Chapter 6: Local Contexts and ‘Cultural Disconnects’:

Theorising ‘Practice’

Having laid out the international and national contours of LSE in the previous chapters, here, I attempt to go beyond the empirical description of the field. That is, examining the relationship between actors and the larger processes of education, skilling, and identity formation, I attempt to present a theoretical explanation for the phenomena observed. Central to this is the examination of how actors respond to these conditions imposed on them. While in the previous chapters, the attempt had been to explain how these conditions shaped actors in particular ways, here I aim to present the ‘responses’ (i.e., the set of historically situated, symbolically mediated, ongoing dialectical processes of possibilities and counter-possibilities through which social systems and actors get formed [Ortner, 1994; Postill, 2010]). In taking into account these ‘responses’, I also examine LSE itself as a ‘response’ to other local conditions and factors, thereby examining its material and dialectical constitution as a globally influential discourse.

6.1. Local Contexts, Global Discourses and ‘Cultural Disconnects’:
Understanding Responses from the Field

LSPs, as they unfold in practice, have to contend with multiple realities (some of which such as adaptation to the school culture has already been recounted earlier). Here I draw on some examples from the

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1 By practice, I refer to the long tradition of social theoretical approaches that examine the interaction between agents and structures, and not only pay attention to how structures have “determining” effects upon human action, but also seek to understand how this ‘system’ is produced, reproduced, continued or changed through human action (Ortner, 1994).
field to demonstrate another issue that emerged in practice – that is, of how certain ‘cultural disconnects’ emerged in translating what essentially appears to be middle class cultural practices and socialisation techniques onto the field.

By ‘cultural disconnects’, I refer to the differences in the understanding of the programmes between the facilitators and children (who were the recipients of the programmes) and the international experts, developmental agencies, and middle class managers of local organisations, who sought to transform and ‘empower’ disadvantaged children through these. In presenting these ‘disconnects’, I argue that they emerged not just as a result of the poor training and monitoring practices of the organisations, but more importantly, as a result of differences in ‘cultural capital’ (Bourdieu, 1986). In order to demonstrate what I mean by this, I start with some illustrations of these ‘cultural disconnects’ observed below, and then examine the result of these ‘disconnects’.

6.2. ‘Cultural Disconnects’: A few examples

The following was an event that was observed during a Teachers’ Training Programme (TTP) by IP. But before presenting a description of the event, it is important to first provide some background information about this component of IP’s programme, since this will provide certain vital information required to understand the nature of the programme and the ‘disconnect’.

As mentioned before (in Chapter 3), the TTP was developed as a part of IP’s plan to scale their programme and reach their target of equipping 2, 40,000 children with life skills by 2014. As part of this

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2 On February 2, 2013, for teachers of EES, a minority charitable school in south Bangalore.
expansion plan regular school teachers were to be ‘empowered’ with life skills so that they could, in turn, train children and help IP reach its large target group. Since IP did not have the required manpower of facilitators to reach this target alone, this was sought to be reached indirectly through the TTP. The TTP was started in mid-2012.

This also made it necessary for IP to increase its base of ‘lead facilitators’ (i.e., adults trained in the pedagogic knowledge of how to facilitate life skills classes), who could train other adults (like school teachers) in working with children. Prior to 2012, IP had a small base of ‘lead facilitators’ (less than 10), mostly drawn from its middle class, senior managerial group and/or from other volunteers or consultants who were also largely from the middle class. However, with the need to address this larger number of children, and with the rolling out of a new HR policy (which sought to regularise the contract of facilitators, occupy them with full-time work, and award them incentive-based promotions, as already discussed earlier), in mid-2012 the base of ‘lead facilitators’ was expanded to include some facilitators as well.³ (The selected facilitators had to undergo a separate training for this which was different in orientation when compared to the training they had received as facilitators. This was because the focus here was not simply on affording them an experience of experiential learning practices or drawing their attention to how to make a session experiential. Rather, the focus was also on building the skills required to help other adults recognise the skills required for facilitation).

³ Facilitators, as noted earlier, stood in many ways as a ‘foil’ to the middle class managers’ sensibilities and culture, coming mostly from non-middle class backgrounds or even from impoverished, working class homes or the street.
The TTP was a cost-effective strategy conceived by IP in order to scale their programme. It provided an economical solution to replace the otherwise more expensive direct training programme (since that would require IP to employ a larger number of facilitators on its pay-roll and incur costs on training and monitoring them regularly).\(^4\) In its place IP had signed agreements with several different schools and NGOs, that had voluntarily agreed to bear the costs of training their teachers, in return for the ‘expertise’ that was provided by IP. These costs were mainly those of hiring a training facility (which could be met within the school itself, if the school had space), and food (which, in the case of the MES training that will be described below, was brought from the teachers’ and head master’s homes.) Thus, in contrast with IP’s internal trainings for facilitators and volunteers, which were held in more elite, paid, community halls and training centres such as Ashirvad and Mobility India (in Bangalore), TTPs, like for MES, were organised in more modest spaces such as the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagar Palike (BBMP) Samudaya Bhavan\(^5\) (with even toilet facilities not available in some of these spaces. Thus, during the MES training programme we were given coupons by the school to use the local pay and use toilet.)

I describe these differences in detail since I will come back to discuss this point on scale later, in discussing how these training programmes were conceived of by IP. I also undertake this detailed description as a way to point to the kinds of spaces for which non-middle class facilitators-turned-lead facilitators like Jaffar (who co-facilitated the MES training described below), were trained for. (I contrast this with the

\(^4\) An individual facilitator’s monthly salary was approximately Rs. 7250 (as retrieved from IP’s website, February 3, 2015).

\(^5\) A government run community hall that is lower in cost compared to the ones at which IP held its internal trainings.
mostly middle class lead facilitators who conducted training internally for
the facilitators, or for other middle class volunteers, which again seems
to suggest a segregation of roles based on class. The middle class
members of IP would also not be seen at trainings for children in the
government and other low-income aided schools, except when they came
into school occasionally to monitor sessions).

Having laid out some of the background information required to
understand the context of the TTP, I now present a snippet from the
programme conducted for MES by ‘Sasha’ (Shashidhar) and Jaffar.
While Sasha was an experienced, middle class, freelance personality
training consultant, and voice-over artist who had worked with IP as a
consultant ‘lead facilitator’ for over two years, Jaffar was a recently
trained lead facilitator. Jaffar belonged to a lower-middle class
background, and was a former (school) arts teacher, who had joined IP a
few months earlier. I discuss this particular training session handled by
these two lead facilitators from different backgrounds in order to
highlight the differences in their facilitation style, and the ways in which
they oriented their audience. (I use this as an example to demonstrate how
‘cultural disconnects’ emerged in the course of translation of these
programmes on field).

**Diary Entry: February 2, 2013, TTP for MES**

After a round of morning warm-up activities, Jaffar started the
next session saying, “Think of how you can *use* what we did
in the morning *with children*”. Sasha immediately rephrases
this, saying, “For that you should first see *how this will be of
use to you*. Then only we can take it to the children”.

A little while later, Sasha, who was conducting a session on
understanding the goals of IP’s LSP, asked the teachers what
is meant by ‘life skills’. Some answered stating it means
“personality development”. When Sasha pushed them to think
further by bringing them to focus on the two words - ‘life’ and
‘skills’, one teacher pointed out that it means “How we should live life”. Immediately Sasha rephrased this saying it is about “the skills we need to lead life”. Giving an example he explained, “If there is a fire here, we need skills to escape and help others escape. Everyone may be ready to pour water to put out the fire, but that needs life skills.”

During another activity called ‘River of Life’, in which participants had to share intimate details of their life’s journey, Jaffar asked the group, “how did you feel after sharing your story?” Teachers responded stating that they had realised that others’ problems were bigger than theirs, and thus they could use this activity to give children an opportunity to talk about their lives as well. Even though Jaffar tried to draw their attention to aspects of their own selves, the conversation kept slipping towards children. So Jaffar summarised the discussion stating, “The goal of this activity is to be able to bring out what children have in their minds. They might have so many problems.”

This led to a teacher speaking of the various kinds of activities that might be useful to have children speak about their problems. At this point Sasha intervened and reminded the group that the goal was for them to think about themselves. He asked them to reflect about aspects such as the creation of a ‘safe space’ that had been necessary to create an atmosphere of trust and sharing, where they could share their feelings.

What appeared to be central to the exchanges within this session (as to several other instances observed on field) was the difference in outcomes emphasised by the two facilitators. While Sasha and other middle class employees and volunteers (like myself) associated the programme and its participative pedagogies and experiential moments of learning with a process of self-introspection, personal transformation and change, non-middle class facilitators (like Jaffar), teachers, and children, associated it with specific content to be learnt through the programmes. For example, in replying to Sasha’s question on the meaning of ‘life skills’, teachers described it as learning how one should lead life (implying certain standards and social norms prescribed by society). In contrast with this, Sasha presented life skills as the ‘skills’ that were
internal to an individual, and thus drew attention to the need for self-making and self-regulation.

A similar kind of ‘disconnect’ could also be observed during the facilitation of the ‘River of Life’ activity. While Jaffar, during reflection, appeared to move away from a discussion on the internal aspects of the self, and sought to summarise how the activity was to be conducted with children, Sasha reoriented the discussion back to the self. Jaffar appeared to be at a loss when it came to having a ‘vital conversation’ around the phenomenology of trust and sharing that was the basis of the activity. However, at this point Sasha brought back the attention to the creation of a ‘safe space’, by drawing attention to participants’ personal attitudes and effort that had facilitated the opening up of the self. He thus took the conversation beyond the level of the immediate relief felt by the teachers to see how and what had enabled this experience, and how experientiality became central to the process of learning. Focusing continuously on the need to be self-reflective during the session, and trying to explain this philosophy to the teachers, Sasha also made the following comment: “The way I behave is my life skills. If I develop life skills in me, I can develop it in children. If there is a lack of life skills in me, it is difficult to develop it in children.”

Central to these ideas circulated by the middle class organisers and managers of the programme was the notion of working upon the self. Life skills were not seen as ‘rules of thumb’ or guides; neither were they seen as that required only by children, to be given through instruction. Rather, they were seen as particular and specific experiences of ‘concerted

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6 ‘Vital conversation’ is the term used by the organisation to describe a deeply introspective and emotionally charged discussion on sensitive topics related to the self.
cultivation’ that provide opportunities for examining one’s self and bringing aspects of it into conscious awareness.7

This understanding of the skills was also seen in the narratives of most founder/directors of these LSPs, including Devesh Arya, the founder and CEO of IP, as can be seen from the excerpt below:

I asked myself what was my strength. It was to think creatively. I started thinking of all my experiences [that had enabled this], all of which came from non-academic experiences. That’s how I started these programmes. Experiences of supporting a friend who had an accident, struggling through projects, going blank in a debate competition, rejecting a neighbour who had been affected by cancer when he became sick - these experiences started standing out for me. I realised all these were experiential in nature, and these were the moments that were unique and gave me those insights. I wanted to create these powerful experiences for children to help them build insights. I started these programmes purely from that space (personal communication, May 28, 2012).

