

Introduction

This chapter reviews some of the literature which has guided the framework and the methodology of the present study. The review covers the following areas: 1) Theoretical frameworks in the sociology of education; 2) Research in the area of gender and curriculum; 3) Curriculum research in Indian education and its relation to gender; and 4) Qualitative research in/on Indian education.

2.1 Sociology of education**2.1.1 Theoretical perspectives**

This section examines the different sociological traditions associated with studies of schooling. It charts the course taken by theorists in examining the philosophical and methodological bases in exploring sociology of education. A later subsection deals more extensively with the approaches by critical educational theorists and the response to reproduction theories by feminist scholarship. A problem with these conceptualisations is that they are moored in certain intellectual traditions and within a sociohistorical context very different from that of India – that of advanced capitalism in America and Europe. Nonetheless certain concepts used in the study of curriculum and the terrain of the discourse in itself are of significance to the present study.

The dominant paradigm within the sociology of education was structural functionalism, which emphasised institutional forms and consensual relationships (Parsons: 1959). Variants of this perspective ‘shared a view of society as a system tending towards equilibrium performing required functions and with consensually shared cultural values setting the limits of social action’ (Livingstone: 1993:4). The search for placing greater emphasis on the influence of human action and conflictual aspects of social relations lay behind the development of different theories. These theories were informed by social interactionism, phenomenology, Marxist and Weberian analysis, cultural historiography and

existentialist philosophy. In opposition to functionalism, many of these theories placed social conflict, over consensus, at their centre.

The 'new sociology of education' that emerged with *Knowledge and Control* (Young: 1971) registered the shortcomings in viewing teachers and students as carriers of social roles, and drew on phenomenological traditions to expose the social construction and transmission of curricular knowledge. As Young stated in his introduction to the book: 'the primary aim...is to open up some alternative directions for sociological enquiry in education' (p.2), and that the 'major focus of the sociology of education becomes an enquiry into the social organisation of knowledge in educational institutions'(p.3). The emergence of the 'new' sociology brought in to focus the role that interpretative approaches, rather than functionalist ones, could play in the understanding of school processes. Drawing on a variety of frameworks, interpretative approaches are characterised by 1) an opposition to structural functionalism; 2) a view of individuals as creators of meanings; 3) a focus on the assumptions underlying social order, together with the treatment of social categories as problematic; 4) a distrust of quantification and the use of 'objective' categories and 5) a focus on the transmission and acquisition of interpretative procedures (Bernstein:1977).

A significant contribution to interpretative sociology comes from Goffman's dramaturgical sociological perspective in anthropological research. In this he uses the idea of 'performance' in social situations, in which participants intersubjectively construct a collective meaning of the situation which involves 'not so much a real agreement as to what exists but rather a real agreement as to whose claims concerning what issues will be temporarily honoured' (Goffman: 1971:23). Goffman coined the term 'genderism' to refer to moments in social life that evoke stereotypical beliefs. These are ritually grounded encounters where men and women 'play out the differential human nature claimed for them' (Goffman: 1977: 301-336).

Symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology, two important strands within interpretative sociology, have had a significant impact on studies of schooling. By linking human action with modes of linguistic and cultural expression and subjectivities,

interactionism and ethnomethodology enable an ‘internal’ perspective on the educational ‘subject’ and her/his community, as well as the dynamics of knowing in their relationship. Within interpretative sociology, both approaches ask for a suspension of rationality about practical activities by treating them as ‘anthropologically strange’ (Garfinkel: 1967:3; also Blumer: 1969), thus enabling as close a participant view of social reality as possible.

School-based research within the interpretative framework has examined the ways by which those involved in education construct, define and manage their everyday world. The organisation of schools, ideologies of teachers, and the nature of school knowledge are given emphasis in such research. Keddie’s (1971) study on classroom knowledge, for example, examined the categories used to understand student failure in a streamed classroom. She showed that categories like ‘low/high ability’ and ‘deviance’, although apparently consensually maintained, are played out in interactional contexts in the classroom between teachers and students and among students, and linked to the unequal distribution of power.

