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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines a methodology for understanding and describing the reading activities of a small group of black inner city junior high school students. The methodology is based on the assumption that reading can be viewed as a social activity or process that becomes defined through the interaction of participants. Data are collected through the use of ethnographic techniques such as participant observation, videotaping, and ethnographic interviews. Data are collected in three general settings: the school (including both in-classroom and outside-classroom activities), the community, and the home. There are four components to the analysis of the data: a lexical/semantic analysis, microanalysis, macroanalysis, and triangulation. The product of the analysis is the generation of hypotheses about reading activities and the social contexts in which they occur. (Author/GC)

CAPTURING READING IN SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY:

A METHODOLOGY FOR A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ETHNOGRAPHY

by

David Bloome

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Paper presented at the Ethnography in Education Research Forum, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, March 14, 1980

Educators have traditionally viewed reading as the process of decoding printed symbols into sounds and/or meaning. That is, they have viewed reading as a cognitive process or activity. However, reading can also be viewed as a social process or activity. That is, reading can be viewed as an activity by which people orient themselves to each other, communicate ideas and emotions, control others, control themselves, acquire status or social position, acquire access to social rewards and privileges, and, engage in various types of social interaction.

In this paper, I am going to discuss a methodology used to capture the structure of reading activities. This methodology is based on a number of assumptions or theoretical considerations about the nature of social context and face-to-face interaction.

During the discussion of the methodology I will be referring to the theoretical considerations that form the rationale of the methodology. The construction of methodology and the construction of theory are interrelated processes, growth in one is needed for growth in the other. Thus, the methodology presented here is concerned with both the generation of hypotheses about reading and - in a roundabout fashion - the construction of theory.

The study is concerned with the reading activities of a small group of Black innercity junior high school students. By capturing the structure of their reading activities, hypotheses will be generated that will suggest appropriate avenues for further research. Knowing what questions to ask is a crucial component of educational research, and, has too often been left to either a priori assumptions about the nature of people or the situation, or, left to the whim of the researcher.

The methodology employed for data collection consists of ethnographic techniques such as participant observation, informal interviewing, and, the collection of artifacts. Data is recorded on video tapes, audio tapes, photographs, and, by field notes. The use of these techniques is not of special significance since they have been used in a variety of settings for a variety of purposes. The focus of this paper is on the relationship of the components of the data

collection, and, upon the methods for analysis of data. For although there are theoretical issues involved in the choice of ethnographic techniques as opposed to other qualitative techniques or quantitative techniques, there are important theoretical issues that need to be discussed that are involved in both the relationship of the components of data collection, and, in the methods for analysis of the collected data.

Components of the Data Collection. Data is collected in three general settings: the school, community institutions, and, the home. Within the school, data is collected in a number of settings: halls, classrooms, administrative offices, cafeteria, recreation areas, and so forth. The data is of a general nature and not restricted to the activities of a few previously identified students. The intent of the participant observation and informal interviewing, at this point, is to identify those areas that might prove useful for "intensive" participant observation later.

Much of the research that has employed ethnographic techniques in the study of reading and/or reading instruction has limited itself to participant observation in the classroom. Such a limitation prevents data collection and analysis across situations that may be related yet differ in significant ways. Understanding the differences and similarities of related activities across differing contexts may be useful in generating hypotheses about reading activities. Much of the ethnographic research on reading conducted in schools has been conducted in elementary schools or in preschools. Participant observation outside of the classroom may not be a factor since these students are almost always either in the classroom or under teacher supervision. However, in junior high schools, students spend a sizeable amount of time in the school building but outside of class. Examination of the reading activities that occur during this time may yield important insights into reading activities in the classroom.

After a number of settings within the school have been identified as potential areas for observation, and, after access to the appropriate classrooms

has been achieved, student subjects can be identified. Six students were identified; an equal number of males and females, and, an equal number of good and poor readers as determined by their relative scores on a standardized reading test that they had taken as part of their regular program.

Once student subjects are identified, it is possible to begin the process of gaining access to the two other general settings: community institutions and the home. Through informal interviews with students, it is possible to identify those community institutions students patronize. These institutions could range from supermarkets to basketball courts. As in the school setting, general participant observation is needed before sites for 'intensive' participant observation are determined.

Access to student homes is a delicate process. Parents must be convinced of the value of the research, they must have trust in the researcher, and, they must have a valued status on the research team. It is no secret that all too often teachers and other educators have blamed parents for the educational failure of the schools. However, bridging the gap is not impossible. This is especially true if the researcher lives in the neighborhood, or, has established a trusted reputation in the neighborhood.

During the period in which access is gained into the three general settings, there are two other components to the research that were conducted. One, the creation of a community board, and two, the recording of words and phrases that refer to different social contexts.