As Devesh’s account shows, life skills were understood to be more than ‘skills’, and as experiences of reflecting upon the self and engaging in a process of ‘conscious self-making’.8 Thus trainings were also meant to focus on the creation of such experiences. Further, training for facilitators and adults were meant to simultaneously help them achieve an emergent understanding and recognition of the strategies, practices, and environment through which this process of ‘conscious self-making’

7 Vincent and Ball (2007), drawing on Laureau (2003), describe ‘concerted cultivation’ as the use of language and reason as strategies to pin down aspects of the self, talent and identity.
8 ‘Self-making’, as used by Vincent and Ball (2007), refers to the idea that the child must become someone of categoric value through a process of choice-making and realisation of one’s potential. I use ‘conscious’, as an adverb here, to refer to how the programmes are specifically designed to bring these processes to the level of awareness and verbalisation.
could be brought to fore, rather than on teaching strategies or providing instructions on how to conduct a class.

IP was in fact one of the few organisations that invested heavily in building this culture of conscious self-making through introspection among its entire staff (even among those who were not directly in contact with the children or involved in training) – a practice that seemed to stem from a more complex account of behavioural change held by IP. As the following comment by Devesh, put to his team during training shows, this practice seemed to be motivated by a belief that unconscious and unexamined aspects of the self could influence the ways in which one behaved. Stating the following to his facilitators at a training programme-

> When you are doing art in a class, and a child comes up and says I don’t want to sit next to that girl because she’s a Dalit, and you say it’s ok, you don’t have to sit, then your bias is coming through (personal communication, May 15, 2014),

he argued: “Therefore, there is a need to explore one’s self, who am I, and where I come from. Then come skills” (ibid).

Thus, in order to adequately familiarise and transfer this culture and practice to facilitators, IP organised a series of trainings for them during the academic year 2012-2013. This included an intense, four-day training programme that included sessions on organisational goals and vision, sessions for self-introspection and personal transformation, and ‘teach back’ sessions in which facilitators could practice their skills of facilitation.

In addition to this there were other occasions on which facilitators received training along with the other members of the organisation, such as when the master trainer, Christiana Munro, visited India in October

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9 From where the above example given by Devesh to his team has been taken.
Other than trainings there were also occasions when facilitators could receive clarification or discuss the pedagogy of facilitation. These were called ‘Curriculum Feedback Sessions’ (of which there were three held - two with the internal managerial team of IP, and one with Christiana Munro when she visited India). During these meetings, the team discussed the relevance of the curriculum and the facilitation practices to children, and received clarification on how activities were to be conducted and on the aims and objectives of the activities and sessions.

However, despite this rigorous training and investment in bringing about a personal transformation in the facilitators, as well as in their knowledges about facilitation, what was largely visible was a failure of the transfer of this culture. While facilitators mastered ‘content knowledge’ (e.g., psychological terminologies, programme jargon), and imitated overt behaviour and mannerisms of the middle class (which included dressing style, mannerisms such as greeting each other with high fives, handshakes, or hugs, adopted personal accessories such as leather-bound organizers with which to plan their sessions/schedules, etc.), the actual tacit skills and knowledges required for facilitation were often missed out.

To provide an example of what I mean by this, below I present a session conducted by Devyani and Sonu (two newly trained lead facilitators of IP) during an annual training programme, conducted for the staff and volunteers of IP, in the presence of Christiana. To provide a brief background to this, the session was conducted with the intention of achieving two aims: first, it was meant to be an internal training programme for the entire organisation in order to ensure that a common

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10 Christiana was from an international youth empowerment organisation from which IP sourced its curriculum.
understanding of the programme is available to all its staff and volunteers, and to train them in the philosophy and pedagogy that IP subscribed to. Second, this session was also specifically meant for Devyani and Sonu, who had recently been trained as lead facilitators, to provide them with an opportunity to practice their skills and receive feedback from the master trainer, Christiana.

Devyani was a senior programme coordinator at IP who had been involved in their Youth Centre and mentoring programme for over six years. Having come from an impoverished home, Devyani had first encountered IP as a ‘mentee’, and had received mentoring support from IP in making important life choices such as selection of a career, decisions about continuing education, and so on. Devyani had then started volunteering with IP in 2007, after completing her tenth standard. She had been assigned the task of going into disadvantaged communities and identifying youth like her, who could benefit from IP’s mentoring and LSP, and of convincing their families and motivating the youth to attend the programmes as she was seen as having the knowledge, personal experience, and language required to convince members from these communities.\(^{11}\)

Sonu, the other facilitator, also came from an impoverished background, and was a migrant from Orissa who had come to Bangalore in search of better job prospects. Sonu worked as a senior coordinator in the administrative team at IP, and was in charge of technical and logistical support (which involved ensuring the availability of resources, food, water and other logistical support required during outdoor trainings), distribution of required material for sessions to facilitators on the

\(^{11}\) As reported by Devyani (personal communication, April 20, 2014).
instructions of the admin-in-charge, stock-taking, and other clerical jobs involving payments at the bank, electricity bills, etc. Pointing out that IP had a tradition of providing training in life skills to all its employees (including the administrative staff), Sonu informed me during an informal conversation, that he had initially resisted this, considering it irrelevant to his job. It was only following the CEO, Devesh’s intervention, that he had been convinced to attend the training. However, having attended the training once, Sonu had felt that his ‘mind had been opened up.’ This course of events had also opened up his mind to the possibility of training for, and becoming, a ‘lead facilitator’ and ultimately starting such an organisation independently back in his own hometown (personal communication, October 19, 2012).

Coming back to the point of the session conducted by Devyani and Sonu at the annual in-house training event (which took place in October, 2012), the task given to them was to facilitate sessions on personal transformation for a mixed group of middle class staff and volunteers and ‘non-middle class’ facilitators of the organisation. The particular activity that was to be conducted was a game called ‘Lava Pit’ that is used to build skills of team work, communication, critical thinking, and develop proximity and closeness among the group.

For the purpose of the activity the group was divided into two teams, and each was given the task of crossing an imaginary lava pit (i.e., an imaginary space designated in the middle of the room). Each of the teams were provided with a set of mats (that would allow them to cross the pit without getting burnt by the lava). However, the number of mats provided were always lesser than the number of team members, and what would have been enough to cover the entire length of the pit. Thus the members of each team were required to strategise in a manner that would
allow them to cross the pit with the entire team safely. For this they had to accommodate themselves on as few mats as possible (staying physically in contact with each other), while freeing up others mats to place them ahead so that they could step on these as they moved forward. During this process if members stepped into the ‘lava’, failed to remain physically connected to each other, or left some other members out, the team was asked to start all over again. Finally, the goal was to complete the task before the other team.

While this was the nature of the activity to be facilitated by Sonu and Devyani, a series of ‘disconnects’ could be observed right from the start. First, instructions with respect to the goals and restrictions placed by the activity were so weakly explained that it allowed the two groups to take creative licenses with respect to the performance of the activity. For example, instead of the activity leading to an atmosphere of competition in which the two groups found the most effective team-based strategies to finish the activity first, it led to an atmosphere of cooperation and subversion of rules with the two groups helping each other, instead of competing to outdo each other. The two groups coordinated their movements and pooled in their mats in order to increase the total pool of mats available to both teams to cross the pit. Further, since mats were exchanged in such a manner that each team moved a few steps at a time and then gave their extra mats to the other team to also move in front, both teams finished the task at the same time, and in the process also missed out connecting physically with their own team members.

Following the activity, during reflection, middle class members of the group such as Sonali (Programme Anchor from IP’s managerial team) and Carmen (a college student and volunteer from the US), noted that the activity had been “chaotic”, no one had been listening to each other, and
that ideas had not been shared between each other in the group. Other middle class members such as Tim (a retired school teacher, and another volunteer from the UK), noted that the groups had been “closed” and that he had felt left out. Tim also noted how another volunteer, Stephanie’s suggestion, on how to strategise to achieve the goal had never been paid attention to.

In contrast with this the non-middle class facilitators, who had dominated and led the activity, had enjoyed the boisterous atmosphere in which the activity had taken place and the improvisations (of exchanging mats across the groups) they had made under the circumstances. For the facilitators the game had been an instance of displaying their camaraderie, with most of the activity having been dominated by instructions and plans they had called out to each other across the groups. In this process they had left out some of the other middle class members in their own groups to follow suit.

Thus what emerged dramatically during the reflection process was the difference in experiences that the middle class managerial group and volunteers had in comparison with the experiences had by the facilitators. These differences in experiences were further compounded by other factors such as the formation of in-groups and out-groups (as reflected by Tim’s account, with Tim and the other middle class members of the group forming the minority out-group). This also had implications in terms of the comfort experienced by different groups in terms of personal and physical space. For example, Sneha (one of the founding members and volunteers of IP), described her experience in the following manner:

I feel very protective about my personal space. I did not feel safe in the space because there were new people I was meeting for the first time and I was asked to come physically proximate to strangers for an activity.
While all these observations made by participants raised several opportunities for reflecting over questions of ‘safety’, space, group dynamics, gendered and class-based experiences of discomfort, experiences of feeling left out or not being heard, and even an occasion to reflect over the creative improvisations made, what was observed was that both Devyani and Sonu were largely unable to delve deeper into these experiences and engage participants in a process of self-reflection. While Sonu seemed to have mastered, and demonstrated, the behavioural knowledge and skills of being a ‘good’ and engaged ‘listener’ (which is one of the tasks that is emphasised of a facilitator and taught to them), by adopting the right body language (i.e., with his head tilted on one side, nodding in response to the comments made by the speakers and providing feedback with periodic responses such as “okay”, which appeared to demonstrate a keen interest in what the speaker had to say), he was unable to reflect respondents’ thoughts back to them, or to the larger group, stimulating them to dig deeper into the nature of the problem. While he tried to prolong the reflection by constantly saying “More … anyone?”, he was unable to pick up on the previous point and recast it into a provocative thought or question that would further the discussion.

Similarly Devyani responded to Tim and Sneha’s comments by redirecting the focus onto children, rather than provoking the group to examine themselves, stating, “It is very beautiful the way Tim and Sneha have put these points. Are these things what happen with our young adults as well?” Again her use of the term ‘young adults’ revealed the manner in which Devyani had been able to internalise the language of the organisation (which also referred to adolescents as ‘young adults’, giving the appearance of recognising the agency of their students), while being
unable to master the tacit skills of facilitation which required engaging individuals deeply with their own selves.