2.1.2 Reproduction theories

Research into ‘why’ and ‘how’ social reality comes to be constructed in particular ways is linked to the emergence of neo-Marxist frameworks (Whitty: 1985 :8-29). In contrast to earlier phenomenological and ethnomethodological studies, which attempted to show how reality was sustained by participants at the micro-level (p.22), the larger economic and political *context* of construction of knowledge are prominent in these frameworks. Apple establishes these paradigmatic linkages:

Phenomenological description and analysis of social processes, while important... incline us to forget that there *are* objective institutions and structures ‘out there’ that have power, that can control our lives and our very perceptions. By focusing on how everyday social interaction sustains people’s identities and institutions, they can draw attention away from the fact that individual interaction and conception is constrained by material reality...One does not throw out social phenomenology here...One combines it with a more critical social interpretation that looks at the negotiation of identities and meanings in specific institutions like schools as taking place within a context that often determines the parameters of what is negotiable and meaningful. *This context does not reside merely at the level of consciousness: it is the nexus of economic and political institutions, a nexus which defines what schools should be about, that determines these parameters.*

(cited in Whitty(1985:23); emphasis added)

Curriculum, constructed within the structural context of domination of certain classes in the economy, can be seen to be explicitly ideological, and tied to the cultural expressions of domination. The linkages between everyday school practices and the larger structures of power have engendered several interpretations using neo-Marxist frameworks.

Social and cultural reproduction

The major theories addressing the place of education in the reproduction of values in society were those of social and cultural reproduction. Although these theories cast a radically new frame within which to analyse schooling and school knowledge, they have been critiqued on several counts. Social reproduction theorists like Althusser (1971) and Bowles and Gintis (1976) addressed quite specifically the reproduction, through schooling, of the structures and social relations of capitalist society. Althusser viewed schooling as an 'ideological state apparatus', embodying ideology materially (in the form of rituals, practices and social processes), and representations that structure the consciousness of students. Ideology as presented in Althusser's formulation has been critiqued for being static and undialectical, not allowing for 'even the slightest vestige of conflict, contradiction and struggle' (Giroux: 1983:82). The 'correspondence principle' of Bowles and Gintis draws parallels between the hierarchically structured patterns of values, norms and skills that characterise the work force in capitalist society and the dynamics of classrooms. Although this work was the first to highlight the importance of the 'hidden curriculum' in reproducing social relations through schooling, it has been critiqued for a variety of reasons, primarily because of its deterministic approach to complex social realities. As Apple notes, 'if schools are wholly determined and can do no more than mirror economic relations outside of them, then nothing can be done within the educational sphere' (Apple:1982a: 6).

Cultural reproduction theorists such as Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and Bernstein(1977, 1985) freed the idea of reproduction from the confines of a deterministic Marxist framework by introducing key concepts which made a considerable contribution to the study of curriculum. 'Cultural capital' and 'habitus' were central to Bourdieu and Passeron's framework. By 'cultural capital', Bourdieu refers to the different sets of linguistic and cultural competencies that individuals inherit by way of the class-located boundaries of their families. A child inherits from her/his family those sets of meanings,

qualities of style, modes of thinking, and types of disposition that are accorded a certain social value and status as a result of what the dominant class or classes label as the most valued (Giroux: 1981). Habitus relates to those 'subjective dispositions which reflect a class-based social grammar of taste, knowledge and behaviours inscribed permanently in the body schema and the schemes of thought of each developing person'(Bourdieu and Passeron:1977:15). These dispositions structure social experiences which reproduce the same objective structures (pp. 94-95).

A theory of cultural transmission was the central point of Bernstein's analysis of education and the role it plays in the reproduction of class relationships. According to Bernstein, schools embody an educational code which structures the school experience and plays an important part in organising the manner in which authority and power are mediated through all aspects of school experience. The dominant educational code consists of a *collection code* and an *integrated code*, whose meanings are directly related to the concepts of classification and framing. Classification refers to the relationships– the strength or weakness in the construction and maintenance of the boundaries that exist - between different categories, contents and so on. Framing refers to the 'degree of control teacher and pupil possess over selection, organisation, pacing and timing of the knowledge transmitted and received in the pedagogical relationship'(Bernstein:1977:89). These concepts can be strong or weak in different combinations, which in turn define the dominant educational code of the pedagogical relationship. The collection code refers to strong classification and framing whereas the integrated code is characterised by weak classification and framing. The integrated code contains more possibility for progressive ideology.

