of a sudden, his eyes lit up and he got up and went to the math corner. He rested his notebook along the Multiplication Table Chart and started copying from there. Seeing him, his other friends also joined and they all copied the table from there. (Field notes, October 18, 2012)

Free access ensured fair distribution of the resources and the power of using TLMs was not only confined to authority figures in school. Children were treated as responsible participants in the classroom community and were trusted with the use of TLMs in the classroom. The rules and regulations further helped teachers break the ice between them and their students. There were no rules or regulations on children to speak in a particular language, children were free to talk to the teachers or others in any language in school. MLE Plus classrooms in multitude of ways made Saora language and cultural resources the essence of classroom and pedagogic practices. The favourable position of Saora linguistic and cultural resources in the MLE Plus classroom structures not only created spaces for it to be used as a potent pedagogical tool, but also generated opportunities for children to learn to use these resources to engage and participate in the classroom community.

The position of Saora linguistic and cultural resources in the classroom of both schools reveals their perspective on the role of children’s linguistic and cultural resources in their learning. On one hand, the Odia-medium school ignores Saora children’s diverse linguistic and cultural resources and excludes it from their learning process and reinstates the marginal position of Saora children in classroom practices. Au contraire, the MLE Plus school sees children’s linguistic and cultural resources as a mediating tool in the process of their learning, and thus, it makes Saora linguistic and cultural resources an essential part of the classroom and pedagogic practices. The following section will highlight whether this difference in assumption about language and learning is reflected in teaching and learning practices of both schools and how the different teaching and learning practices shape the experiences of participation and learning of Saora children in both schools.

**Practices in the Odia-Medium School, Leaving no Room for Meaningful Participation by Emphasising on Memorisation, Repetition, and Copying**

The classroom in the Odia-medium school accommodated grades 1-5 in one room with a single teacher handling all the grades. Mohan treated grades 1-2 as one group and grades 3-5 as another for the purpose of teaching. This practice resulted in the instructional time being divided unequally between both groups and selective non-participation became an inevitable part of the teaching and learning practices. Submersion of Saora children in Odia and employment of teacher-centered teaching and learning practices contributed to the experience of non-participation among the children.

Excerpt 1:

Math class, November 10, 2012.
Concept taught: Numbers divisible by 2.
The teacher writes on blackboard: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.
1. T: We have written counting from 1-10. Now, we will see which of these numbers are divisible by 2.
(The teacher looked at the children for few minutes but no answer (One minute of silence). The teacher then starts explaining with the help of the blackboard.)
3. T: See, which number is divisible by 2. Let us take 2. \( \frac{2}{2} = 1 \). If you subtract 2 from 2, it is equal to 0. So when we divide 2 by 2, what is the quotient?


5. T: All of you … How much is the quotient?

6. All students (in chorus and low pitch): 1.

7. T: If we divide 2 by 2, then the quotient is 1.

8. All students (low pitch): 2 divided by 2, then, the quotient is 1.

9. T: Like that we see 3. Is 3 divisible by 2?

(Writes on the board \( \frac{3}{2} \) and demonstrates that there is a remainder of 1.)

10. T: Is 4 divisible by 2?

(Writes on the board \( \frac{4}{2} \) and demonstrates that there is no remainder.)

11. T: How much is the quotient of 4 divided by 2?


13. T: Like that, now we will divide 5 by 2.

(Writes on the board \( \frac{5}{2} \) and demonstrates that there is a remainder of 1.)

14. T: Say aloud the table of 2. \( 2 \times 1 = 2, 2 \times 2 = 4, 2 \times 3 = 6 \).

15. T: Now we will see 6.

(Writes on the board \( \frac{6}{2} \) and demonstrates that there is no remainder.)