The community board is comprised of a small number of neighborhood people, that should include respected leaders of the neighborhood. The function of the community board is twofold. First, to protect the interests of the community from research that is likely to adversely affect the community (a similar proposal for review boards made up of Black professionals has been suggested by Hilliard (n.d.) writing for the Black Child Developmental Institute, Inc.). Secondly, it provides

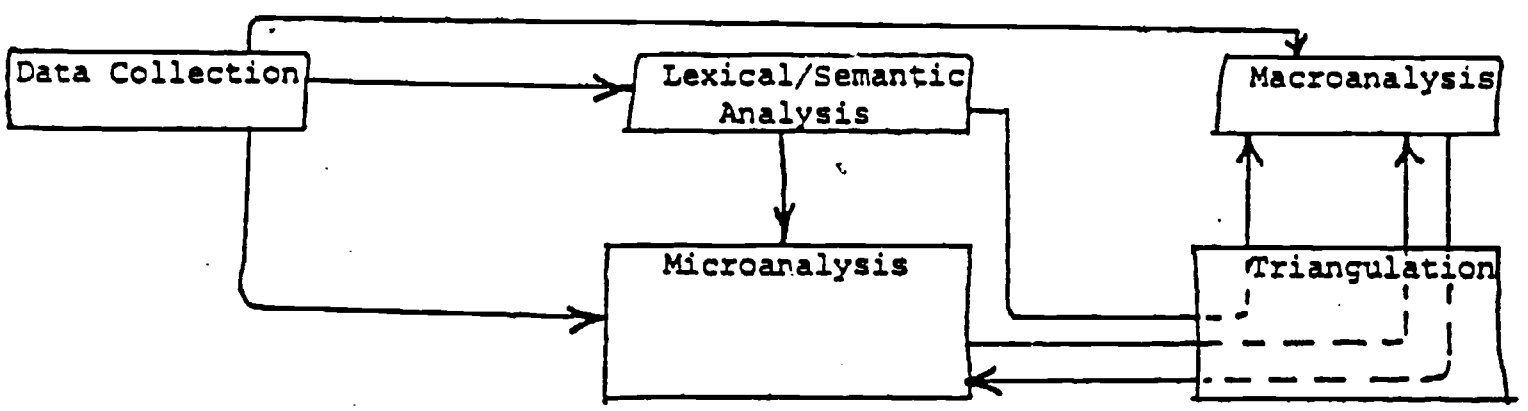
feedback, can help identify social contexts, and, can point to contradictions or omissions in the research design or implementatior. Furthermore, the community board can help in the selection of sites for intensive participant observation. In effect, gaining access to the three general settings consists of not only entry but also of the creation of a research team that includes teachers, students, parents, and, neighborhood leaders.

The recording of words and phrases that refer to social contexts, mentioned before, is used in both the macroanalysis and in the microanalysis. It helps determine the thematic and structural components of the reading activities. This component is discussed further in the analysis of data section.

The description of the methodology for data collection has avoided discussing reading or defining reading activities. This avoidance has been purposeful since I do not have an adequate definition of reading as a social activity. For the purposes of data collection, reading is considered to be any activity meeting any of the following criteria: 1) defined as reading by participants, 2) eye gaze in the direction of print, 3)an instructional lesson defined as a reading lesson, 4)the potential use by participants of printed symbols to communicate, or 5) communication about something read or to be read. These criteria are merely signals that a reading activity may be occurring.

The remaining components of data collection merely involve identifying sites for regular and systematic 'intensive' participant observation (video taped), modifying participant observation as needed, informal interviewing with teachers, students, and, parents, and, where possible, following a student subject throughout one complete day. Following the student throughout a complete day provides help in framing the relationship of the various components in the macroanalysis.

Analysis of Data. The data to be analyzed is recorded in field notes, on audio and video tapes, on photographs, and, in a collection of artifacts (e.g. samples of reading material). There are four components to the analysis: the lexical/semantic analysis, the microanalysis, the macroanalysis, and, triangulation. The relationship of the components is shown in the diagram below.



RELATIONSHIP OF ANALYSIS COMPONENTS

The lexical/semantic analysis makes use of the recordings of words and phrases that refer to social contexts, as mentioned earlier. The purpose of the lexical/semantic analysis is to define, from the students' perspectives, the categories of social contexts into which they divide their lives. For example, one category might be "school." "School" might contain several subcategories - "office," "homeroom," "English," "bus," and so forth. This component helps identify those social contexts that have psychological reality for the students, and, a lexical reference. In addition to using the recordings of referents to social contexts, the video and audio tapes are searched for references to differing social contexts. These sets of references help provide a number of the constructs and themes that help build a framework. This framework is used in both the microanalysis and the macroanalysis, described later.