Cultural reproduction theories have been critiqued for being class-essentialist, and not adequately allowing in their conceptual framework the possibilities for conflict and contradiction. Apple raises the important question of the 'relative autonomy' of schooling, when he asks whether the primary role of schools

...is to reproduce the ideological and 'manpower' requirements of the social relationships of production? Or, do they also embody contradictory tendencies and provide sites where ideological struggles within and among classes, races and sexes can and do occur?
(Apple:1982b:14)

The perspective of schools as institutions with 'relative autonomy' comes from the Gramscian notion of hegemony. Gramsci (1971:57-8), moving away from a deterministic conception of the state, viewed it as a terrain of continuing conflicts and contradictions. The Gramscian perspective enables not only an understanding of ideological transmission, but also resistance to dominant (hegemonic) ideologies, by developing what he terms a 'contradictory consciousness'. Ideology, according to Gramsci, is not a system of ideas but a 'condition that is implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activity and in all manifestations of individual and collective life' (Hall: 1988:55). Hall (1996) extends this to include

...the mental framework – the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and systems of representation – which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works.

(Hall: 1996: 26)

Individual and collective processes of accommodation and resistance to dominant ideologies found expression in several researches in education in the 70s and 80s, chiefly in Britain and the United States. Using ethnographic methods, these studies captured the nuanced complexity of resistance in classrooms and schools. Willis' *Learning to Labour* (1977) explored the school experiences of working class youth's resistance to dominant ideologies of schooling which emphasised mental labour and gentility. In this pathbreaking study, he showed how these young 'lads' constructed a counter-culture based on their experiences which positioned, and *produced* themselves as working-class. With this work, the theoretical emphasis shifted from cultural reproduction to *cultural production*.

2.1.3 Feminist critiques of reproduction theories

In the Euro-American context, feminist scholarship on schooling and curriculum has followed two distinct traditions. Liberal feminist approaches, while documenting gender discrimination in textbooks and school practices, did not place their findings within an analysis of society and the economy. Socialist feminists, on the other hand, make the primary assumption that schooling is connected to class structure and the economy (capitalist), and that capitalism and patriarchy are related and mutually reinforcing. Within the latter, there have been severe critiques of traditional Marxist theory, basically directed towards its privileging class analysis, and subsuming gender within class (Acker: 1994;

Arnot: 1982; Weiler :1988: 27-56). Moreover, feminist critiques of the theories of social and cultural reproduction have largely been addressed to the manner in which gender is seen as *subordinate* to class. By not addressing women as productive agents, there is an essentialising of gender roles, a 'reproduction of mothering' (Chodorow: 1978). Although critical feminist theorists have borrowed key concepts from reproduction theories, these concepts have been re-worked into new formulations which give primacy to women's experience and address their subordination. Macdonald (1980) for example, extends Bernstein's concept of 'code' to the construction of dominant gender codes in schools—patterns of practices that construct gender in everyday school life.

Resistance theories which embody these possibilities, have also been used in feminist educational research. Key works are by McRobbie (1978) and Anyon (1980,1983). McRobbie, in an ethnographic study, showed how working-class girls resisted the dominant ideology of the educated woman, through displays of 'unacceptable' femininity. Anyon examined the hidden curriculum of work in four schools differentiated by the socio-economic class of students. Her study showed that the girls both resisted and accommodated to dominant norms in ways that mirrored their class positions. As Weiler notes,

[feminist theorists] insist that women as well as men can resist domination and oppression and they as well as men negotiate social forces and possibilities in an attempt to meet their own needs. This is the same dialectic between human needs and human will [that we see] in other critical studies. Women, as well as men, are enmeshed in social relationships and ideological, as well as material, webs of meaning and power. But because they are oppressed by sexism as well as class, the form of their resistance will be different from that of men. But the question for women is how the human ability to create meaning and resist an imposed ideology can be turned to praxis and social transformation.
(Weiler: 1988:40)

By shifting the focus from class as a sole determining factor in the development of consciousness and a unitary explanatory variable, as well as questioning the economy as the only site where educational conflicts have meaning, feminist theorising has enabled the identification of other absences in educational theory and research, such as race and ethnicity, and enlarged the arena of conflict to the cultural and political, and to both public and private spheres. Further, feminist scholars working within postmodern and the

poststructural frameworks, and specifically within the Foucauldian framework of power/knowledge, have underlined the shifting meanings of power in specific situations offered by classroom experience. Walkerdine (1990) has applied such an analysis to a study of primary classrooms.

