

Literacy in Development. People, Language, Power, Brian V Street (ed), Report of a Seminar, Education in Development, Kings Lynn, Norfolk, UK, 1990 (74pp, £4.50).

Literacy in Development. People, Language, Power is the report of a seminar which was part of the British contribution, spearheaded by Education for Development (ED), to the International Literacy Year 90 (ILY 90). Its objective was to "direct the attention of the general public to matters related to literacy in Third World developing countries - to increase their awareness and understanding" (p2).

The publication is the product of the efforts of 118 participants. It contains two valuable as yet unpublished Keynote Addresses by Manzoor Ahmed (on Literacy and Development) and Lalage Brown (on Literacy and Women), and the workshop papers and verbatim renditions of the four plenary sessions. The workshops follow a logical progression: NFE and Development, Definitions and Politics of Literacy, The Setting up and Maintenance of a Literacy Programme, and, finally, Teaching and Learning Methodologies and Materials.

The reader is presented with ten contributions and reflections on the potential role of literacy in (rural) development in the nineties. These contributions are held together by the bonding compound of the organisers' introductory and concluding comments, and the participants' reactions during the plenaries.

The organisers question whether the basic dilemma of "whether literacy has any role at all in rural development" was addressed in any meaningful way in the Conference (Rogers, p4). If it ended, in that respect, on a rather inconclusive note, it may be because the participants were predominantly practitioners whose basic problem "was one of strategies, not principles" (p4), and because the organisers themselves failed to properly set out, because of time constraints, "the theoretical context".

On the one hand there is a remarkable consistency and willingness to stick with the major foci of the Conference: People, Language, Power. These three aspects are well represented in the powerful investigations into literacy and language by Street, Jules and Saraswathi. The wider implications are further emphasised by Ahmed's contextualisation of literacy in the freezing economic climate of the 1990's (he uses the image of a water bucket with a large hole in the bottom when referring to absolute illiteracy figures - North America has 30 million functional illiterates). Brown points to the added problems of women's 'invisibility' within this already dire picture. MacCaffrey (on the student writing movement in Britain) and Saraswathi and Mukhapadyaya, in the context of India, link up with Freirean tradition and an understanding of liberating education and its attendant participatory, empowering methodologies, curricula and materials.

The conference, on the other hand, avoids paying the same attention to an exploration of possibly empowering meanings of development, particularly rural development, as it does to literacy. A further weakness occurs when it 'broadens out' into the field of Non Formal Education (NFE), without going into the historical and ideological foundations of this essentially negative way of describing what are often independent, positive and self directed educational activities. The two case studies of NFE initiated, set up, financed and maintained from the centre (Alexander and Townsend Coles) are not counterbalanced by grassroots-initiated NFE. The 'People, Language and Power' connections of these examples are, at best, tenuous. Would it not have been better, in view of this, to concentrate

on what Jomtein (1990) identifies as the real literacy.

Despite some inconsistencies and a lack of uniformity which, in a report such as this, is not necessarily a weakness, the Conference does succeed in shedding light on ILY90; and the problematic of literacy in the next decade, putting them in the limelight. The report contains a wealth of information and insights, and is highly recommended for "those interested in development, education and literacy in the Third World"

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Reference

Jomtien (1990) "'Framework for Action' for the Nineties" in *Basic Education*, 8.

Ageing in Developing Countries, Ken Tout, Oxford University Press and HelpAge International, Oxford, 1989 (xvi and 334 pp, £30, ISBN 0 19 827279 0 hbk, 0 19 827276 6 pbk).

Doctoral dissertations rarely succeed in being transposed to readable and informative books. This one manages, though I have some qualifications to make. Its success and its limitations arise from the same cause, the unusual conditions under which the author completed his work. Ken Tout worked fulltime for the UK-based NGO, HelpAge International, and specialised on projects in South America for seven years.

The first six chapters of his work set the scene. The introductory chapter contains definitions of ageing, and points out how the extended family network of support for elderly is disintegrating; then the author discusses demographic data on the *greying* of populations; analyses the impact of socioeconomic factors (rural decline, lack of social security, migration, "ageism", malnutrition); reviews some surveys of the elderly in South America, Africa, Western Pacific, Malta, and the Caribbean; looks at a selection of individual case studies and themes focusing on those elderly who live in destitution, in isolation and in poor health; and outlines the available information on existing social services (pensions, health care, institutional social services) in different parts of the Third World.

The remaining five chapters discuss policies and projects for enhancing the lives of elderly in developing countries. Experimental projects that provide income generation, substitute support, and emphasise integration into a local community are discussed: a bakery run by elderly, specialising in delicacies of yesteryear; a laundry run on behalf of old peoples' homes but open to the public; a fast-food outlet; weaving project; farms and cooperatives. Tout also includes a comprehensive analysis of problems and mistakes in pilot care projects for the elderly, but with relevance to other development projects – culturally inappropriate project design, dishonesty, staff shortages, the difficulty of targeting the really needy. The author then proposes a typology of three model programmes, at district, metropolitan and national levels, and in a separate chapter concentrates on national strategies on ageing.