These points on how reflection was conducted by the two facilitators can be compared with how the same activity (i.e., Lava Pit) had been facilitated by Devesh and Diana (the Associate Manager of the Programme Delivery Team at IP), for teachers of EES.¹² During this training, Devesh and Diana sought to throw back at the group the thoughts and actions that had emerged in the course of the activity in order to help them reflect on themselves. For example, following the ‘Lava Pit’ activity, Devesh, who conducted the reflection drew the teachers’ attention to points in the activity when they had not followed the rules (unlike Sonu and Devyani who did not comment upon this).

Informing them that he had noticed this, he pointed out to the teachers that he was not looking at it from a perspective of “cheating”, but was trying to understand their perspective. Asking them questions such as, “Did you feel it was not important to follow rules?”, and “Did you feel that there were weak members in the team?”, Devesh brought around the discussion to questions of “What does it mean to win?”, and whether it was acceptable to win by bending the rules or leaving team members out. Having elicited responses from the group about members who were in a ‘sari’, and who were slowing down the group’s progress because they found it difficult to jump over to the next mat, Devesh related this to real life ‘handicaps’ and disabilities, bringing the group to introspect on whether the following conclusions could be deduced from their action: “So you’re saying you can leave behind a [handicapped] person to reach a goal?” Stating that “One [aspect of the game] is the goal,

and the other is how you get to the goal”, Devesh was able to elicit responses from teachers’ with respect to how, while the goal was important, how one got to the goal must also be paid attention to.

Similarly Sanjana, the Programme Anchor of the Design and Development team at IP, who was also present at the training, made a thought-provoking intervention to the ongoing discussion stating, “It is easy to break the rules when no one is watching. When this repeatedly happens we become less guilty [of breaking the rules].” This prompted one of the teachers to share her self-realisation of how this had been true in her case with teaching. With no one monitoring her classes on an everyday basis, she pointed out that she had gradually become more and more lax in her duties as a teacher and had become less uncomfortable about this over a period of time.

Thus, what could be seen from the two different instances of facilitation with the same activity was how the two sets of facilitators oriented the group members to different lessons to be learnt from the activity. While Devesh and Sanjana sought to bring the teachers to internally examine themselves, Devyani and Sonu, on the other hand, seemed to shift the focus outwards, towards the children that they would be working with.

This was despite having been introduced to the ‘culture of self-making’ through several forms of training, and the extended period of time spent with the organisation, in the case of facilitators such as Devyani. In fact, other facilitators, both at IP and the other organisations (where the training processes were, however, not as strong as IP’s), oriented to the programmes similarly, which therefore led me to conclude that what the programmes seemed to be failing to transfer the middle class
‘cultural capital’, or ways of relating to the self as a “project-in-the-making” (Vincent and Ball, 2007).

6.2. ‘Cultural capital’ and the Ways of Making Sense of the Self

I introduce the notion of ‘cultural capital’ here since I propose (following Bourdieu) that it is closely tied with questions of identity, and consequently with the kinds of responses made or actions undertaken from the particular standpoints and social locations that the various actors involved in these programmes, occupy. ‘Cultural capital’ refers to the analytical concept put forth by Bourdieu to explain the non-material forms in which class differences and inequalities are sustained. According to Bourdieu (1986), non-economic and embodied forms of wealth, such as forms of socialization and education, that are the work of time and specific cultural practices of upbringing endow individuals with particular kinds of minds, bodies, selves, tastes, mannerisms, lifestyles, dress, etc., that provide the crucial material necessary to sustain class distinction beyond monetary wealth. In its objectified form this also consists of various ‘objects of culture’ (such as books, paintings, art, instruments, technology), certifications, degrees and scholarships, that confer status, and are not equally accessible by all. Central to this notion of ‘cultural capital’ is the hidden, congealed, and embodied forms of knowledge transferred through hereditary processes or exchanged within specific social networks (e.g., family, friends, school, community, religious, etc.), and that are otherwise difficult to transmit or acquire due to their tacit and embodied nature. According to Bourdieu, it is these forms of ‘capital’ that essentially allow social differences to be reproduced and maintained within society.
More recently studies by Annette Laureau (2000; 2003), Carol Vincent and Stephen Ball (2007) and others, have drawn on this concept to show how child rearing strategies in middle class and working class homes differ, affording children different ‘cultural capital’ and base for socio-economic participation and success within dominant institutions (that favour particular kinds of selves). For example, in her book *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race and Family Life*, Laureau (2003) argues that middle class parents invest in strategies of “concerted cultivation” (that require greater direct and indirect resources such as income or time off from work and leisure), engage children in age-appropriate activities. Part of these strategies also involve the of use reasoning and questioning as ways to pin down aspects of identity and create a sense of autonomy and entitlement of the self.

On the other hand she has noted that white and African-American working class families invest in strategies of “natural growth”, which emphasise food, shelter, safety, and love as the prerequisites for healthy development, leaving other aspects of development (such as leisure) to the children themselves. Working class parents were also found to use more directives and physical punishments in correcting children’s behaviours, rather than engaging them in a process of examining and introspecting one’s self, which has implications for the sense of autonomy and entitlement experienced by these children.

These differences noted by Laureau in fact even seemed to have clear overlaps with the differences in ideas about children’s socialisation, shared by the middle class organisers of the LSPs (who emphasise autonomy and self-examination on the part of the child), and the facilitators and teachers in government schools (who seemed to favour strategies of ‘natural growth’, as will be shown below). Similar
observations have also been made by other scholars about the middle class in the Indian context, who have been noted to provide their children with experiences of ‘concerted cultivation’ through engagement in various paid curricular and extra-curricular activities, in a bid to foster a sense of individuality and competition in them (refer Ganguly-Scraser and Scraser, 2012; Nambissan, 2010; Saraswathi and Pai, 2000). In fact Saraswathi and Pai (2000) note that while the traditional ‘ethno-theory of (child) development’ has favoured a view of learning as maturation (rather than as formal practice, as seen among the working class in Laureau’s study), and did not favour the use of praise, rewards, and reinforcements for this, present practices of socialisation among the middle class shows a heavy investment in educational and extra-curricular activities that support children’s individualistic and materialistic expressions. This shift in attitudes of child rearing, that offers the child more autonomy and opportunities for self-expression, reflects the new ‘middle class modernity’ that has been a consequence of their greater cultural contact and affinity with the West and its cultural and educational resources and experiences.13

In contrast with this, ‘modern’ ideas about self-making appeared to still be absent among those who belonged to the lower classes, or to provincial contexts, such as the children and teachers from government schools (an observation that has been made by other scholars, such as Nita Kumar [2007] also). Thus, for example, government school teachers such as Jyothsana Nayak, a Hindi teacher at AGS explained the LSPs in the following manner: “In government schools, parents don’t talk to children. They only provide for clothes and food. Children need someone

13 For a socio-historical account of middle class formation in India, refer Baviskar and Ray (2011); Deshpande (2003); Fernandes (2006); Joshi (2001), etc.
to talk to. Then they will get relief and feel like doing something” (personal communication, August 6, 2012). Echoing Laureau’s ‘natural growth’ strategy, what Jyothsana seemed to understand as significantly absent from the homes of the children she worked with, was affection or emotional support. She therefore saw the programmes as fulfilling this requirement of ‘natural growth’, in addition to providing good advice.

Absent from Jyothsana’s account was an idea of ‘life skills’ as training to engage the child with one’s self and develop insights into their attitudes, behaviours and beliefs. Even facilitators such as Vrinda (from MFCL) and Yamuna (of VYB) explained the programmes in a similar fashion. While Vrinda explained to me that their role was one of providing guidance and advice, and that the success of the programmes ultimately depended on whether children took up these strategies and applied it to their lives (personal communication, November 15, 2012), Yamuna explained that her role was one of providing emotional and personal support to those children that no one else (i.e., neither parents, nor teachers) had time to care for (personal communication, March 23, 2012).

Having described the differences in approach by the two groups to the programmes, which appeared to result from the differences in their socio-cultural capital, in the next section I now attempt to extend this argument further. In doing this I examine how these ways of orienting to the programmes contribute simultaneously to the ‘failure’ and ‘reproduction’ of the global discourses on the self, education, and future success and mobility within the current neoliberal environment.

In order to demonstrate this I examine each group’s ‘responses’ (i.e., the facilitators’, the managers’, and the children’s) to the
programmes as acts of ‘strategic opportunising’ (a term that I will explain further below). I also try to show how the ‘field’ itself can be understood as a site born out of a series of such ‘responses upon responses’. Further, I attempt to show how the larger global discourse and practice of LSE can also be viewed as a ‘response’ to certain other conditions and factors.

6.4. ‘Strategic Opportunising’, Failure, and Reproduction of Global Discourses

I use the term ‘strategic opportunising’ to describe the ways in which actors strategically and opportunistically respond to the current life situations that they find themselves in. That is, in the face of an assemblage of discursive socio-cultural practices and techno-scientific rationalities that have produced new standards for ‘being’ (e.g., modern, ‘successful’, ‘educated’, ‘flexible’, ‘adaptable’, ‘skilled’, etc.), and that have consequently marked their own cultural ways of being as ‘coarse’, ‘dull’, ‘backward’ or ‘uncultured’ (as discussed in the earlier chapters), I argue that actors ‘respond’ in two ways: first, by taking stock of their own selves and making sense of themselves against these new discourses (i.e., about how one is, and how one ought to be); and second, by selectively appropriating these discourses in order stay relevant in the current scenario. I explain this further below by discussing how each group of actors made sense of the life skills discourse.

6.4.a. Facilitators and the production of a new professional status

As a way to explain the point made above, I start with accounts presented by the facilitators, which offers an insight into how they

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14 The inspiration for this comes from Foucault’s idea of power as ‘action upon actions’, and seeks to present an idea of the field as dynamically and dialectically constituted.
understood the LSPs and their own selves in relation to it. Belonging to modest lower middle class or lower class, rural and/or agricultural backgrounds, associated with small towns and universities, the facilitators that I speak about were those that Nita Kumar (2007) describes as the ‘provincial other’, to the urban, globalised, corporatised, ‘modern’ India. As members belonging to these ‘provincialities’, they were those who have occupied ‘inferior positions’ within organisational and institutional discourses, and were recognised by the organisations as not sufficiently educated in ‘modernity’ and ‘bourgeoisie culture’ that require a particular facility with practices of self-making in space and time (N.Kumar, 2007).