Limitations

Although reproduction frameworks provide insights into the cultural and ideological assumptions behind examining the ways in which schooling contributes to the 'learning' of social values, they suffer from the limitation of having evolved in the contexts of advanced capitalist societies in which the discourses of education have been very different from those in India. Application of these frameworks to the Indian situation could be very limiting. One way of examining the concepts like 'cultural capital', 'habitus', 'codes' is to situate them in discursive practices in specific cultural contexts. Levinson et al (1997) bring together perspectives of the 'cultural production' of the educated person from several different societies. The central argument in their work is that

... the concept of 'cultural production' allows [us] to better understand the resources for, and constraints upon, social action – the interplay of agency and structure – in a variety of educational institutions... [A] culturally specific and relative conception of the 'educated person' allows us to appreciate the historical and cultural particularities of the 'products' of education and thus provides a framework for understanding conflicts around different kinds of schooling.
(Levinson et al.: 1997:3)

Ethnographic studies in different societies show the manner in which local knowledges and resources interact with larger discourses about education. In this sense these studies use the frameworks discussed above as they apply – or do not apply – to specific sociohistorical contexts.

2.2 Gender and education

2.2.1 The 'overt' curriculum

Studies of curriculum have generally been addressed to examining gender bias and stereotyping in school textbooks. Studies by Lobban (1974, 1977) and Frazier and Sadker(1973) were among early studies in this area. These studies showed that in school textbooks, there were distinct patterns of gender representation: males were active, instrumental and related to the outside world; female characters were depicted almost

entirely in domestic roles. An extremely important point made by Lobban was that school textbooks tend to exaggerate differences and present not only a gendered world, but one that is far removed from children's social experience. Studies of textbooks in the United States, Australia and India, for example, have found that the gap between reality and representation of women's lives is unimaginably wide. While 57 per cent of women portrayed in reading textbooks were housewives, in reality 39 per cent of women were homemakers, 54 per cent were in the labour force and 17 per cent were students. 42 per cent of women's occupations were shown in the texts as schoolteacher, while the actual number was a mere 6.1 per cent (Finn et al: 1979: 114). This has implications for the way children derive meaning about the social world. Spender, based on her work on sociolinguistic analyses of school texts, says

The inequality of the sexes is subtly maintained by providing one sex with a few tarnished images with which to make sense of the world and their place within it, and by providing the other sex with a range of glorified images. It is not surprising that [they] should learn the lesson and develop very different views of the world and very different self-concepts.
(Spender: 1980:26)

Analyses of school textbooks in India present similar findings, with ratios of boy-centred to girl-centred stories extremely high, as high as 21:0; and stereotyping of behaviour, with girls portrayed as passive and submissive as against boys who are assertive and adventurous (Nischol: 1976,1979). Kalia's (1979) comprehensive study of sexism in school textbooks showed a high degree of correspondence between the traditional role of Indian women and their portrayal in textbooks, which was stereotypical in the extreme. Women were most often described for their beauty, obedience and self-sacrifice; men for their bravery, intelligence and achievement. Kalia's study showed that 'the culmination of [the woman's] achievement is the compliments she receives from males for her looks and cooking...' (p.218). In a later essay Kalia (1986) has focussed on language in textbooks. He shows how sexist language distorts social reality, making invisible to learners the lives and experiences of women. Stereotypes of women's 'nature' – as nurturant, docile and submissive – are found in several studies. A nation-wide study on women's participation in the economy found that women in Indian textbooks are rarely shown engaged in what constitutes 'legitimate' productive activity (CWDS, cited in Khullar:1991). AWAG, Ahmedabad (Shah et al:1988) conducted a detailed study of primary-level textbooks in

Gujarat to examine whether the commitments of the NPE(86) policy had been incorporated into the revised textbooks. It found that women were marked by their absence in all subjects including in problems in mathematics books. The study further shows that the overarching images of social life relate to urban, upper-middle-class experience. The group found that women are not represented in the production of textbooks as writers, reviewers and consultants, thus further limiting possibilities for reducing gender bias.

The invisibility of women in Indian school textbooks is not surprising, given the other constellation of biases that are seen in these books. Studies have shown that the image of national reality in school textbooks is based on the urban, middle-class experience. Advani (1996) using Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1983) framework of the 'invented tradition', has shown how a mythified, upper-caste and class representation of the nation is presented as 'reality' to learners. This has also been shown by Scrase (1993) in his study of textbooks used in West Bengal schools. As Scrase points out, alternate images of reality, alternate world-views, are not presented, thereby ensuring legitimization of this version of reality: 'overtly, through bias, stereotype and distortion of 'subaltern' culture, and covertly through omission of and silence about subaltern culture' (p.144).