Analyses of lexical referents have been conducted for various purposes. For example, Gearhart and Hall (1979) explored the variation in cultural and situational uses of internal state words. Their purpose was to explore how differences in their use might affect school achievement. Anthropologists, such as Frake (1969), Conklin (1969), Lee (1971), and Tyler (1969), have explored the relationships among lexical items

in cultures in an effort to better understand how people themselves perceive various aspects of their world.

A second component of the analysis is the microanalysis. The microanalysis described here is similar to that used by Green (1977) and Green and Wallat (1979) in their analysis of instructional conversations. There are eight steps in the microanalysis.

The first step is the transcription of the videotaped situations. Both speakers and what they said need to be identified.

The second step is an analysis of the nonverbal symbolic behavior. An example of nonverbal symbolic behavior is raising one's hand in a class in order to gain the floor. In this paper, nonverbal symbolic behvaior also refers to symbolic paralinguistic behavior also. An example of symbolic paralinguistic behavior is a rising tone at the end of an utterance suggesting that a question is being given. Identification of meaningful nonverbal symbolic behavior is a two stage process. First, researchers review the videotapes and identify nonverbal symbolic behaviors. The participants are asked to verfiy the preliminary findings. Since nonverbal symbolic behaviors may change between contexts, it is important to have researchers and participants review all videotapes that are to be microanalyzed; for example, the making of a fist and raising one's thumb may mean 'I want a ride' in one context, while in another it may mean ' You are out on strikes ' (in a baseball game). Once identified the nonverbal behaviors are juxtaposed onto the transcripts.

The third step is the identification of social message units. Social message units are defined by Green and Wallat (1978) as minimal units of conversation, a division of the unit would alter its meaning. The boundaries of these units are determined by verbal and nonverbal cues. Support for the use of nonverbal cues in identifying units of conversation come from Erickson and Schultz (1977), Erickson (1978), Schultz, Erickscn, and, Florio (1979), McDermott, Gospodinoff, and, Aron (1977), Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz (1976), Cook-Gumperz and Corsaro (1976), among others. The basic premise is that since participants in a situation must make their meanings clear

to each other, then they must signal each other, and, they do so both verbally and nonverbally. The signalling is thus available to observation. The social message units are identified from repeated viewing of the videotapes.

The fourth step, is the identification of interactional units. An interactional unit is an exchange of messages on a single idea or topic. For example, an interactional unit might consist of a question and answer, or, it might be longer and consist of a question, answer, and an evaluative response. Interactional units do not have a predetermined length or format, but, are signalled by verbal and nonverbal cues given by participants. One way to view an interactional unit is as a functional grouping of social message units. Interactional units are identified similarly to the identification of social message units described above.

Step five involves the identification of the strategies utilized by the social message units. The interactional context provides the context within which the strategies of the message are determined. Green and Wallat (1978) have developed a list of strategies related to the purposes of social message units that will be used here.

The sixth step is the identification of message ties. A message tie refers to a relationship between a social message unit and another message unit and/or referent. A message unit may have multiple ties. Some of these ties may not be stated overtly, but can be identified through 1) being informed by participants in the situation, 2)being informed by knowledgeable members of the culture, and/or 3) observation of systematic and regular differences in the verbal and nonverbal symbolic behavior of interactants. In the current study, one set of message ties involves the lexical/ semantic analysis described earlier. That analysis provided, from the participants' viewpoints, categories of social contexts into which participants divided their lives. Message units are viewed as having ties to particular social contexts. For example, consider the following hypothetical comment whispered by one student to another in mathematics class: 'Did you see what they wrote about Judy in the boys' room?' The message is tied to an earlier social context, and perhaps, many other earlier social contexts, and, may not at all be tied to any social context involving 'school,' regardless of where the conversation took place or was read. Message ties of interest in this study are 1) ties between messages, 2) ties between a message and a particular social context, and 3) ties between a message and a social referent of

importance to participants.