Even when many facilitators, in organisations such as VYB and MFCL, had exposure to a ‘modern’ discipline such as ‘Psychology’, they had mostly not imbibed its cultural ways of understanding the self as a ‘bounded, rational and autonomous entity’ (Burman, 2007; Fendler, 1998; Rose, 1999), and did not apply its techniques of self-making to their own lives. In fact, many of these facilitators even reported that they had not even heard of LSE before joining their respective organisations. Consequently, they were also those whose knowledge was devalued in all three organisations, and the ones who occupied lower roles within the organisations, with little decision making powers or opportunities for creatively contributing towards curriculum development. In their functions they resembled what Giroux (1985) has noted about teachers, as being ‘high level technicians’ in the neoliberal economy, who have been separated from the processes of knowledge creation and generation, and are required to merely follow the blueprint for education laid down somewhere else (Sarangapani, 2011). Based on this understanding, thus

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15 Some facilitators even had a masters’ level training in the subject, because of which they had been recruited by their organisations.
facilitators were also constructed by the organisations, as ‘recipients’ of the programmes who had to be educated in ‘life skills’, monitored, and evaluated. In the face of these constructions of their selves, I now present the set of responses put forth by facilitators such as Kaveri and others, in making sense of their lives.

Providing explanations such as, “we’ve never grown up with [these skills]”, but are “opening up a little”, because of this, what facilitators such as Kaveri seemed to be doing was attempting to make sense of themselves. Comparing herself with the children that she worked with, Kaveri attempted to explain to me about how these skills were important for the children in government schools to gain confidence, and to ensure a level playing field for them, when compared to others from the middle class. Pointing to how she herself had never received such opportunities due to the absence of such forms of training during her school days, she sought to explain how she, and government school children (like her) lacked confidence because of this. Thus, she argued that they were also afraid to speak in front of ‘private school children’, and brought their ‘culture’ (of being loud, rash, withdrawn, disrespectful, or addicted to drugs) into school. Stating that “they [government school children] should also improve like private school children. When they leave school they should know how to be in society”, she made a case for the LSPs. She pointed out that while, these skills should have come automatically to them, it was important to place these “openly in front of this generation of children” so that they may also benefit (personal communication, July 31, 2012).

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16 In contrast with this, Kaveri believed that middle class children left their ‘culture’ behind, since they were ‘bold’.
Similarly, others such as Yamuna (a facilitator from VYB), also appeared to be making sense of her non-middle class self, and that of the children in government schools in a similar manner. Stating the need for these programmes specifically for children in government schools, she explained

… government school children require life skills more because they don’t know anything, have no discipline, won’t wear uniforms; … they come like free persons. They are the rebel kind. They don’t know that they need to wish the teacher. Government schools don’t teach them how to behave or about interpersonal ‘talking’ (sic) skills. They come from slums so we need to educate them. In private schools, they are already taught so many things … There may be family problems like parents not looking after well (in private schools), but these kind of problems are not there (personal communication, March 31, 2012).

From the narratives of facilitators, such as these, what appeared commonly across the accounts were the ways in which they came to evaluate and understand their selves, and that of the children, in relation to the bourgeoisie standards of the new economy, workplaces, educational settings and society. In relation to these standards there was a recognition of their own selves as lacking these knowledges that were important for mobility and success. Thus, for example, facilitators such as Bharath (from IP) explained to their students:

I was poor. My parents struggled to put me through school. Someone like this (pointing towards me) taught me art, clay modelling, acting, dance, and today it has helped me get a job.17

Recounting to his class about how he got his present job by impressing his managers with his mimicry skills, Bharath sought to highlight how

17 Observed at a session for eighth standard students at ANMS on August 22, 2012.
these programmes could offer real skills that could compensate for the poor outcomes of schooling for these children.

Yet, in ‘responding’ to these programmes and their discourses in this manner, I argue that facilitators were not just trying to make sense of themselves in relation to the new demands and expectations placed on individuals through these educational discourses, to become more ‘skilled’. I argue that they also ‘responded strategically’ in another sense, by ‘opportunistically’ using the discourses and practice of these very programmes. That is, facilitators seemed to be adopting and applying the language and practices associated with these LSPs to themselves, in order stay ‘relevant’ and access certain kinds of training, identities, jobs, etc., while, also rejecting parts of it, and substituting it with other ends.

Therefore, facilitators such as Bharath and Sonu continued to see value in these forms of cultural training programmes offered by the middle class, for the opportunities for mobility it could provide them. Understanding the specific opportunities it could afford them (such as getting trained and certified by international experts such as Christiana Munro), Bharath even stated the following to me, on one occasion: “Adu ondu training sikkidare, naane training shuru maaDuttini” (‘If I could get that one training, I will start my own training programmes’).18 Similarly, others such as Sonu also expressed these desires of starting his own organisation with the skills he could gain from working at IP.19 In these instances, facilitators appeared to be drawing on the very currents, patterns, conditions, and discourses of ‘skills training’, and the particular ideas of an entrepreneurial self that have gained currency in the present context, and that threatened to render them irrelevant, ‘unemployable’,

18 Personal communication (September 22, 2012).
19 Personal communication (October 18, 2012).
‘uneducated’, and ‘inconsequential’, to fit in and survive within this climate.

Yet, when I describe these ‘responses’ as opportunistic, what I also mean to show is how, on the other hand, they appeared to use this space and training to very different ends, training children in a different set of knowledges. That is, they appeared to be conducting the sessions without necessarily adopting the discourse and practices of LSE in its entirety, which is what led to the ‘disconnects’ observed on the field (as noted above). For example, these knowledges and skills that they emphasised were ones of support and advice on how to be ‘disciplined’ (by following external norms, rules, conventions and authority), additional vocational or technical skills that could secure them jobs (as had been true for Bharath), and the language and cultural jargon available to children from the middle class.

This was evident from classroom events during which facilitators such as Vrinda (of MFCL) clearly explained the nature of the programmes, stating to her students that, “We will teach you also to go on the right path. If you go on that right path, very good. Otherwise, I can only say it’s your bad luck” (personal communication, October 25, 2012). Others, such as Yamuna (of VYB) focused on presenting ‘jargon’ or novel information, such as learning the spelling of ‘psychology’, learning the full form of ‘WHO’, learning terms such as ‘copers’, ‘spewers’, and ‘exploders’, and so on. Similarly, other facilitators such as Arunoday from MFCL emphasised the learning of the 10 life skills in English. Insisting that children should have these names at their fingertips, he provided them with the following warning: “Next class if you don’t learn

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20 These were categories mentioned in the facilitators’ manual, in the lesson on anger management, to describe people based on their differences in their expression of anger.
the 10 life skills, there will be no punishment. But I won’t give you entry into class” (personal communication, November 15, 2012).

Further, all these forms of novel information presented to the children had to be copied, memorised, repeated, and reproduced in subsequent classes. Thus, for the facilitators, as much as for the children themselves, this ‘jargon’ itself inspired awe and represented the power of middle class ‘knowledge’, therefore also often becoming the main part of the lesson and take away from the classes. Often sessions would include a game in which the children and the facilitator, together, would try to use this ‘jargon’ learnt – for example, by identifying people in the group using the categories they had learnt, such as ‘spewers’ or ‘copers’.

Further, while using this language, explanations and (sometimes) even the activities and pedagogic practices (e.g., questioning) of the programmes, would be put to more conventional ends of teaching children obedience or respect for elders, as can be seen from the two examples given here. The first example is from a life skills session conducted by Gautam, a facilitator from IP for the fifth standard at ANMS.\(^{21}\) After a game called the ‘Yes game’, where an object is hidden and one child (who has been sent out of the class earlier), tries to find the object with the help of cues given by his/her classmates, Rajesh started a discussion on the learnings obtained from playing the game. After initially asking some questions about ‘Who didn’t like the game’, and ‘Why’, he went on to summarise the lesson learnt from the game, pointing out that if in the game, the individual had been shown the wrong route, or had not received support from the class, he/she wouldn’t have been able to find the object. Similarly, he pointed out that “only if we follow our parents and teachers

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\(^{21}\) On February 17, 2012.
we will be able to reach our goals.” He concluded this lesson saying “Study hard and somehow pass”.

In another session, Yamuna Karkera, a facilitator from VYB, conducted a class on decision making for students of ninth standard at AGS, again using this as a way to draw attention to appropriate classroom behavior. A part of this session is presented below.

Yamuna: I will tell you a story. Listen carefully. This is about 10 frogs which lived in a river. A few of the frogs, about five of them, think of moving to another river to get better food. So how many frogs left the river?

Students (in chorus): five…10…

Yamuna: I said five frogs were thinking (emphasising this) of going to another river. I did not tell you how many went to another river. So thought has not taken action here. (Turns to the black board and writes ‘Decision’ on the board. Students, in chorus, start shouting “memory”, in response to this. She continues to write ‘Decision → Action-Oriented’, then turns and addresses the students).

Yamuna: You all, before coming to the ninth this year, would have thought you have to study well. You have to make it action-oriented. If you haven’t converted it into action it will get cancelled. Next topic let us take, ‘Thinking of being good’. Every decision has good and bad consequences. What are the good consequences of being a good student?

Student 1: Girls are always called good. Boys are called bad. (Children start laughing)

Student 2: We will get good marks.

Student 1: We should do our work, complete our work. We shouldn’t bring a bad name to our school.

Student 3: We will have a good name with teachers. There will be discipline. We will get good marks.

Yamuna: So these are the good consequences of this decision. What are the bad consequences that come from it? …

Student 4: Responsibility becomes more.

Student 5: We can’t make noise in class.

Student 6: We will have less freedom.

…

22 On December 13, 2012
23 Portions of the transcript has been here omitted due to constraints of space. The entire transcript is reproduced in the appendix 7.
Yamuna: Next step – you have to assess whether there are more of good or bad consequences to the decision. If you have taken a decision you have to think of its consequences also. You should think if I should go ahead or not. If good is more you should go with that; if bad is more you should not go with it. That decision, who needs to take? You only. You only know –or should I take (the decision)? So choice is yours.

In another session, conducted for a group of eighth standard students at AGS, Yamuna drew her class’ attention to the following expectation for behaviour at school24:

Yamuna: Can we talk to teachers and parents like we talk to our friends? … When you have a doubt can you just ask like this (making an aggressive tone and gesture)? There’s a way to ask no? What approach should we use?

Students: We must fold our hands and tell the teacher ‘miss we are unable to understand. Can you please explain it?’

Yamuna: So you shouldn’t ask rashly, but softly. Then teacher will feel like answering. Otherwise she will think I have so much experience and she (student) is talking to me so rashly (sic).