In this math class, where Mohan was teaching the concept of numbers divisible by 2 (The concept of division was taught at the beginning of academic year), it was observed that despite of him introducing, demonstrating, and explaining the concept again on the blackboard, the majority of the students stared blankly at the blackboard. The medium of instruction used in this class was Odia and the teacher used Odia mostly to explain concepts to children. As can be seen in turns No. 1, 3, 7, 9, 13, and 15, the teacher solved the problem on the blackboard and children simply repeated the answer after the teacher offered the solution (see turns No. 4, 6, 8, and 12). Mohan used semiotic system embedded in academic mathematical discourse, like symbols of multiplication, division, and equal to, to explain to the children the concept of multiplication and division with the underlying assumption that the children understood the concept of multiplication and could apply it to find numbers divisible by 2. The teaching-learning method employed by Mohan highlights the assumption that knowledge of the multiplication table was independent and stable and could be easily transferred to other situations without much problem. By making children repeat the multiplication table of 2, Mohan ensured that children knew the table and apply it to solve division problems. Mohan, after explaining the concept, asked the children to pick up numbers from 1-10 and find out which numbers were divisible by 2. He left the classroom after assigning this task.

Analysis of this excerpt reveals that the teacher neither checked if children understood the concept nor did he allow children to come up with solutions. The nature of majority of questions asked in this excerpt and this class were closed-ended where children could either come up with a “Yes” or “No”, or the teacher himself quickly offered a solution and made the children repeat after him (see turns No. 3, 5, 9, 10, and 11). The majority of his statements in this excerpt and the class revolved around transferring the technical skills using decontextualized language and semiotic system. The teacher made no attempts to engage children in cognitive or metacognitive activities. None of the questions asked in this class made children reflect on the concept. While the teacher explained this concept by demonstrating the solutions on the blackboard, few students disinterestedly looked here and there, and few others who were attending to the teacher had a blank expression. The blank expression on children’s face and repeating the answers in low pitch reflected their predicament of not being able to understand much. It was observed that the children copied numbers from 1-10 the way it was
written on the blackboard and shared a blank expression. None of the children approached the teacher while they were facing problems in solving the tasks. The analysis of the notebooks of children revealed that they had simply copied the numbers from the board and not solved anything. Mohan made the children recall the table of 2 to ensure that the children solve the numerical problem of finding numbers divisible by 2 and left the class to attend to the other group. When he returned to this group and saw that the children were not working on the task, he demanded them to show notebooks. None of the children stood up to show him their work. So, he went to Rahul and Vikhyat who were sitting in the first row and threatened them “Where, show me your notebook. No point in hiding the notebook. Show me!!”. Vikhyat and Rahul shivered with fear and apprehensively handed over their notebooks to the teacher. Seeing that the children were unable to find numbers divisible by 2, he gave the children a repulsive look and offered them a thumb rule to identify numbers divisible by 2. Mohan could see that the children, irrespective of their grades, were unable to solve basic division problems. Instead of probing and trying to find the problems that the children were facing, he offered a quick fix without further explanation.

Excerpt 2:

120. T: You should remember that the numbers whose 1 unit are 2, 4, 6, 8, and 0 are the numbers that are divisible by 2. Just learn it!!
121. T: Remember, once again, the numbers whose 1 unit are 2, 4, 6, 8, and 0 are the numbers that are divisible by 2.
122. T: Look here, this number has a unit number 0, so it is divisible by 2.
123. T: Here, the unit number is 7, is it divisible by 2? No, naa…
125. T: Because 7 number is the unit number here, which number is not here, 2, 4, 6, 8, and 0. Do you understand?
126. Janita: Yes.
127. T: Likewise, in 53, 3 is the unit number, so is it divisible by 2?
(Teacher asked few similar kind of questions and only Janita replied in “Yes” or “No” in low pitch)
...
137. T: Now, collect all cards and write all the numbers in your notebook.
138. T: I have told you which numbers are divisible by 2? They are 2, 4, 6, 8, and 0.
139: T: Write the numbers that are divisible by 2. Put a √ mark in front of the numbers divisible by 2 and a × mark in front of the numbers that are not.
140. T: Write all these numbers one by one and tick the number divisible by 2.