The seventh step in the microanalysis is the mapping of social message units. The mapping is a graphic representation of the structure of the evolving situation. In their mapping of instructional conversations, Green and Wallat (1978) map social message units along two dimensions: 1) thematically tied instructional units, and, 2) potentially divergent units. In this way, they examine the structure and flow of teacher-student interaction as related to pedagogical goals; classroom rules, rights, and, obligations; participant structures; and, the development of communicative competence. In this study, mapping occurs along a number of dimensions in addition to those used by Green and Wallat. Some of these dimensions are determined a priori, derived from related literature. However, many are not, but are extracted from the lexical/semantic analysis and from interviews with participants. Broadening the number of dimensions was necessary because the research explores situations outside of the classroom. In this way, it is possible to explore the structure of evolving situations in various contexts outside the classroom. Broadening the number of dimensions also gives the opportunity to capture structural relationships between contexts. For example, consider the situation of a student participating in a Bible class at a local church. There ia a potential for this situation to be related to situations in school. Capturing these relationships can help generate hypotheses about the social contexts of reading and home-school and community-school relationships. Hypotheses of this type have been generated by Schultz, Erickson, and, Florio (1979) who compared participant structures of an elementary math lesson with those of a dinnertime situation at the student's home. They hypothesized that some of the student's errant behavior could be caused by the similarity of participant structures accompanied by differing sets of social rules; and most importantly, their hypotheses described the level and manner in which this miscommunication or lack of communicative competence was occurring. The macroanalysis, described later, also helps in providing a frame for the juxtaposition of various situations.

The last step in the microanalysis is the creation of typologies. Typologies can be considered models of social behavior. Typologies are created from recurrent patterns in the mapping of social message units. It is a process that has been used successfully in such widely differing topics as instructional conversations (Green and Wallat 1979) and children's television commercials (Bloome and Ripich 1979), as well as many others.

One methodological issue concerns the number of situations that need to be microanalyzed before typologies can be constructed. There is no fixed number. The process determines the number.

This process of selecting videotaped situations for analysis is similar to the one described by Erickson and Schultz (1979). Briefly, their procedure involves viewing all of the video recordings in the order in which they were taken, making preliminary notes, and, indexing the location of occasions and transitions of occasions. After the indexing. the tapes are again searched for "analogous occasions of theoretical interest." At this point, their procedures call for the imprinting of elapsed time on the selected videotapes. In the present research, this procedure is omitted, and, procedures previously described are used in the identification of nonverbal symbolic behavior. Nonetheless, the procedures and rationale used by Erickson and Schultz to select video taped situations for analysis are also used in this study.

While there are difference in the microanalysis itself, the procedures followed after the microanalysis in applying those findings to other situations, is similar to that described by Erickson and Schultz (1979). The corpus of indexed tapes is searched for analogous instances of the situations that were analyzed originally. The purpose is to test the generalizability of the hypotheses generated by the microanalysis within the corpus of tapes. In addition to, and, as a part of this subsequent microanalysis, participants in the situation videotaped, view the videotapes and respond to the preliminary hypotheses of the researchers. Participants can thus confirm or disconfirm those preliminary hypotheses. If these hypotheses are not confirmed by participants,

or, by successful application to similar situations, then a reanalysis of the original videotape and any subsequently analyzed tapes is needed. A reanalysis may suggest that the situations are not similar at the level analyzed, or, it may suggest that hypotheses need to be adjusted to account for differences. It may occur that in consultation with participants, the researcher and participants together may generate hypotheses about the situations that adequately describe them.

The same process occurs for other videotapes situations that are thought to be analogous. Patterns and typologies derived from these sets of situations can then be compared. However, rather than merely comparing one situation with another - for example, comparing textbook reading lessons in a classroom with graffitti reading in a YMCA boys' locker room - and arriving at additional hypotheses, a suitable frame or context is needed. That is, before a comparison of situations can be made, it is necessary to understand the relationship between those situations from the participants' points of view. This frame or context for comparisn comes from the macroanalysis.

The purpose of the macroanalysis is to provide a framework for understanding the hypotheses generated by the microanalysis. A number of researchers have suggested that bottom-up models, such as the microanalysis described earlier, avoid the real issues and lead to deficit models of behavior (Hilliard 1978, Spears 1978, Drake 1978, Ogbu 1978). On the other hand, top-down models, or macroanalysis, have been accused of excessive subjectivity, and, a priori assumptions.

However, as Clement (1978) points out, there is a disadvantage with rigid adherence to only perspective.

> Structural models tend to ignore the on-going processes of negotiation, conflict, and competition occurring at the many levels of action through which the overall sociological patterns are expressed. By ignoring these processes, sources of variation and change are obscured. On the other hand, exclusive focus on competition for resources omits considerationof the constraints imposed upon a given institution or setting by the general configurations of the society. The two approaches are complimentary in that together they highlight both societal mechanisms for stability and societal mechanisms for instability and change. Implied, then, is that in each situation, a complex and particular set of potentials and constraints is operant. (p.246)

The study follows Clement's suggestion and uses the two approaches - structural analysis or macroanalysis and microanalysis - to highlight each other. The macroanalysis is derived from the lexical/semantic analysis described earlier, participant observation, interviews with community leaders, interviews with participants, and, structural components derived from the microanalysis.