What can be seen from these transcripts given above is the coupling of the ‘questioning’ method with conventional techniques, such as, the use of ‘directives’ to reinforce traditional notions of ‘discipline’ (that are very different from the notions of ‘self-disciplining’ that are emphasised by the programme managers. These practices in fact resemble the traditional socialisation goals mentioned by Saraswathi and Pai [2000], as noted above). Questioning, here, served as a means to elicit the ‘right’ answers that were important to reinforce conventional discipline, rather than to allow for children’s agencies to be expressed or selves to be explored.25 Rather than involving children in gaining experiential knowledge of the self through reflection and exploration of one’s thoughts, behaviours,

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24 Session observed on July 9, 2012.
25 It thus appeared to mimic the ‘textbook culture’ of the classroom that Krishna Kumar (1988) and Sarangapani (2003) refer to.
actions, beliefs, and conflicts involved in decision making, the focus was on providing an algorithm for decision making, and on testing its as seen in the first example, as though decision making itself was a simple process of applying rules. (This is also what seemed to be implied in Vrinda’s comment discussed above).

Thus, what the facilitators appeared to value as ‘skills’ were not the tacit skills of self-making, but the overt forms of discipline, punctuality, regularity, and neatness that they saw in middle class children. They also valued the additional extracurricular skills of art, drama, and sports that the middle class had access to, and the familiarity with certain forms of naming and language, particularly in English that children from the middle classes had. While interpreting ‘life skills’ in this manner, by coupling existing ideas of child development with more progressive ideologies and techniques, what was also interesting to note was how facilitators appeared to be constructing themselves as a new class of professionals, who formed the much-required bridge between the middle classes and their visions for a ‘developed’ and ‘sanitised’ society and the populations that they sought to ‘reform’. Pointing to their knowledge of both these worlds, I argue that they managed to stay ‘relevant’ in the current environment (instead of being rendered irrelevant, due to too much education for traditional jobs, and not the right kinds of education for the new corporate and service sectors that have opened up in the new economy).

Facilitators tried to stay relevant by strategically adopting the very language and discourses of the programmes, but still achieving very different outcomes (as a result of their own standpoints from which they interpreted these discourses). Therefore, I use the term ‘opportunistic’ in describing their responses to imply that they used the knowledges got
from the programmes not in their spirit, but only as a means to other ends. One part of these ends was to strategically build and negotiate their own identities and positions of power/knowledge vis-à-vis the organisations, other dominant institutions (such as schools, workplaces, the economy), and the larger neoliberal enterprise itself, that has come to define who and what constitutes ‘authority’ and ‘knowledge’.

That is, while facilitators were being constructed as ‘lacking knowledge’ and ‘culture’ by the managers (due to their class positions and social status), facilitators sought to reverse this perception by constructing themselves as the real ‘experts’ and as the adults who genuinely cared for the children from these disadvantaged groups. In addition to this, more than one facilitator, in their accounts of themselves and their organisations, constructed the management as lacking experience and the real expertise required to work in the schools and communities that they worked in. Presenting themselves as having the real knowledge about these communities, some such as Kaveri, and Nayanika, pointed to the unrealistic ideas of the management with respect to the programmes, challenging those from the middle class to attempt conducting a session at these schools. They sought to point out to both the lack of the actual skills required to manage children within government schools, as well as the resilience required to work within these materially challenging conditions, as factors that would make them unable to perform in these contexts. Others such as Gautam (a facilitator from IP), clearly expressed his frustration with what he saw to be unrealistic techniques and practices that were unsuited to the context and tasks of managing and educating these children, stating the following:

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26 Personal communication (June 26, 2012).
27 Personal communication (March 23, 2012).
They (managers) insist on freedom. But class can’t work if we give them full freedom. The last 10-15 minutes when we have to deliver the message, it’s very difficult for us. Without discipline it is not possible to control the class (personal communication, February 17, 2012).

Similarly, other facilitators such as Santhosh (from IP) also spoke of how novel pedagogic practices, such as that of ‘reflection’, was also unsuited to these contexts, arguing that while they [facilitators] were getting paid to undertake these practices and apply it to themselves, children were not similarly motivated or interested in this.28

While it may be argued that challenges such as these posed to the LSP, by the facilitators, partly arose from the differences in ‘cultural capital’ that limited their abilities to undertake participative and introspective learning practices, it can also be argued that in trying to achieve what the facilitators believed were the ‘real skills’ or knowledges that were of value within this context, they were in fact also carving out a niche identity for themselves. While being recognised (post training and jobs in these organisations) as ‘life skills trainers’, and more importantly as ‘life skilled’ themselves, and as having a meta-level knowledge of life skills (by schools, or other organisations that they applied to, drawing on the language and personal culture learnt in their respective organisations),29 they in fact continued to reproduce traditional practices and discourses on ‘disciplining the child’.

However, these ‘opportunistic strategies’ employed by the facilitators, I argue, were also self-limiting and ‘partially blind’, in that they were neither informed by the depth of cultural knowledge required

28 Personal communication (October 19, 2012).
29 Here I refer to the aspects of dress, language, and personal mannerisms (such as handshakes and hugs) that some facilitators reported having adopted, following their association with their respective organisations.
to understand how their own strategies of offering alternate skills and knowledges were limiting for themselves, as well as for the children (because these were not the skills relevant to the new economy and the modern reflexive society). Further, I argue that these ‘responses’ were ‘blind’ also because they were undertaken without a recognition of how this contributed to the sustenance of the neoliberal logic of individual enterprise (in their aspirations of becoming like the middle class, and adopting certain aspects of their selves), and as a consequence, led to a reproduction of their class and social status (for without the cultural capital of the middle class they could never find entry into their worlds).\(^{30}\)

Yet I contend that this was also no different from how the children related to the programmes, or even how the middle class managers did (despite their different understanding of ‘life skills’ that they seemed to have). That is, I argue that these other groups were also ‘strategically opportunising’, using the programmes albeit in different ways, thereby resisting and contributing to the reproduction of the neoliberal logic, as I will now show below.

6.4.b. Children and ‘strategic opportunising’: The production of a ‘culturally better educated subject’

While, the ultimate target of the ‘life skills’ project, and the reforms it seeks to achieve is of children from disadvantaged and poor communities, it is important explain why children themselves appear so little throughout the entire thesis (as well as in the larger context of the schools and organisations). While the thesis had originally started with

\(^{30}\) This is therefore different from the forms of strategising identified by other cultural theorists such as Paul Willis, who see the acts of appropriation and subversion made by subaltern groups as a conscious strategy of resistance of the dominant culture that ultimately leads to failure for themselves.
the intention of examining children’s development as a result of LSPs, currently it has taken an altogether different direction, coming to the children at the very end, as though they were minor characters in the story. While this was definitely not the intention, it must be noted that the thesis and writing flows from and reflects the nature of the ‘field’, in which children, merely, appeared as targets to be acted upon by various authorities. Thus, they became available only through these encounters.

To give an example of what I mean by this, even on a visit to ATBHS, a government school which did not have a LSP, and therefore, the access to which was unmediated by any of the organisations I worked with, interactions with children were structured and controlled by the school. Children were called into the staff room and told to tell me about the life skills that had been taught to them, with constant cues from the teacher-in-charge, who also sought to jog their memories and provide clues to the answer. Following her lead, children simply repeated her answers. This was the case in most encounters wherein getting access to children’s voice and understanding became difficult. Children mainly appeared as characters fitted into the organisations’ and schools’ plans of ‘education’ and ‘development’ with little discussion in any of these spaces about what life skills meant to them. It is within this context that children’s responses to the programmes must be understood.

As has been explained before, within the context of the larger social patriarchal set-up of society and school, children (particularly those belonging to disadvantaged families) are seen as ‘unknowledgable’, ‘uncultured’ and requiring ‘disciplining’ and guidance. This was evident not just from the accounts of children offered by teachers, facilitators, and the managers, but was also visible through actual classroom observations. Within this context children’s responses were sought to be reshaped
according to conventional (adult) wisdoms. For example, an instance of this was provided in the previous chapter on how a young girl’s response to eve-teasing was sought to be remade according to traditional norms that prescribe for girl’s to be demure and avoid situations of confrontation. Children too learn to relate to themselves according to the expectations of teachers, society and schools, as could be seen from another instance described earlier, wherein a young girl described herself in relation to the duties (of preserving tradition) prescribed by societal (gender) norms.

Thus, based on these experiences and relations with teachers and other adults, and the structure of the school and society, children responded within the context of the programmes too, as students who must ‘answer when asked’, and ‘be told what to do’. While the space of LSPs differed in its format and structure, when compared to the regular classroom or society, children continued to relate to the classes in a conventional manner. By this, what I mean is that they continued to see themselves as individuals lacking both the ability and authority to contribute to classroom discussion, or the construction of knowledge. Thus, even on occasions within which children were given opportunities to express themselves, such as during artwork or theatre activities, children would resist performing themselves,31 and instead, would demand the ‘right’ answers from the facilitators or me. Thus, during theatre activities such as ‘Morning Mirror’ (discussed earlier, in Chapter 5) children demanded that they be shown exactly what to do (“Neengo pannungo miss. Adhaye naa seyarum” ['you do it miss, and we’ll do the same']).

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31 i.e., by presenting their own ideas, beliefs, and thoughts through the activity.
Clearly, unsure of the expectations here (due to the novel nature of the activity), and uncomfortable with taking the lead in interpreting and self-directing what was to be done, they expected the facilitator or me to perform for them, so that they could then imitate this. I specifically describe these responses by children, seen on many occasions, as ‘imitation’ because it often led to a scenario of identical representation (of an act, artwork, or piece of writing). To illustrate this point, I go back to the check-in activity called ‘alien conference’, described in the previous chapter, wherein children were given the task of imagining how they would look or act as aliens. As discussed earlier, what was observed in that session was not just that children were reluctant to perform without a script (i.e., without being told exactly what they must do); but when two volunteers (Narendra and Murugan, who also happened to be the only two boys in a class of about twenty children), finally agreed to undertake the task, they reproduced the same actions and story that had been presented to them by the facilitator, Bharath, and me. (Similarly, in the previous chapter I had also described how this performance of ours had been used by another student, Soundarya, as a script that she enacted within her community).

Key to understanding these responses by children within the programmes is the point about ‘expectations’ that I made earlier. That is, what appeared to be happening within the programmes (as within the context of regular schools) is that children learnt to respond according to the expectations set for them, thus rarely expressing (or performing) their own minds or displaying their creativity. This could in fact even be seen in the ways in which children responded to questions about the programme, or when asked about what ‘life skills’ meant to them. Most children voiced adults’ ideas about ‘life skills’ as ‘good behaviours’, or
as ‘important aspects of life’ (“jeevanige bēkaada anshagaLu”); as ‘giving teachers respect’ (“gurugaLige gaurava koDuvudu”); as what is good for the future; or as lessons on how to be, on maintaining discipline and staying silent in class, on not hitting others or using foul language, keeping the classroom clean, etc. I present these set of responses given by children, as representing adult voices and expectations, for two reasons. First, when probed further, on how these skills would be useful or ‘good’ to the future, children were largely unable to explain the relevance of these skills to their lives. Thus, they appeared to be repeating what was told to them without having understood or arrived at these conclusions themselves.