2.2.2 The hidden curriculum

There are different ways in which gender forms a part of school culture. What emerges from a review of the literature is that

- 1) Gender is used as a functional category in schools. That is, it is used as a basis for organisational arrangements, such as seating patterns, task assignment, etc. (Delamont:1990; Grant: 1983; Stanworth: 1983) as well as for perceiving, evaluating and regulating behaviour – at times even using competition and rivalry as a way of monitoring and controlling (Bem: 1983; Delamont:1990; Sadker and Sadker:1994).
- 2) Teachers' expectations, systems of rewards and punishments, labelling patterns, verbal and non-verbal communication, etc. are clearly marked by gender, i.e. they are distinctively different for girls and boys. Girls are more likely than boys to be perceived favourably by teachers because their personal traits are most compatible with teacher expectations (Sadker and Sadker:1994).

- 3) Male and female teachers hold to adult gender stereotypes, and appear to model traditional gender role behaviour in the classroom. Boys take up more 'teacher time', since they tend to be seen as more 'disruptive'. There is differential focus on boys for misconduct, remediation or other forms of behavioural control (Eccles and Blumenfeld: 1985; Sadker and Sadker: 1982, 1994). Male teachers tend to adopt a more authoritarian and instrumental teaching style, whereas female teachers use a more supportive and expressive style.
- 4) There are both overt and subtle discriminatory practices in the school which structure girls' and boys' experiences, such as in play. Children are also witness to the overall structure of the school in which men are in positions of decision-making, and exposed to the experiences of women teachers.

2.2.3 Children and gender separation

Children themselves also structure interactions in classrooms and playgrounds around gender. The literature on this is vast, and largely follows psychosocial approaches. Gender separation is widely observed in peer networks, seating patterns and verbal exchanges and work patterns; moreover, shared interests define peer networks (Lockheed:1985; Grant: 1983). However, Deaux and Major (1987) assert that in public situations students are likely to fit themselves into this gender-differentiated structure. Thorne (1993) in a critical review of experimental and clinical approaches to the study of children's gender identity and separation in schools, concludes that these explanations do not account for situations when girls and boys form groups across the gender divide – which is as much a part of gender relations as the occasions when they are apart. Thorne emphasises that the 'origin' and 'ultimate explanation' frameworks, employed to understand how children themselves create and maintain gender separation cannot grasp the 'fluctuating significance of gender in the ongoing scenes of social life' (p.61).

These studies indicate the importance of the school culture to the hidden curriculum of gender. Although one study which was based in the Indian rural context did conform to the broad conclusions (Batra:1991), most of these studies based in North American and British schools do not examine the ways in which the class, race and ethnicity of students influenced the structure of schools and children's perceptions of gender. Ethnographic

studies which bring narratives of girls and boys to their analyses, are able to locate themes relating to gender identity and intersections with school experience (Davies: 1982,1997; Thorne:1993). Although they too do not directly address the question of class and race, the studies do point to ways of thinking about identity formation in schools through nuanced exploration of these themes.

2.3 Ethnographic studies of schooling in India

Anthropological studies in India have generally not addressed schooling. Khullar (1989), in one such study, examined the creation, maintenance and role of values in a rural community. She found that there was streaming of boys and girls in different subjects in schools, consistent with their primary socialisation into gender roles. In this context, Khullar questions the idea of gender relativism in formal curricula, a perspective through which school curricula would focus on what is 'relevant' for girls and boys to learn. She argues that such an approach could end up legitimating and replicating socialisation into gender roles in the family and community.

Ray (1997) has studied the forms of conformity and resistance of girls to the dominant ideology of gender in her study of two girls' schools in Calcutta, one which caters to the upper middle-class section of society, and the other which is a government-aided school where families of the urban poor send their daughters. She found, in both cases, there was a conformity to norms, but there were distinct patterns for the two schools. In the poorer school, there was what Ray calls 'pragmatic acceptance' – an acceptance of school culture arising out of an incapacity to act, and the lack of more meaningful alternatives(p.165). The girls in the upper-class school adopted modes of 'passive resistance', conforming not out of necessity as much as the need to express control over the sense of relative freedom their social class allowed them.

In the few qualitative studies of schooling in India, gender is not explicitly the focus of research, except in Ray's study. The studies briefly reviewed below provide, however, an 'insider' perspective on schools and schooling in India, a perspective which is also critical to the framework of the present study.