The end result of the macroanalysis is a graphic representation of the macrostructure, as viewed by participants. Since participants may differ in their perspectives, several representations of the macrostructure may be needed. The macrostructure can be represented as a hierarchial structure with multiple levels. The basic unit is the situation or event;

> a unit that can be analyzed in and of itself without the addition of other units or segments of units. These units fit into categories, or, larger units of context. These larger units of context may fit into larger units of context, and so forth. However, unlike the lexical/semantic analysis or the microanalysis, it is assumed that participants' perceived categories of context and the attributes that they assign to them, affect the dynamics of the basic units. In other words, the participant's ability to relate the immediate situation in which he finds himself to his view of the world and how it operates, is considered to be a factor in understanding and describing social behavior. Furthermore, it is not only the participant's perception of the operation of these larger units of context that affect the immediate context, it is also their actual impingement upon the immediate context that is important to describe.

The analyses described above should yield a number of hypotheses about the social context of reading situations for junior high school youth. These hypotheses need to be verified through triangulation. Triangulation refers to the process of gaining three perspectives on a hypothesis or situation: that of the participant observer, and, each of the interactants. The hypotheses are presented to each of the

participants who is asked to verify whether the hypotheses adequately describe the situation from their point of view. If there is agreement, the hypotheses can be tested in other situations with other subjects. If there is disagreement, then either the disagreement must be explained by the hypotheses, or, a reanalysis must occur. A disagreement that can be explained by the hypotheses is one that derives from a situation in which participants have disjunctive views of the situation. In such a case, the hypotheses need to explain the disjuncture as part of the evolving situation. In such cases, participants can often project other participant's perspectives, though they may disagree that the perspective is correct.

Triangulation in this study also occurs in one additional manner. The hypotheses, at several points, are presented to community board memebers, who are familiar with the situations being described. The purpose of such a presentation is twofold: 1) to investigate the potential for describing other situations, and/or, investigating their applicability to other students; and, 2) to provide a mechanism for direct communication of the results of the research into the community.

I have described a methodology for capturing reading activities among junior high school students in school and community. The methodology was based on the assumption that reading can be viewed as a social activity or process. That is, it is an activity that becomes defined through the interaction of participants.

A number of literacy theorists have suggested that schools decontextualize learning. That the nature of print make knowledge accumulative and that therfore schools decontextualize knowledge by removing children from their social setting and placing them in schools (Goody, 1977). Other theorists have suggested that literacy training in schools would be more effective if it was placed within a communicative context that allowed the child to use more of the child's skill with nonverbal and paralinguistic cue systems to aide the child (Cook-Gumperz, Gumperz 1978). Both of these views are developmental and seek to lay a framework for understanding the acquisition of literacy.

However, there is a need to explore the social structure of reading activities after children have acquired the rudimentary cognitive and social skills involved in the activity. If reading is viewed as a social activity, then it is assumed that such an activity can have both positive and negative outcomes for participants. Exploring the structure of reading activities among junior high school students may give us clues as to the means by which positive and negative outcomes are achieved - by individuals or by groups working in concert.