Second, I make this point since, when probed further, children’s second set of responses appeared to show how they related to these programmes in a completely different fashion. Children mostly spoke of the programmes as a space for fun, games and stories that made it different from the regular school. They referred, mainly, to the specific activities that they had enjoyed during the course of the programmes, such as artwork, games or sports, rather than speaking of behavioural goals such as ‘obedience’ and ‘discipline’, or other tacit skills of self-making.

Even, ex-students of these programmes such as Chandrasekhar and Sonia, who had completed school and were working or studying further, were only able to remember the games and stories that they had learnt in the classes. Others such as Valli, who worked as a tele-caller for Vodafone, from within the cramped space of her single room house after completing SSLC, noted that these programmes had no relevance to their

32 These responses are drawn from a number of FGDs conducted with children across five schools.
work and lives, and stated that “We did it then and it is over. No use now” (personal communication, March 14, 2013).

Thus, these responses diametrically different from the first set of responses given by children on the usefulness of these skills to life, which thus seemed to suggest that they were responses derived from elsewhere. In fact, even during classes children sought to maintain this distinction between schools and ‘life skills classes as games and fun’, by enthusiastically participating in the activities, but withdrawing during the processes of discussion and reflection. During reflection, children often used strategies such as pointing to the facilitator that it was late, and time to go home, to avoid reflection; or they would simply answer with the response, “same as her/him” (meaning their answer was similar to whoever had answered before), to avoid the reflection process. In other cases, they would plead with me to intervene and stop the class stating that the class was ‘boring’, or would directly tell the facilitator, “sir arukarango.” (Spoken in colloquial Tamil, this literally meant “sir don’t put blade”, or ‘don’t bore me’).

In fact, on some occasions children would also jokingly reprimand the facilitator, pointing to him or her that they were engaging in the same kinds of behaviours as their teachers (that is, of giving advice, telling them how to behave), thus, clearly seeking to make a separation between the LSPs and the school routines. (On other occasions, they admitted to me that the facilitators were presenting the same messages as their teachers, but in a friendlier manner). That they likened the discussion and reflection to regular school tasks became clear when on several occasions, I came across children pulling out their class work or homework books and working on these lessons, in the midst of a life skills class, when no interesting activity or game was being carried out.
Thus, in laying out these two different sets of responses by children about the programmes, I argue that the initial responses given by them was not an indicator of their ‘voicelessness’, or lack of agency, but an indicator of how children became available to understanding within these institutional contexts and practices that set expectations for behaviour, but to which they also responded strategically. That is, I state that children’s initial responses about the programmes, as a medium of transferring a set of ‘good behaviours’ to them, can be seen as strategic responses to satisfy the schools’, and adults’ needs for conformity, and the vision of a ‘disciplined’ child.

While, responding in this manner by providing the expected answers on how to be and behave, even on given paper and pencil tests by the organisations to measure the impact of the programmes (that will be described further below), children did not appear to apply these lessons on behavior to their everyday lives. Therefore, despite the articulations about discipline, respect and harmony that children learnt to voice, across the schools, teachers and facilitators rued the behavioural problems related to discipline, class cleanliness and ‘respect’, or even more serious behaviours such as smoking or elopement that they continued to face. For example, some schools such as ANMS, even blamed the facilitators and the LSPs for giving children too much freedom that they believed was making them ‘rash’ and ‘bold’. Even facilitators such as Sneha (of VYB), reported on how children only appeared to be paying lip service to the lessons, such as non-smoking, taught to them. She pointed out that while they had stopped smoking in her presence, due to the fear of being reprimanded, they continued to smoke behind her back, clearly showing how children had not internalised these messages.33 Thus, it seemed that

33 Personal communication (March 17, 2012).
children’s responses to the programmes was ‘strategic’, in order to avoid certain consequences, or in order to appear in a manner that was desirable to the teachers, facilitators and other adults with power over them.

Similarly it could also be seen how the messages related to personal attitudes, mannerism and expectations for social decorum, also had little impact on their day-to-day interpersonal relationships or communication styles. This became particularly visible during one class when Asma, a student from ANMS, shared her fear of being teased and ridiculed by other children of the class, for being different. That is, being the only Muslim girl among the majority Tamil-speaking, Hindu children in this Tamil medium school, Asma hesitated to express her cultural knowledge and ways of being within this space. During this session, when children were asked to share their ‘favourite’ actors, films, songs, etc., as part of the activity underway, Asma hesitated to share this in front of the class, even when urged by her classmates. Later, she admitted to me that this was because the other children in the class would not know of Salman Khan, and ‘Chance pe Dance’ (her favourite actor and song) and would make fun of her. Thus, even while the programmes were meant to teach children values such as empathy and tolerance for difference through modules on self-awareness and empathy, instances such as these clearly presented a case of how these lessons were not imbibed by the children.

Similarly, it was also noticed how on other occasions children made fun of Asma, or isolated her, having their own in-groups of Tamil speaking friends. Others, such as a minority Kannada speaking girls, were also similarly bossed around, and would they too would similarly hesitate to come up and perform in front of the class, until the time that a new,

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34 Session observed on September 25, 2012.
male, Kannada-speaking facilitator was appointed to their class. This changed the classroom dynamics, since the facilitator would value their cultural knowledges and would invite these children to perform in front of the class, and would privilege their accounts.

But, while children did not apply the messages given by the programmes in the manner that they were intended, in defining themselves (i.e., by adopting the behaviours of discipline, obedience, respect, and so on), children appeared to be ‘opportunistically’ using the material of the programmes in defining themselves alternatively. The main take-away for the children from the programmes were the ‘real’ skills it provided, either to manage academics, or get employment. Thus, some groups of children pointed out to me that these programmes should also be made available even to the tenth standard as it would also improve their memory and concentration and in turn aid with their studies. Another important use they saw with respect to the programmes were the technical skills that they could acquire from some of them. For example some children saw value in learning computers (which was earlier a part of IP’s programme) and sports (which would allow them an opportunity to enter the state level or national level).

Simultaneously, children also creatively ‘appropriated’ parts of the programme in producing their own identities. That is, children used these ‘new knowledges’ that they received access to, such as psychological terminologies like ‘consciousness’ and ‘sub-consciousness’, or the spelling of ‘psychology’, information on ‘how dreams are produced’, or terminologies such as ‘spewers’ and ‘copers’ to present themselves as ‘better educated’ than their peers. Children like Soundarya (of ANMS) reported that they performed the skit taught in the life skills class (referring to the theatre improvisation act that the facilitator and I had put
up) and received much praise for this. Children thus used the stories, games, songs and other activities learnt in the course of the classes to demonstrate their superior ‘cultural knowledge’ compared to peers in community, who went to other schools and did not receive these LSPs.

They noted how such knowledges, as well as skills such as football and art, had helped them win both material benefits (such as an award for free medical treatment at a local hospital), as well as immaterial benefits (such as bringing prestige to the community). Noting how they did not know how to draw or play sports such as football earlier, they pointed out to the development of technical skills through which they were able to construct themselves as ‘educated’. Further using these skills, children also reported playing the role of ‘mentors’ and ‘teachers’ within the communities, offering examples of how they occupied positions of responsibility, such as teaching younger children in the community, or of using their ‘skills’ of music and story-telling to pacify younger children who had been left in their care. Thus, these skills were also means by which children ‘resisted’ the identities given by schools, the life skills organisations, and the developmental discourse, as ‘lacking knowledge’, of being ‘unenterprising’ or ‘unsuccessful’.

6.4.c. ‘Managers’ and the production of ‘distinction’

Finally, I come to the ‘managers’, who, despite their cultural knowledge of these techniques of self-making, appeared to be doing something else in practice. ‘Managers’ is the term I use for the group that has been mainly responsible for conceptualising, developing and operationalising the programmes in India, as a result of their access, and connections to global networks of knowledge, finance and aid. I refer to them as ‘managers’, not so much as an indicator of their designations, but more with reference to their attitudes of ‘governing’ the lives of the poor.
That is, this was a group (irrespective of their official designations) that actively sought to intervene in the lives of the poor, using managerial solutions to problems of poverty and development (Ilcan and Lacey, 2013) that focused on various techniques to manage life itself, in order to help them escape from their cycles of poverty, and to ‘socially vaccinate’ them against life’s ‘risks’.

While often, these were individuals from the middle class (particularly, what Fernandes [2006] calls the ‘new middle class’), with no prior formal training or engagement with educational, psychological or clinical work or practice, and no formal authority or accreditation in life skills training itself, it was a group that was, however, well-trained in the ‘culture of self’, having previously worked in corporate firms, and the ‘new workplace’ (Urciuoli, 2010). Applying their childhood experiences of ‘concerted cultivation’, and the cultural knowledges of ‘soft skills’ and ‘managerialism’, drawn from their work experiences in the corporate sector, the ‘managers’ designed, planned and implemented the programmes along the lines of these experiences. Arguing that through these programmes they sought to ‘give back’ to society, founder-directors, and other members of these organisations, such as Devesh Arya, presented their visions as one of contributing to individual development and national growth, as can be seen from the account given below:

Twelve to 14 million people graduate from the country but don’t get jobs…There are 12 to 14 million jobs as well, but not people. The education system is not preparing us for the future… We said ‘the education system is good. We are not going to change the education system.’ We see a lack of life skills. Why life skills? Because when you have life skills you

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35 In fact many of them were operating within government run schools outside the purview of the state education department, and had no interface or permission from the education department to conduct these programmes.
will be able to deal with life’s challenges on your own. You’ll find a way to deal with life’s challenges (personal communication, May 15, 2012).

What was evident in managers’ discourses, such as the one given above, was the neoliberal assumptions of ‘work-productivity-growth’ promoted by neo-classical economics (Vasavi & Kingfisher, 2003), which see appropriate ‘skills’ as the key to both individual and national development (Gibb & Walker, 2011). These ‘skills’ were the ones that sought to make individuals aware of their ‘roles and responsibilities’, of ‘how to be and behave’ with self-responsibility and social consciousness (as seen from the presentation of messages such as the importance of particular forms of education, or campaigns, such as conserving energy through the use of CFL bulbs). Rather than helping individuals understand and demand for their rights and entitlements, teaching them to critically examine the nature of citizenship, or questioning the state’s role in development, equity and access, managers equated personal transformations with changes in one’s own self, beliefs and behaviour. Thus for example, managers such as Sukumar, G. (of MFCL’s LSPs for government schools) explained to me that “in today’s ‘globalised’ world nothing else matters except skills” (personal communication, June 7, 2012). Structural constraints, such as caste, class, gender, and related problems of access to infrastructure, education and employment, inequities in wealth distribution, and so on, that marked these children’s lives and contributed to a reproduction of these inequalities, never found voice within these managerial discourses.

