

Editorial

Musing on Transformative Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

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Dear Readers

I am sitting in my West faced office on the third floor of the building C at Kathmandu University School of Education, Hattiban, Nepal. I am watching outside of the window which refreshes me when I feel exhausted and tired. Today, my tiredness exceeds because I was assigned a task by my colleague to write an editorial for the journal published by the School. I am thinking of using transformative teaching learning activities in higher education of Nepal because my professional life is/will be part of it.

I could see the lush green field from my chair and often I deceive my computer screen and gaze at the field and experience a sense of relief. While looking at the field, I recall my childhood when my parents would force me to get an education. Now I understood the education my parents expected was highly individualist and progress centred. The words of my parents still reverberate “study hard and make progress in your life”. Since the day, I am searching “progress” down the career path in my life. My parents believed that I could never achieve the progress working in the paddy field as a farmer who was always inferior in comparison with the university graduates. Therefore, they encouraged me not to be a farmer. They always expected me to be an educated person. I followed their suggestions without any questions and arrived at the stage of writing an editorial for an academic journal.

I was never been able to sense that the development of higher education is deeply rooted in the rationalism and European enlightenment believing that progress is the knowledge because of three reasons: a) higher education focuses on the knowledge production process where the great rationalist produces knowledge which could be useful for the society and community to progress. The term progress refers to the wealth and prosperity of human civilization, b) universities become the symbols of the knowledge centres which hardly recognise the existing knowledge traditions in the community and society, but lately Godin and Gingras (2000) showed the shift of knowledge production from university to other places, c) university functions to disseminate the knowledge produced from the university in different forms specially from publications and conferences which inform not only

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the policy but also the societies. These three things usually demonstrate the power of the university knowledge which is manifested in the ranking, position and contributions of the university.

I apologise for reflecting on the contributions of higher education in my personal and professional life in the neoliberal era through this letter. The letter reflects on the usefulness of higher education to youth for the sustainable future. In doing so, I use two metaphors to portray the contemporary situation of higher education in Nepal: a) Faustian thinking, and b) White Man's Burden. These two metaphors portray the challenges and adversities created to recognise the diversity of wisdom tradition in the higher education in Nepal and how they influence the identity of the students and scholars being intelligence comprador. Lastly, I envision the process of harvesting transformative learning for sustainable future in the higher education in Nepal by means of reflecting on my higher education journey.

During my student's life, I was not able to critically engage in questioning the relevance of higher education. I took higher education for granted and gradually strived to get academic certificates to be the consumer of the global economy. I was reluctant to use and apply the knowledge heritages in my society and community because I thought I would be inferior among the white superiority. The university education engulfed my being and thus I started imitating not only the accent but also the claims made in grand theories and philosophies.

Mainly, I faced problems being in the universities which confined within these three domains: knowledge production, knowledge management and knowledge dissemination in the colonial modality. How far have universities in Nepal been functioning in the area? While reflecting on the situation of Nepali higher education system, I wonder whether the number of universities that have been expanding matters for establishing knowledge centres. There are all together 11 universities in Nepal which tend to perpetuate the rhetoric of globalisation and human capital formation as the so-called leading universities claim in the global market. In this regard, the success of higher education has been recognised with the flow of people in the world with increased connectivity with the global market. Entrance of the students for the global citizenship became the goal of higher education (O'Leary, 2017). In the similar line, U. R. Regmi (2017) believed that the higher education sectors have to be revamped in order to produce globally competitive and capable citizen in Nepal.

Universities in Nepal mainly focused on increasing the number of students who could pay fees, university affiliation has been expanded to the private sectors and the government has been gradually decreasing the budget to the higher education. These circumstances are pushing universities to act in the fashion of neoliberal projects. In this regard, K. D. Regmi (2017) claimed that policy of higher education in Nepal is mostly guided by three key tenets of neoliberalism: "marketisation, privatization, and decentralization" (p. 190). These three tenets of higher education affect the functioning of the universities so as to serve

the interest of the global economy. As a result, universities in Nepal are undergoing with several problems associated with management and pedagogy. Mostly, these universities are struggling to gain the credibility as knowledge centres which would further contribute to the society and state.