Newman (1989), notes that his study grew out of the belief that ‘a qualitative, anthropological study of village schools in India was long overdue’. The study is a detailed account of the schools and problems of teachers and administrators in three schools in Uttar Pradesh – a village primary school, a Muslim primary village school and a Catholic-run urban school for upper middle class children. His findings show the differences between these schools in relation to the futures of the students. Village schools were seen to play no role in social and economic progress, whereas students from the urban school possessed the cultural capital—including knowledge of English—to become future planners and administrators. These dispositions also made their experiences vastly different from those of the village school children. Kumar’s (1989) work also shows the contradictions in undifferentiated delivery of curriculum, which ignores the specificities of class, caste and gender, thereby legitimating these distinctions and disadvantaging tribal children. Thapan (1991), in an ethnographic study of a school in South India based on the educational philosophy of J Krishnamurti, illustrates the complexity of relationships between ideas, teachers and students in everyday interaction. Sarangapani (1997) bases her phenomenological study of the relationship between the child’s construction of knowledge and her/his social experience on ethnographic data collected from schools and the community in a village in North India. The nature of knowledge and the process of knowing and learning are examined in her work. She argues for reconstructing the child as an epistemic subject with greater social sensitivity, both regarding the process and purpose of knowing and the nature and function of knowledge.

2.4 Discussion: Implications of the review to the present study

The literature reviewed here reveal the epistemological concerns of the present study. The studies reviewed have informed the present study in two significant ways, by pointing to the need for: 1) situating the study of gender construction within the context of social relations within the school and 2) locating these constructions within a larger landscape which is significantly patterned by the interlacing of structural factors (the economy, social class, patriarchy) and cultural ideologies relating to gender, as well as formal education.

Schooling in India is highly differentiated along class lines. This is indicative of the distribution of knowledge and the legitimation of certain kinds of knowledge, and therefore

power, in Indian society. This nexus of power-knowledge is underwritten in the hidden curriculum of schools. Foregrounding the question of 'context', as these studies suggest should be done, implies viewing gender in its interrelationship with social class.

The studies reviewed in this chapter lend insight into the ways in which schools construct identity in children. It appears from the different theoretical and methodological perspectives that these constructions lie in the areas of overlap between normative discourses of socially-appropriate gender behaviour, the patterning of such behaviours through social practices, and the normative discourses surrounding formal education – what values are attached to 'being' educated in different societies. The hidden curriculum provides the ideological underpinnings of the construction of gender in a meta-discourse of gender in the social institution of the school. Theoretically, there seems justification for a struggle between macro-level social structures of dominance by class, caste, ethnicity, religion *and* gender and the meanings produced in micro-level contexts which constitute the contexts within which the hidden curriculum expresses itself. This relationship between 'structure' and 'agency' underpins the theoretical thrust of the studies reviewed in this chapter.

If schools have relative autonomy from the wider social structure, it is because of the nature of education itself. A positive perception of education would be one that empowers individuals to contest received knowledge through critical engagement with their own, multiple realities, enabling a 'critical consciousness' (Freire: 1972). Policy interventions in the area of school education serve an important role in this regard. The National Policy on Education (1986) and the Programme of Action (1992) stress the case for making gender equality through school education an element of 'social engineering'. The policy clearly advocates a shift from problems of access alone to a reorientation of the entire education system in favour of women's equality and empowerment. Ground realities – specific contexts within schools which stress gender divisions and engender discriminatory practices – provide the framework within which such policy can be meaningfully translated.

Methodologically, the review points towards the need for understanding both *contexts* within which such constructions occur in school, as well as the *meanings* or *subjective*

interpretations children assign to them. To adequately understand both these dimensions calls for a suspension of the researcher's own normative positions about appropriate gender behaviour, which are adult-centric. Capturing the complexity of social interactions within the school demands intimate knowledge of the contexts within which gender construction occur, but more importantly, why and how these are rationalised by the social actors – teachers and children. Interactional contexts in everyday life form the matrix within which such rationales can be understood (Bernstein: 1985; Jones: 1997), laying the ground for a methodology which is able to capture the 'everydayness' of school life, and the place of gender constructions within it; this implies casting the everyday world of social actors as problematic (Smith: 1987). From the review presented here, it emerges that ethnographic techniques, involving immersion in cultures to facilitate understanding of participants' multiple, nuanced and subjective readings of that culture, provides a methodological framework within which it is possible to capture the layers of complexity involved in institutional, individual and collective constructions of gender identity in social institutions. The rationale for adopting ethnographic techniques in data collection and analysis stems from the nature of questions asked in the study and the nature of data required to address the research concerns. These data are to be explored in the situated contexts of gender construction, which are in themselves products of curricular and social practices within schooling, and which give rise to children's subjective interpretations of their gender identity. The following chapter discusses this framework in some detail and elaborates on its application as a methodology in the present study.