Despite this, however, I argue that these did not form the real responses of the managerial middle class. That is, despite the neoliberal vision for society, and enthusiasm for these LSPs (seen as the way forward to development), I argue that the managers were less concerned
with the programmes themselves. Rather, their real response appeared to be one of building the organisation as an identity, which would stand as an identity for themselves (as I will explain further below). Thus, they appeared to be responding to a different global condition – one of global expansion of the middle classes (Ball, 2007), and the need to maintain identity and status within this.

Within the current economic scenario, a number of scholars, such as Ball (2006), Fernandes (2006), Leichty (2003), Sancho (2015), Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase (2011) and others, have drawn attention to the increasing base and diversity within the ‘middle class’, that threatens “their ‘imagined futures’ and those of their offspring … from the ‘unmanaged congestion’ in the old and new professions and in management positions (Jordon et al., 1994)” (Ball, 2006; p.38). Responding to this threat, scholars such as Sancho (2015) have sought to show how investments in ‘cultural capital’ such as private school and English-medium education, have not only become an important strategies for the middle class to retain its class status, but have also become a strategies for other groups to acquire a middle class status. Others such as Fernandes (2006) have drawn attention to how, within the newly liberalised political economy, and restructured spaces of labour market and society in India, there is a growing clamour from those below (i.e., the lower and middle levels of the middle class) to acquire the cultural trappings and symbolic capital required to get a foothold into the elite segments of this class.

Thus, it is within this context that I argue that the LSPs served something more for the managers, rather than as tools to reproduce the neoliberal agenda of development. With members of the middle class being those who most depend on ‘cultural capital’ (as noted by
Deshpande, 2003), I argue that the production of the LSP served as differential strategies of ‘cultural production’ that could help them retain a distinction from those above and below (Leichty, 2003). Demonstrating this below, I describe how the programmes were structured to meet different ends from the ones described above (that only formed a part of their talk, but not practice, and hence, also represented another instance in which the language of the programmes were ‘opportunistically’ employed).

For seen from the outside (through the critical lens of a researcher), for a large part, these organisations appeared as ‘entrepreneurial’ ventures of self-making for the middle class, through which they also inadvertently appeared to be ‘resisting’ the neoliberal project of disciplining. That is, based on the year-long observations made and experiences had within these organisations, what came across strongly in terms of their implicit organisational goals and visions, was the focus on growth and expansion of the organisations as an end in itself. Along with this, there was very little focus on the child and his/her cultural change.

This was evident from the manner in which everyday practices, decisions, and activities were framed around the goals of developing the organisation as a ‘brand’ (that would also stand as an identity for the individuals associated with the organisations), rather than on cultivating the ‘enterprising’ and ‘self-responsible’ future worker and citizen. Organisational goals and annual plans were therefore, often, described in terms of reaching targets, building a ‘brand’, scaling, economising and gaining more visibility, as can be seen below from the accounts of various managers given below.

‘Our vision is of empowering children from vulnerable backgrounds through life skills. The mission is to reach
2,40,000 children by 2014. The organisational goal is to empower 50,000 young adults by training 500 adult’s in IP’s life skills philosophy… We have to build a brand image that says “life skills means IP’. (Devesh Arya, during the presentation of annual plans, goals and objectives, April 20, 2012).

In another instance, during a personal interview (September 20, 2012) Pavan Raghunath, the former HR and soft skills team manager at VYB admitted to me that they wanted to “productise soft skills”. The question they were asking was “can life skills be delivered by all?”, since they found that psychologists were expensive, and funding for these kinds of skills was not high. Arguing that NGOs could not afford the cost of psychologists, he pointed out that they were looking at a model wherein anybody could be handed a “tab and a user manual, and you were good to go” (i.e., to teach soft / life skills).

Thus, within organisational plans and goals, such as those presented above (or the teachers’ training programme discussed earlier), the chief focus was on efficiency of delivery and reach; not on the quality or depth of knowledge and training required to achieve change. Efficiency and cost-effectiveness of delivery models and scalability of programmes took prime precedence within organisational discussions, and the emphasis was on growing in organisational size.

Weekly team meetings and discussions also focused on completion of targets, updates on work progress, new partnerships, and so on, rather than on understanding or addressing the ‘cultural disconnects’ seen on field, or on finding ways to improve the pedagogic process, in order to bridge these gaps and address other ‘field’ related problems. Thus the ‘field’ appeared to be a site that was just to be acted upon, and as a site of delivery for the programmes, while field realities were never factored into organisational processes, and did not find much space within organisational discourse. In fact, in organisations such as IP, weekly team meetings did not include the facilitators, thus clearly demonstrating how
the ‘field’ did not figure in the weekly stock-taking and planning processes of the organisation.

Impacts of the programmes on the various behavioural transformations expected in students, when measured, were also rudimentary, correlational or superficial, and focused little on the actual transformation of the child. For example, all three organisations justified the positive impacts of their programme through the collection and analysis of data on attendance and pass percentages. This was the main indicator used with donors and schools, to justify and receive support for their programmes. While organisations such as IP even presented results such as an increase in attendance on the days that their LSP was available in schools (since children attended school so that they could be a part of the fun and games of the life skills classes), they, however did not critically interrogate these results and examine whether such attendance amounted to any real change in the cultural mind-sets of children and parents; or whether such results could also be sustained in the event of these programmes being discontinued. Therefore, it also seemed that the programmes were not working towards bringing about an internal change and self-discipline in the child, as much as they were working towards ensuring temporary changes and benefits, which provided evidence and support for the positive effects of the programmes. Long term effects did not figure as a concern in most programmes, evident from the fact that most did not maintain a record or follow up on the children who had received their interventions.

Even when specific life skills were measured to present evidence for the benefits of these programmes, evaluations relied on rote knowledge rather than internal change in the self. For example, VYB administered a paper and pencil test to assess improvements in children’s
creativity and critical thinking skills following their intervention in schools. The test administered for creativity took into account the number of ‘uses’ that children could list for a given object (e.g. pen, and did not consider other dimensions that have been identified within psychological literature for creativity, such as flexibility, originality, elaboration, and functionality of responses [refer Kim, 2006; Torrance, 1966; 1974]).

Further, as was witnessed during a team meeting prior to the administration of the test, the facilitators were instructed by the team leader, Nayanika, to create an intense atmosphere of competition, by comparing each of their classes to other classes and the number of responses that children had given there, so that children would compete to give the maximum possible responses.\textsuperscript{36} Similarly, with respect to the critical thinking test used by VYB, examples such as the following were used to test this domain, with these questions having also been previously discussed in class.

I find a sealed, addressed envelope lying on the road
a. Throw it into the dustbin
b. Put it in a post-box
c. Give it to my schoolteacher
d. Give it to any person walking by

I watch an advertisement which says by applying Fair and Lovely for just a month the skin becomes fair and glowing:
\begin{itemize}
  \item a. First I go and buy it, because I want to look beautiful
  \item b. I don’t believe in this
  \item c. First I will ask others and if it is working for them then I buy it
  \item d. Don’t do anything
\end{itemize}

Prior to the administration of the test, facilitators were similarly advised by the team leader to adequately revise these topics to ensure that the

\textsuperscript{36} On February 23, 2012.
children score well. While on the one hand, such strategies revealed the manner in which ‘processes’ or experiential aspects of learning got reduced to item-response formats, testing declarative knowledge rather than procedural knowledge, on the other hand they also revealed the ‘textbook’ culture of learning (Kumar, 1983) that was adopted by the programmes (as also discussed earlier), focused on strategies of ‘coaching’, memory, and ‘performing’ the right answers.

While paper and pencil tests was one form of evaluation used, which was inadequate to the measurement of the rich, complex dynamics of the classroom and individual learning, IP used an observation checklist that measured five parameters of interaction – ‘overcoming difficulties’, ‘solving problems’, ‘taking initiative’, ‘managing conflict’, and ‘understanding and following instructions’, based on their five life skills. Designed and tested by two British psychologists, the checklist was to be used by each facilitator to rate children individually, in their respective classes. Based on behavioural observations such as ‘does X carry out tasks without being told’, ‘does X show sensitivity to others needs and feelings’, etc., facilitators were required to mark each child on a scale of one to five (five indicating the highest performance, representing independent functioning on the part of the child). This was carried out at the beginning and end of the academic year.

As was observed when facilitators used the checklist in the classroom, they often randomly scored the checklist, and were unable to explain the scores given in many cases, either because they did not understand what was to be evaluated, or because there were too many children in the classroom and they could not pay full attention to each one. Further, as was reported by the statistical analyst employed by IP to analyse the impact of their programmes, the results from the checklists
often showed contradictory data, which was however not being given attention by the organisation. Arguing that IP had mostly been averaging the responses as an indicator of change, Jayanthi, the analyst pointed out that while the overall averages seemed to be showing an improvement from the baseline, facilitators had on many occasions, given a lower score at the end-line compared to the baseline, leading to a negative result. These results had not been systematically analysed (personal communication, 28 May, 2012). She also noted that in some cases, all questions on the baseline and end-line tests would carry the same score (e.g., all questions on the baseline checklist would be marked ‘2’, and all questions on the end-line would be marked ‘5’), out of fear that results that showed a lack of improvement might reflect poorly on the facilitators’ performance.

Discussion over these questions about practice, scoring and disconnects were often brushed aside by the managers, in favour of arguments about ‘scale’. For example, following a combined observation of a life skills class with Ranjit, the programme manager at VYB, at AGS,37 we had a discussion on assessing the impact of programmes. Revealing his concern about the impact of the life skills component of their programmes, Ranjit pointed out that while the academic learning programmes could be measured in terms of input and output, they were unsure of what output there was / to measure for the life skills component. Even when I spoke about the need to pay attention to the process of change as an indicator, he argued that these ‘outcomes’ would not sit well with the donors, and seemed unconvinced of this himself.

Similarly, during a meeting with another manager, Aamir Raza (the MD of MFLC), and his programme team, to disseminate the findings of my study, I sought to highlight the lack of experientiality within the programmes, and the translation or usefulness of the skills and values for the lives of these children. Responding to this critique, he posed the following counter-critique to my argument:

The challenge is there needs to be a meeting point of idealism with practicality, and I think that’s a conscious battle that MFCL has to constantly keep fighting. And, I truly believe that something’s better than not trying it through…because the Indian challenge is numbers. It’s alarming, it’s scary for me to think about those 1.7 million schools now, churning out those children. And everyone of them means a life….and by the way these are ones who went to school. There are lots of them who don’t even go to school. Now the thought of what they are going to be doing in life…because what skills their parents have had…if they pass out 100 percent of their children, it’s not enough for them to lead a life because the world has changed so dramatically…it has to be with some structured programmes. So, as much as I might like a CFL, but that is not a solution to India’s educational problems because CFL is the ideal. Interestingly some of Krishnamurthi’s schools are struggling to find facilitators (personal communication, August 13, 2013).