These neoliberal debates create several problems specially on the recognition of diversity, connecting universities to the community, using university knowledge for social transformation and recognizing community knowledge and bringing back in the university to build resilient teaching learning activities. In such a context, the First International conference on Transformative Research Education and Sustainable Development was organised by Kathmandu University School of Education back in 2016. The conference mainly critiqued the disempowering notions of higher education and stressed more on the need for transformative education and research. In this context, the editorial reflects three kinds of major problems appeared in the higher education context of Nepal and envisions transformative education and research as the need of higher education today.

Faustian Dream

It was early 90s when I completed my School Leaving Certificate examination from a rural public school in Western Nepal. My parents dreamed about fitting me in the field of science and technology in higher education. I was an obedient son so that I could not deny their wish, so I choose 'science' in the beginning of my higher education and career. You might have sensed from the letter that I could not have a good grasp of the English language. I heard that each classroom activities would take place in English. Therefore, I was not much excited to join the Science faculty. Fortunately, I failed in the entrance exam and came back to my hometown. I did not become sad because I had known myself better than my parents.

Then, I joined humanity in the public campus in my hometown Dang and majored in English, Population Studies and Political Science in my intermediate level of education. I was much fascinated with English and was hungry to read just to improve my English. Then I became like Dr. Faust who was tempted to achieve all the goods in life.

During those days, I studied the text of Dr. Faust in the English literature. The character grabbed my attention. I wished to find the power, prestige and progress from the university education. However, I could not find the Mephistopheles to take the tour of time and space. I, however, hardly reflected on my deeds to prepare myself for higher education. I could not sense the result when I completed the university degree. I was prepared to get a good job, good wife, good home, good clothes, good shoes, good food and so many other good things.

During those years, I studied to be good and good for me is to learn and gain knowledge. I never asked question what to learn and why to learn. I just got the right

answers to pass the examination so that I could get a good job. I would get prestige in front of the people in my community, people would respect me.

I did not give a damn about the outputs of higher education except preparing myself for the global job market. It was ridiculous for me to prepare of the skilled human forces in the global market because I was thinking to explore jobs in the local market of Nepal. After the completion of the Master's Degree in 2003, the sense of inferiority has been gradually cultivated in my mind and body instead of confidence and capacity to fight with adversities. Thank you, Pandora, I was able to recollect a few pegs of hope to continue my higher education which made me more resilient to my life and career. My certificates are not enough to ensure how effectively and efficiently did I complete my work with the help of the technology as Moracco and Moracco (1978) believed as a symptom of modernism which perpetuated in higher education of Nepal.

This modernising process increased the hunger to be Dr. Faustus who would be able to consume all the goods produced by the multinational companies thereby increasing the capacity of purchasing. I could even dare to purchase humanity, moral and ethics from the higher education. This, modernising process not only makes homogeneous consumers but also devalues the importance of nature and culture where I live. I was in a race of being all the goods in the world like Faustus. I forget all the values from the ecosystem where I was living for the race of preparing to the effective and efficient manpower. Education is always perceived as the outcome of the industrialization and influence of science and technology, which usually is driven by the market (Featherstone, 1991).

White Man's Burden

The dream of Dr. Faust drives me several years in the undergraduate and graduate study. I spent my prime youth in the classroom of the universities of Nepal which always framed that the 'West is the centre of Knowledge'. I gradually devalue the knowledge heritages and wisdom which was part of my family, community and country. I denounced the knowledge of my grandmother who attempted to teach me about the spirituality and ethics through the *slokas* of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharat* during my childhood. I hardly valued the significance of the rituals taking place in my house and could not be excited to learn from such rituals. Gradually I escape with these traditional values in my family and society. In doing so, I was/am creating the image of white man in the family and community.

During my university classroom, I never asked even a single question that would disconfirm such belief system. I always tempted to see my future as a white man with my higher education. I never challenge the higher education which is engulfing my communal belonging. I never judged the value of learning in higher education. I was rushing to develop myself as a highly skilled human resource, so that I could earn and live my life in a pleasant way consuming the goods in the global market. My higher education made a good consumer. This is the burden I got from the colonial higher education.