In this excerpt, Mohan offered a quick solution and assumed that the children understood this thumb rule and would apply it without much problem. The instructions in turns No. 120 and 121 in Excerpt 2 emphatically stressed on simply learning that numbers with 2, 4, 6, 8, and 0 at the unit place are divisible by 2. He never explained why such a rule does not apply to the numbers in the tenth place. Majority of the statements in this math class revolved around explaining the mathematical content in terms of applying formulae to get numerical answers rather than the procedures that children need to learn in order to apply the formulae. Again, repetition was used as a method to ensure that the children memorised this formula and then applied it to solve the problems at hand. Mohan followed traditional teaching and learning practices where the underlying assumption was that mathematical knowledge is all about simple formulae and procedures. The children will understand by mastering these formulae and procedures. The more the children practice, the better their learning will be. The mediational role of the language, numerical experiences of the children, and the conceptual understanding were of least concern for Mohan. Mohan worked with an implicit theory of memorisation of the formulae and
procedures, helping children internalise mathematical procedures as well as link these procedures to broader mathematical domain (Boaler, 2000). However, in practice, children could not do so as they lacked necessary scaffoldings in the math class. In this class, when Mohan gave children few number cards to find which numbers are divisible by 2, the majority of the children could not complete the task. Notebook analysis of the students revealed that only Janita and Nickodima could complete the task, while others either copied the number ticked as right from the blackboard or from Janita and Nickodima’s notes.

Analysis of discourses in this math class revealed (see excerpts 1 and 2) that 80% of the teacher’s instructions aimed towards controlling students’ actions to complete the task rather than engaging children with mathematical concepts and discourses. In Excerpt 2 as well, rather than ensuring that children understand the concept of division which is a basic concept required for development of higher mathematical concepts in grades 4-5, the teacher offered a thumb rule and asked the children to thoughtlessly apply it to see which numbers were divisible by 2. These shortcuts and thumb rules are effective tools to enhance the speed of the task but are inadequate if children do not understand the basic concepts. Children were already struggling to understand the concept of division and on top of that the teacher introduced an additional concept of “unit numbers” to add to their plight. Mohan failed not only to establish links between how learning of division, multiplication, and unit numbers was enmeshed and related in mathematical discourse, but also he failed to show how learning of these concepts could be beneficial in the everyday life of children. All this suggest that the second assumption the teacher had about knowledge and ways of knowing was decontextualized, and thus, reduced math to learning of meaningless content and procedures, repetition, and rote memorisation, which distanced learning from meaning and real-life situations. The children reported that they hardly saw any connection between what they learnt in school and their everyday life.

In school, we learn and speak in Odia, and at home, we learn and speak in Saora. There is nothing common between what we do here in school and our home. (Interview with Anna, November 12, 2012)

Anna’s statement highlights that she saw school and home as two different worlds where the subject matter and the languages they learnt were completely different and not related. Saora children in the Odia-medium school could neither use the subject matter that they repeated and memorised to solve problems in the classroom nor in other aspects of their life. All this contributed to opacity of resources and prevented children from building any connections between academic and everyday knowledge. All this fostered the experiences of non-participation of Saora children in the classroom.