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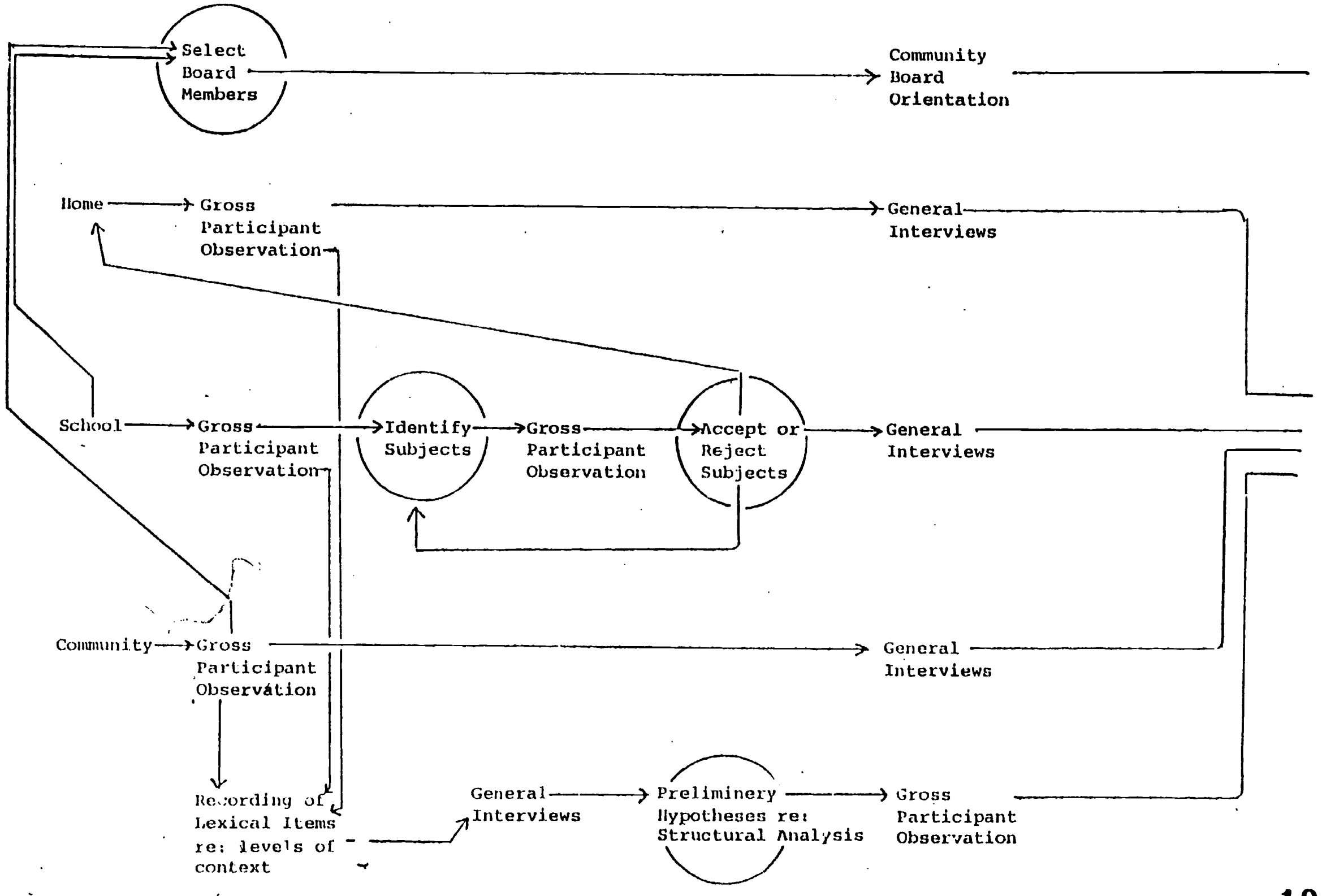
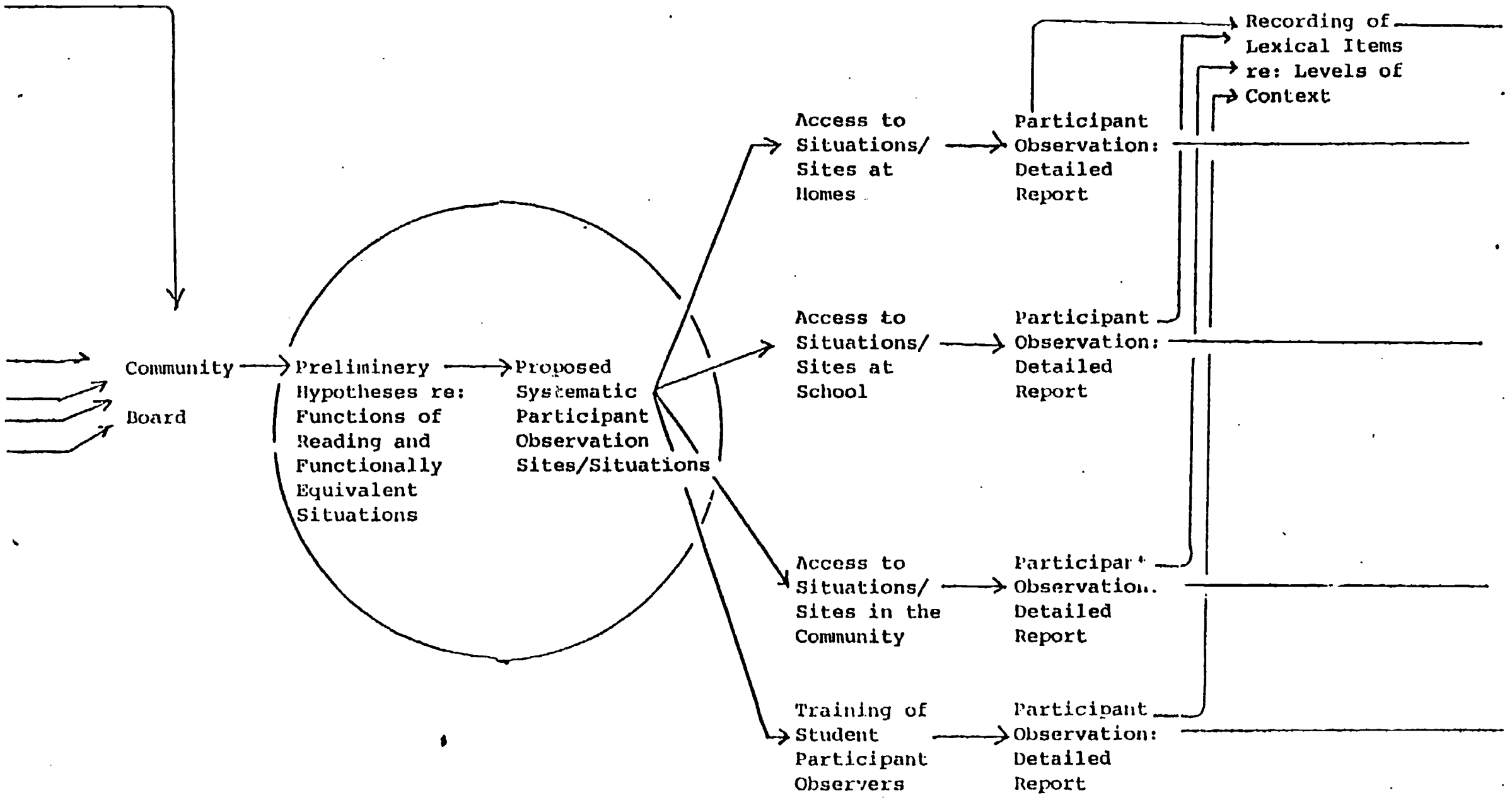