The colonisation of higher education has been manifested in the discussion taken place in the university classroom, the philosophy and worldview I frame, the methodology I apply in the knowledge generation and even the claim I generated from my research work which always appreciate the Western Modern Worldview. Ultimately university became the knowledge industry where the mass production of knowledge takes place which was sold in terms of indexed journals.

I flow in the current of the white man's burden in which I equated higher education to be an effective and efficient human resource developing financial assets from the business and enterprise, prioritising my personal need and values. I became schizophrenic to adapt the Western values system in pedagogy and everyday life. Henry Giroux (2001) believes that schools and universities become agents that reproduce and legitimise ideologies, such as capitalism. In this sense, I compel myself to think over the relevance of education which oppressed the individuals like me. In this context, I envision a type of education which prepares me to travel from organic intellectual (Gramsci, 1971). Unknowingly, I served as the traditional intellectual to perpetuate the hegemony for many years in my teaching career in several ways. How long should I dehumanize the community, society and people? How long does the cultural hegemony of higher education drive my nation and university? Now I could be part of the ideology of neoliberalism (Harvey, 2005).

Under such situation, the transformative learning makes a sense of thinking for human culture, society and ecology around the university.

Transformative Higher Education and Research

After completing my graduation from the university, I joined as a lecturer in one of the affiliated colleges of the universities in Nepal, back in 2003. However, my suffocation facilitating students has been increased with time. I am thinking how these university students are attempting for global citizen? In the early career of my teaching I also helped them to be global citizen but gradually I experienced that universities as a knowledge centre hardly cultivates their interest. The only outcome of the increased graduation rate opened the door of the abroad study. These graduates seem to be ready to explore the employment opportunities.

From the experience of working in the universities of Nepal, the universities are gradually establishing a centre of knowledge which recognises the local ways of thinking. Some efforts are made to incorporate the local epistemology which rejects the Faustian Dream of producing mechanize human beings. Kathmandu University School of Education and its principle of transformation of society sets the principle to promote and respect diverse ways of knowing. However, it is not an exception which is more revamped with the neoliberal agendas of the claiming knowledge from the capitalist mode of production.

Let me use the ideas of Freire (1970) who says transformation starts from the personal life. Perhaps, I tend to be mindful with my family members and students in personal and

professional life as a transformative educator. I recalled Freire (1970) and believed that “Transformation is only valid if it is carried out with the people, not for them” (p. 43).

Moreover, I reflect on my everyday activities to perform better and to voice against oppressions. Possibly, I act and reflect to overcome my limitation not for the sake of humanity but for the sake of ecology which may be the conscientisation. Moreover, possibly, I cultivate a kind of thinking which understands the power relation and its adverse effects on the human relationship to develop an alternative approach of thinking for social justice, peace and personal joy (O’Sullivan, 1999).

In the process of being a transformative educator, I am practising transformative teaching and learning activities by analysing the distortion in my professional life as Mezirow (1991) believed learning as the meaning making process through the epistemic engagement. In doing so, I reflect on the content, process and premise of each session in the university.

Dirkx, Mezirow, and Cranton (2006) made another effort of expanding the territory of transformative learning which can take place by the types of research in the universities which not only contributes to the society but community would be the learning space for a university because it may not be as rational as Mezirow believed and subjectivity and identity as Dirkx believed. I would create a middle space to blend both the ideas – creating a hybrid space of rationality and subjectivities as a transformative educator, teacher and researcher.

Conclusion

As a transformative educator, I envision university as a transformative space which no longer functions as the battlefield of capitalism and neo-liberal ideology of perpetuating inequity and injustice so as to promote sustainable future and wisdom. In this direction, transformative universities, if not all mainstream universities, need to take the lead to equip educators with necessary transformative pedagogies and perspectives, and thereby deliver a transformative experience, one that inculcates critical self-reflection, and engages in the process of becoming, so that the learners can adequately spread change towards sustainability.

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