The analysis of the classroom discourses revealed that the teacher took majority of the talk time in the classroom and the participation of students was minimal. In classroom discourses also, the teacher assumed the position of authority and passed down knowledge to children. The majority of the students remained passive and adopted the knowledge as filtered down by the teacher. The teacher, by excluding children’s linguistic and cultural resources and adopting traditional teaching and learning practices where he focused on transferring technical skills, foreclosed spaces for children to express themselves, their concerns, and problems in the classroom. Children were not observed contributing in negotiation of meaning in the classroom community by sharing their perspectives, knowledge, experiences, and skills that they acquired by participating in other communities of practice. Emphasis on repetition and memorisation of the concepts and formulae prevented children from developing ability to engage with these concepts and understand why and how they are using it to solve problems. Consequently, the children could not learn to use these concepts or formulae to solve problems...
and could not see any shifts in their participatory or learning trajectories. This made children see themselves as incompetent members of the classroom community and this was reflected in their non-participation in the classroom and the way they and the teacher talked about their shifts in participation and learning. As can be seen in excerpts 1 and 2, only Janita and Nickodima seemed to voluntarily participate in the classroom discourses, that too in a hesitant tone (see Excerpt 1, turns No. 4 and 12; Excerpt 2, turns No. 124, 126, and 128). The majority of the children remained silent and were not observed voluntarily participating in the classroom practices. Non-participation of students also extended to the researcher, where the majority of the children refused to participate in the interview after the class by remaining tight lipped and not responding even after ceaseless probing and asking them to speak in any language they feel comfortable. These children used the language of silence to negotiate and narrate the tale their plight. Rahul refused to participate in the interview by saying that “I do not know anything. I cannot tell you anything”. Anna, after much probing, confessed in Saora, “I do not know Odia and as sir teaches in Odia, I did not understand much of what he taught in the classroom today”. Janita informed that “I understood a little bit”. When asked to explain what she understood in the classroom, Janita remained quiet for a very long time and did not say anything. Janita was asked that she could explain in Saora but she remained quiet. Janita’s silence could be construed as either she was not very sure of her understanding or she could not explain it in Odia. The silence of the majority of students and responses of others highlighted that they could hardly understand what was being taught in the classroom and used their non-participation served as a “cover” to hide their inability to learn.

Mohan had been teaching students from grades 3-5 for the past three years and had seen children growing and evolving as students when inquired about what he feels about their performance and growth as students, Mohan replied, “Saora children are very shy and quiet. They do not understand things as quickly as Odia children. Odia children are very bright and active. Saora children are not as forward and active as Odia children”.

Mohan’s statement clearly shows that he saw Saora children as poor learners and attributed their silence and non-participation in the classroom to them being “shy and quiet”. The standard of performance and learning that Saora children were expected to meet in the school was equivalent to that of an Odia child. Consequently, Saora children ceaselessly failed to meet teacher’s expectations and he labelled them as “dull, shy, and quiet”. Not only did Mohan undermine Saora children’s potential, they too thought they were not intelligent. The majority of Saora children in the interview expressed that their peers were more intelligent than them.

Excerpt 3:

Researcher: Ok, then who all do well your class?
Vikhyat: Rahul, Nickodima, Janita … ummm … Chintu …
Researcher: What about you? How do you perform in class?
(Long pause, no reply from Vikhyat)
Researcher: Rahul, Anna, and Chintu said that you do really well in class…
Vikhyat: Noooo!! I am not good in studies, they do better than me.

Both the teacher and the children in the Odia-medium school blamed the victim. Exclusion of Saora children’s linguistic and cultural resources along with traditional teaching and learning practices that emphasized on repetition, memorisation, and copying prevented children from learning to use their or the resources (un)available in the classroom to participate in various activities and tasks. Consequently, neither did the children nor did the teacher see children moving from being a novice to a more competent student in the
classroom community. Ceaseless experiences of lack of interactional engagement, dearth of opportunities to master the use of their resources (both material and relational), and the resources (un)available to work on a task, made non-participation a cover to hide their experiences of marginalization in the classroom.

**Meaningful Experiences of Participation in the MLE Plus School**

Children get confused when I teach in Odia. They cannot answer while reading in Odia but can easily answer when we teach them in our language. (Interview with Koina, October 12, 2012)

Koina’s (a Saora teacher) statement clearly reveals that she understood the plight of Saora children and the problems faced by them when taught in Odia. In the MLE Plus school, the teacher was supposed to use both Saora and Odia while teaching children. But it was observed that Koina used more of Saora to ensure children understood the concepts taught in the classroom. For instance, it was observed that in the math class described below, 90% Saora and 10% Odia were used in the classroom; where, use of Odia was confined to mathematical registers.

The classroom in the MLE Plus school accommodated grades 1-3 in one room with a single teacher handling all the grades. Koina treated grades 1-2 as one group and students from grade 3 as another for the purpose of teaching. This practice resulted in the instructional time being divided unequally between both groups and selective non-participation became an inevitable part of the teaching and learning practices in this school as well. Koina often started her classes with an activity to ignite children’s interest and then shifted to the textbook activities by the end of the class. In this math class, Koina was teaching children the concept of “counting money” (the concept of money was introduced in previous classes at the beginning of the month) and this activity was carried around the math corner. The teacher asked boys and girls of grade 3 to make two separate groups and explained them that she will be giving each group some rupees notes and coins (artificial artefact). The task was that one group will stand with some amount of money and the other group will have to count and stand up with equivalent sum of money. It was observed that the teacher did not explain or demonstrate the concept of “counting money”, rather she posed questions to the children to check if they remember the concept.