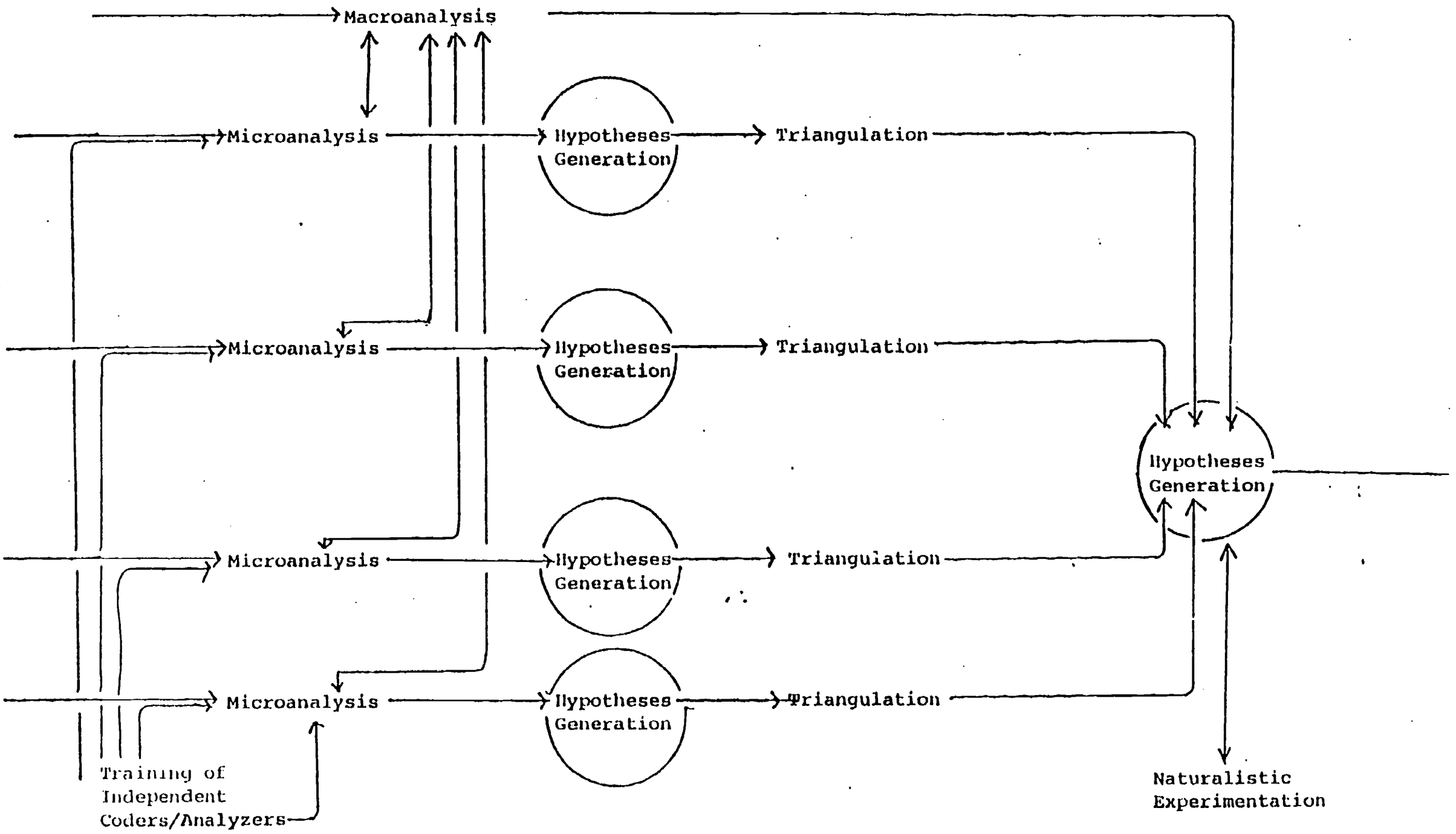
APPENDIX: Schematic Diagram of the Relationship of the Data Collection Components