Further, even on occasions when facilitators sought to raise these ‘disconnects’ with the managerial group, these did not seem to become central concerns or points of discussion as could be seen from some exchanges between the management and the facilitators. For example during a curriculum feedback session with Christiana (the international life skills trainer hired by IP), Gautam, a facilitator, tried to point out to her that he had been finally able (after several sessions) to get children to understand that “Sir questions kēLuttaare” (‘Sir will ask questions’), after the activity is over. He argued that while they were now participating in

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38 A school following J. Krishnamurthi’s educational philosophy and experiential learning approach in Bangalore
reflection, they were still not able to relate these questions to their lives. What Gautam seemed to highlight through this account was how the metaphorical nature of the activity and reflection could not be related by the children to their everyday lives. Christiana responded to this stating that he should then give a story from his own life as an example, after which the children should be invited to share similar examples. Gautam pointed out that “If it comes from them only, we will know if they have learnt. Otherwise they will just listen to what we have said”, drawing on his experiences from the classroom. But Christiana brushed this insight aside, still arguing about how this practice would work.39

This disconnect between lesson plans and content and children’s lives was also seen in the other organisations, such as VYB, which similarly continued to use culturally inappropriate metaphors as part of their activities. For example, in the story of ‘Warm Fuzzy Cold Prickly’ discussed earlier, ‘Warm Fuzzy’ was used to indicate a warmth and pleasantness in interpersonal interactions; while ‘Cold Prickly’ was used to refer to coldness and hostility in interpersonal interactions.40 This, however, could not convey the full import of the message to children who mostly were only familiar with their mother-tongue, Kannada, and had little access and facility with English language and to the cultural content and orientation of its use.

Taking these practices of the organisations into account, what can then be seen is how the middle class, who developed and conducted these programmes, appeared to be strategically using these discourses in

39On October 18, 2012.
40 The term ‘Warm Fuzzy’ was situationally used to represent both the socially desired behaviours that were to be inculcated in children (e.g., polite speech; social greeting), as well as to represent certain pleasurable behaviours that children indulged in (e.g., excessive television viewing, as explained in chapter 4).
defining their own selves, and carving out niche identities for themselves, rather than in ensuring programme success. From examining internal processes of the organisations, and the importance accorded to the various activities such as cultural contextualisation of the curriculum, and programme evaluation (key parameters for understanding the real effects of the programmes), the picture that emerged was one wherein neoliberalism’s practices and discourses were subtly upturned, yet sustained, through ‘appropriations’ (Rockwell, 1996) made for different ends.

What I mean by this is that while the managers did not actively seek to create the neoliberal subject through their pedagogic practices, they still articulated a ‘culture of enterprise’, and appropriated the neoliberal discourse in order to create ‘distinction’ for themselves. Carrying out these programmes as ‘experts’ in the self-skills that they applied to their own lives (and that others did not have), they, thus, reproduced their class identity and status through the means of these programmes. Thus, the organisations served as a platform to build their distinction in relation to the other classes, through a set of ‘skills’ that was different from theirs. Thus, despite the narratives of ‘empowerment’ that formed a part of their everyday discourse, there was no real attempt either to address the structural limitations of disadvantages, or to pay more careful attention to the ‘disconnects’ that led to a failure of transference of skills.

Further, important to achieving this ‘distinction’, recognition, and unique identity was the success of the organisation, which came to represent, both, their ‘entrepreneurial spirit’ and ‘social consciousness’ (that therefore served to distinguish them from other white-collar workers in the middle class). Its success was also important as their own means of sustenance was tied to it (i.e., having quit their previous positions within
the corporate sector, the organisations had come to represent full-time employment for them).

Thus, planning and strategising, not only for visibility and brand recognition, but also for funds and expansion, through different strategies of advertising and networking, became a large part of the day-to-day activities, and were seen in routine practices such as customising experiences and relationships with corporate firms, increasing visibility and raising funds through regular events organised such as marathons and runs; participation and organisation of conferences, involving schools and various forms of educational technology providers; and so on. These strategies were also carefully planned, as seen from how appointments of individuals to key positions were made at IP. While, IP used individuals, such as Ruma, with specific experiences within multinational corporate investment firms such as Goldman Sachs, for their corporate volunteer engagement and fundraising portfolios (since she had the right knowledge of such firms to provide customised and uniquely identifiable experiences for them, according to her), appointments of facilitators (i.e., those who delivered the life skills classes to children in schools) did not require a background in psychology or education.

What these strategic plans deployed by the organisations, thus, revealed was how individuals who managed and ran the programmes had appropriated the neoliberal discourses in making their own selves, and in establishing their identities as ‘enterprising’ and ‘successful’. Yet, while sustaining its logic in constructing their own identities, they also have subtly, unexpectedly, and partially, upturned its effects, by allowing the programmes to be appropriated to other ends on the field. Thus, I argue

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41 Personal communication (April 17, 2012).
that their ‘responses’ have also been ‘opportunistic’ in having appropriated the neoliberal LSE discourse only so far as it has helped them make themselves.

In conclusion, the chapter aimed at examining the phenomena of LSE bottom-up – that is as a set of ‘responses’ that constitute, and are constituted by the field, but that also have linkages with other social processes and structures, and are thus reflective of the larger social context itself. Using the data obtained from my field, I sought to show how the ‘responses’ made by actors to the programmes are forms of ‘strategic opportunising’ for self-making and survival, under the conditions of increasing temporality, insecurities and unpredictability that surrounds everyday life. These conditions of unpredictability, brought by the complex and dynamic interactions between capital expansions, environmental changes and human actions contribute to a condition of constant flux that individuals and larger systems (such as governments, corporations, cultures, capitalism) are forced to grapple with.

LSE itself, as explained before, appears to have emerged as a ‘strategic and opportunistic response’, put forth by actors at the institutional level (e.g., governments, development agencies, professional bodies and academia) in relation to certain specific local conditions and contexts. Initially, started in response to the conditions within the American context, as programmes for unemployment, and other ‘developmental tasks’, during a time of general social unrest, emerging

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42 Field here refers to the field of LSE. In viewing LSE in this manner, as still being constituted and constitutive of the social, I seek to keep the dynamic aspects of discourses and discursive practices in front, thus, also pointing out to how these take very different shapes across different contexts and locations (e.g., India) based on how actors respond on field.
from a number of shifts within society, culture and economy, the need for a ‘response’ such as skilling children in particular ways of life, appears to be a more global phenomena today. Explaining this phenomena, Coppock (2011) argues:

…advanced liberalism...believes that the ‘crisis’ of late modernity since the 1960s has so ruptured ‘traditional’ socialisation that it needs to be redesigned along with a restructuring of the processes of internalisation…‘discipline’ and ‘social investment’ are held to be the necessary means whereby children can be instructed in how to make themselves (whilst also being made) appropriately in the present, and in so doing learn to govern their own souls…as adults in the future (Hendrick, 2009: 24-25). (p.393)

Other scholars such as Ruddick (2003) have noted how ‘childhood’, itself has sought to be remade in many ways in these changed circumstances, of globalisation, and weakening nation states. Specifically within the Indian context, Olga Nieuwenhuys (2009) also makes a note of how ‘childhood’ is carved out into a series of ‘fundable’ projects that purport to rescue the child from the inefficiencies of government, while more firmly linking it up with new projects of ‘government’. Thus, arguing for the need to understand the construction of various childhoods and programmes for childhood regulation (e.g., with some childhoods, as in third world contexts, seen as “necessary”, cheap labour, while, others, such as in the Western contexts, as “surplus” and therefore, dangerous if unengaged), what scholars such as Ruddick (2003) and Nieuwenhuys (2009) appear to be suggesting, is to consider the interactive processes through which programmatic schemes of the social are constituted.

What began as specific responses to conditions of advanced liberalism in the ‘west’\footnote{By which I mean advanced liberal countries such as USA, UK, Canada, Australia, and other OECD nations, within which these programmes have the strongest prevalence} have, thus, also come to be gradually extended...
as ‘universal’ developmental solutions, to different contexts and cultures, in a context of globalisation and expansion of capitalism to new markets (that require a cultural restructuring of these contexts in order for populations to adapt to these changes [Tikly, 2009]). Thus, scholars such as Finn, Nybell and Shook (2009, p.246) note that

The effects of globalization on children can be felt both directly, through policies that have reduced the social safety net or excluded certain young people from institutions of childhood, and indirectly, through changing ideas about the dangers and dangerousness of youth; which, as I have tried to show through the thesis, have led to the conceptualisation of specific forms of interventions, such as LSE, into children’s lives.

Thus, materially constituted by specific actors and their practices of governmental thinking, as a response to other social actors and groups (such as the working class, or children, that appeared to be ‘threats’ or ‘costs’ for national governments, in the western contexts; or new ‘subjects’ or possible workforce, in developing contexts), these actions have themselves stimulated other ‘responses’ by ‘recipients’ of such governmental actions (such as the children, facilitators and managerial groups, in the context of my study). But, as a dialectical process of ‘responses to responses’, I argue that these practices of ‘strategic opportunising’ are necessarily local, contextual and partially ‘blind’, undertaken at different levels by different agents, without a full awareness or control over the actions and counter-actions of other actors at different levels. I argue, that rather than being processes of global, holistic, homogenising change, they actually constitute multiple conditions of change, that nevertheless lead to a macro-process of change, through a
process wherein, ‘strategic responses’ draw on other global situations, resources, actors and their responses, as shown above.

While, emerging locally, but in relation to other global factors, they appear to congeal together to form an ‘assemblage’ (Collier, 2006; Dawes, 2011), presenting an impression of a global social formation and change. Thus, the idea of ‘strategic opportunising’, I argue, also presents the possibility of examining how macro-level processes (such as globalisation, neoliberalism, capitalism) arise unevenly, and are contingent upon other factors; rather than being all-encompassing and deterministic. This, makes it possible to see how individual strategies or phenomena are tied in with global conditions and processes (and, are “actions upon actions”), but also arise as unique responses. While, in the case of my study, I see ‘strategic opportunising’ as a common phenomena that cuts across various social groups, such as the facilitators, managers, and children, through which the local context comes to structured and ordered, more research can perhaps shed light on whether the concept can also be applied to other social categories of class, race, gender, religion, social status, in examining processes of social formation and change.