Excerpt 4:

12. T: **Ok, now, how many zeros are there in 1,000 rupees?**
13. All students (high pitch): Three.
14. T: **How many zeros are there in 50 rupees?**
15. All students (high pitch): One.
... 
24. T: **Hey boys, which note is she showing?**
25. All boys (high pitch): Rs.500.
26. T: **Now, you also show Rs.500.**
   (Boys discuss, count and one boy stands up with five notes of Rs.100).
27. T: **Now, girls show another note.**
   (A girl stands up with Rs.20 note. After seeing that boys discuss and a boy stands with one Rs.10 note and two Rs.5 notes.)
28. T: **Is it correct?**
29. T: **One Rs.10 note and two Rs.5 notes, is it?**
30. All girls (high pitch): Yes.

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The excerpts in bold italics are statements/instructions given initially in Saora which were later translated into English.
31. T: *Is this equal?*
32. All S (high pitch): *Yes.*

This excerpt reveals that the medium of instruction was mainly in Saora. The use of Saora in MLE Plus classrooms was not restricted to translations, but it was used to engage children in academic discourses. The teacher started the class with an assumption that the children know the concept of money and cross-checked her assumption by posing direct questions (see turns No. 12 and 14). As can be seen in turns No. 13 and 15, the children voluntarily participated in the class with enthusiasm and correctly responded to the teacher’s questions. After ensuring that the children knew the concept, the teacher proceeded with the activity. The way math activity was designed reflects the teacher’s assumption that the children do not internalise and apply formulae simply by memorising or practicing them. Rather, she understood the importance of engagement in practices of interaction, adaptation, and reflection and tried to incorporate that in her teaching and learning practice (Baoler, 1997; Greeno & MMAP, 1998). In this activity, she did not reduce the purpose of the math activity to memorisation of procedures; instead, she tried to engage children in the activity where they could apply their previous knowledge and built on their understanding using their shared repertoire. Koina facilitated the activity by posing questions or giving instruction that aimed towards controlling children’s actions to proceed in the activity (see turns No. 24, 26, and 27). Not only did the teacher facilitate the smooth sailing of the activity, but she also made children reflect on the task. For instance, after turn No. 27, boys came up with a different solution and she used it as a point to make girls reflect. Instead of offering a direct solution, she asked girls if boys came up with a right response (see turns No. 28, 29, and 31). There were ample instances in this where the teacher tried to make children reflect on their and their opponents’ responses. It was observed that despite of trickiest of the sums raised by their opponents, the children gave correct responses. The majority of the students were observed to be enthusiastically participating in the activity.

Excerpt 5:

77. Beeju: *How much rupees is this?*
78. All girls (high pitch): *Rs.50.*
79. T: *Next. Show the notes clearly. Girls stand up and answer.*
80. Galiyas: *How much rupees is this?*
81. Girls: *Rs.20.*
82. All boys: *How much are these notes?*
83. All girls counting: *Rs.5, Rs. 100, and Rs.100.*
84. (Before girls could even answer, another boy stood up and asked.)
85. Beeju: *How much is this one?*
86. All girls: *Rs.20.*
87. All boys: *How much is this?*
88. All girls: *Rs.10.*