Select Board Members
Community Board Orientation
Home
Gross Participant Observation
General Interviews
School
Gross Participant Observation
Identify Subjects
Gross Participant Observation
Accept or Reject Subjects
General Interviews
Community
Gross Participant Observation
General Interviews
Recording of Lexical Items re: levels of context
General Interviews
Preliminery Hypotheses re: Structural Analysis
Gross Participant Observation


Community
Board
Preliminery Hypotheses re: Functions of Reading and Functionally Equivalent Situations
Proposed Systematic Participant Observation Sites/Situations
Access to Situations/ Sites at Homes
Participant Observation: Detailed Report
Access to Situations/ Sites at School
Participant Observation: Detailed Report
Access to Situations/ Sites in the Community
Participant Observation: Detailed Report
Training of Student Participant Observers
Participant Observation: Detailed Report
Recording of Lexical Items re: Levels of Context


Macroanalysis
Microanalysis
Hypotheses Generation
Triangulation
Microanalysis
Hypotheses Generation
Triangulation
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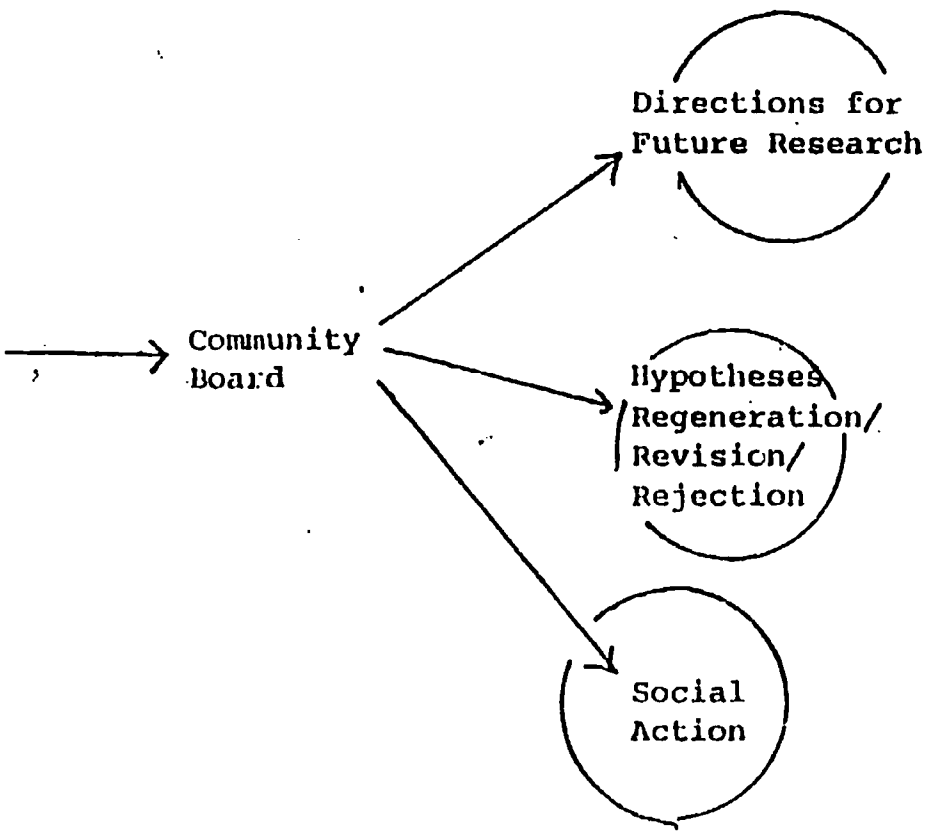
Microanalysis
Hypotheses Generation
Triangulation
Microanalysis
Hypotheses Generation
Triangulation
Training of Independent Coders/Analyzers
Naturalistic Experimentation


Directions for
Future Research
Community
Board
Hypotheses
Regeneration/
Revision/
Rejection
Social
Action