As can be seen in this excerpt, after a point, the children took charge of the activity and the teacher took a back seat. Koina encouraged collaborative learning and discursive practices in the classroom, where discussions and arguments were not considered noise, but were seen as an opportunity for the children to explore links and patterns that were central to math. While actively participating in the activity, the children assumed different roles: Few students worked as the mastermind of the team, few worked as frontrunners, and few others operated as foot soldiers. They demonstrated great teamwork, discussed and debated with each other, and came up with new problems and solutions. It was observed that initially, the children were coming up with
easy problems and solutions, but as the activity advanced, they started to raise the complexity and difficulty level of the problems. The boys tried to confuse girls either by two boys standing simultaneously or only one boy standing with too many notes in their hand. They tried to hide one or two notes so that girls do not see it and go wrong with their calculations. The girls managed to crack boys’ tricks and answered correctly. The boys were trying too hard to confuse girls when the teacher intervened and allowed girls to hold the notes and count. The children enthusiastically participated in this activity where they freely expressed themselves, at times shouted and screamed at top of their voice to suppress their opponent’s voice. It was observed that the children operated as a team in this task and shared mutual accountability for their team and teammates. For instance, it was observed while Galiyas, the mastermind of boys’ team, was deciding the sum that they wanted to show to girls, Pinuel stood up with a Rs.50 note. Galiyas immediately pulled him down and asked Beeju to stand up with five notes of Rs.100 and two notes of Rs.50. Such instances show that the children could mutually engage with each other and were able to master the use of artefacts to participate and solve problems in the classroom. The teacher ended the classroom by asking the children if they understood how to count notes and after getting an affirmative response from them, she explained few problems from the textbook on the blackboard and asked the children to solve it. It was observed that the children continued to work in groups and the teacher too moved from one group to other and guided them if they were facing problems. The notebook analysis of the children revealed that the majority of the children could successfully complete the task.

It was observed that children in the MLE Plus school understood and learnt the subject matter taught to them. The confidence with which children participated in the activity and talked about their learning spoke volumes about their ability and potential as learners. For instance, after the class was over, the children were asked about what they learnt in the math class, the majority of the children confidently participated and tried to show their understanding. 

Excerpt 6:

Elizabeth (E): *We counted money and then solved sums in class today.*
Researcher: *How did you do that, can you explain?*
E: *Hmmm…*
(Shes goes to the math corner and got some notes.)
E: *See, these notes, when you add two notes of Rs.10 like these, it is equal to Rs.20.*
E: *Now, you hold count…*
E: *See, the total is Rs.20.*
E: *Like this we counted money.*

The confidence and the clarity with which Elizabeth explained to the researcher the concept showed that she understood and learnt what was taught in the class. Not only did the children confidently talked about their learning, but Koina also felt that children were doing well.

Our children are doing well. Children with higher intelligence quotient (IQ) are doing very well; average IQ children are also doing good. With my experience of eight years of teaching, I can see that they have the ability to compete with Odia students. My students are quite bright. (Interview with Koina, October 20, 2012)

Koina’s statement and the way children moved from being a novice to gradually increasing the level of complexity of the activity like a competent learner showed children’s conceptual understating and ability to engage with academic concepts using different resources (material and relational) available in the classroom.
Conclusion

The Odia-medium school reproduced the marginal status of Saora language and culture in the classroom by valuing “language of the state” and explicitly excluding Saora linguistic and cultural resources from the educational processes of the children. The exclusionary practices positioned Saora children unfavourably as learners in the classroom community, and the traditional teaching and learning practices that emphasised on memorisation, repetition, and copying reduced children to passive recipients of knowledge. Saora children could neither use their linguistic and cultural resources nor learn to use the resources of the school to engage in academic discourses and classroom interactions. Prolonged experiences of limited engagement with academic concepts and each other in the classroom distanced children from the classroom community and enhanced their experiences of marginalisation.

On the contrary, the MLE Plus school foregrounded Saora linguistic and cultural resources in the classroom and used it as a pedagogical tool to engage and make children feel as a valued member of the classroom community. Inclusive and student-centered teaching and learning practices in the MLE Plus classroom opened spaces for interactional engagement where children not only began to master the use of artefacts available in the classroom, but it also strengthened their connections with their peers and teachers. Collaborative and discursive practices in the classroom enabled children to express, discuss, debate, and build on their mutual understanding of the concepts. Experiences of meaningful participation in academic discourses enabled children to move from the position of a novice to the position of a participant in academic discourses.

References