

The Art of Sublime Educational Inquiry: Tribute to Longinus and Kara

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Pre Script: Grinding the Thoughts

This editorial is an outcome of the endless endeavour to understand creative research methods as a university teacher and researcher. Creative research methods have been adopted in different disciplines such as architecture, geography, social science, education, and the humanities. Practitioners in community and education architects equally use creative aspects of research. However, I am scared of growing agentic artificial intelligence in recent years. Artificial intelligence (AI) has made several things more manageable, such as collecting data and reporting research findings. Using AI agents provides all services for qualitative research, which might kill creativity in research because of the universal structure and format of the research process and presentation. Thus, it is the time to seek the sublime aspect of social and educational research by using creativity. This editorial is an outcome of grinding thoughts that I vomit for my aspiration to foster a sublimity in research as a university teacher, researcher, and learner using monologues and reflection as creative tools for the researchers.

Script 1: Random Monologues

I feel Mondays are overtly hectic in my workplace. We have marathons of meetings starting at 11:00 AM and ending at 3:00 PM. The first two meetings are at the dean's office to plan and execute action for the school and university, and the second meeting is more general and common about faculty and staff. The third meeting is our regular

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ISSN: 2091-0118 (Print) / 2091-2560 (Online)

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Journal homepages: ¹ <https://jer.kusoed.edu.np/>

² <https://www.nepjol.info/index.php/JER/index>



Published by Kathmandu University School of Education, Lalitpur, Nepal.

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Journal of Education and Research (JER) editors' meetings, where we track the progress of articles, peer reviewers, and publication authors. Another informal meeting with students goes on till the evening. I marked Mondays in the calendar as a meeting day.

On one of the fine afternoons in February 2024, we met with the Chief Editor of the JER, Prof. Parajuli's office, at 2:00 PM to discuss the progress of the upcoming JER issue. We are talking about the forthcoming editorial. One of the active editors reminded me that I was supposed to write an editorial for the March Issue that I had promised and forgotten. This moment was shocking because I whirled with several other academic, personal, and professional tasks. I checked my to-do list and revised the priority. I put the editorial at the centre of priority. I started thinking about what to write and why to write. I was convinced by the idea of Sartre (1988), who believes that writing claims freedom and authenticity by expressing the human condition and inspiring others to reflect on their existence.

I often remember Richardson (1994/2000) for allowing me to read "Writing as a Method of Inquiry," and I liked the idea that writing itself is a sublime process to undergo in the from a chaotic mind to a clear process, not just used to put findings of the research but is also a part of doing research in and of itself. I love this idea very much as the creative force in the journey of discovery. That notion always appeals to me, especially when breaking down the conventional ways of writing.

Therefore, in this editorial, I attempt to seek the sublime aspects of social and educational research that can appeal to the broader humanity of the researcher. This editorial may be a part of critical scholarship to raise questions on what I and others are doing at the researchers in and outside of the university because it poses a question: "What purpose should social and educational research serve? Can social science research function as a sublime? Can research give us joyful moments or unpleasant experiences? Can rhetoric matter in educational research? There are different ways to answer the question, but I will tell my stories as a researcher and attempt to connect with the sublime aspects of research with the tribute to Longinus. These questions are the gateway to express my deeply rooted belief in the potential of academic research. It is not just about the result but the entire research process that can provide comfort and inspiration.

Script 2: Educational Research Journey

Let me introduce Longinus. I read Longinus in 2000 when I was a Master's level student at Tribhuvan University Nepal in the pages of *Critical Theory Since Plato* (Adam & Searle, 192). My reading of Longinus about 25 years back was memorable because I deeply remember the key ideas of sublime, which pushed me to re-read the concept. I took the book to my oldest bookshelf, along with spider's web and dust. I cleaned and caressed it. It made me nostalgic to reflect on my creative days as a university student. I contemplated the sublime ideas. I read this essay as a literary device to value literature. This is a hermeneutic journey to re-explore and connect sublimity ideas with educational research methods.

As a teacher, I soon realized that effective educators often engage in thoughtful research. My research journey began with an understanding that the traditional, positivist methods of scientific inquiry were not suited to capture the sublime aspects of the human experience I was seeking (Gautam, 2019). This realization furthered my desire to pursue qualitative research as a means of investigating the intricacies of human interaction and emotion, the conversation so valued in education.

Reading the global giants of qualitative research, I began to learn that much of educational research had been dominated by these technical methods of communication and analysis: codes, categories, themes, and narratives. But within these structures lay a hidden dimension, the sublime, trapped. This perspective flipped for me when I came across works by Denzin and Lincoln (2002, 2011, 2017), who humanized methods of qualitative research. It struck a chord in my heart from their writing that qualitative research for serving people, society, and the planet, especially in post-qualitative research, should be the case. While this approach expanded the scientific legacy of the social sciences, it also instilled in them a deeper purpose: to focus on people, power, and the planet, beyond just the legitimacy of research as science to its contribution to the bigger world.

I learnt the evolution of qualitative research, with its experiments in genres and logic provided me with the canvas to explore these sublime elements. What really inspired me the most were the innovative research methods that Kara (2015) talked about, which opened up possibilities to include pleasant and unpleasant societal components, interrelationships among humans, and their relationality. It was not just

research but an art form where every study could explore human experience in its most authentic forms.

Playing the dual role of teacher and researcher, I have realized that the classroom can be a laboratory /community for this kind of inquiry. By combining lessons from literature with methodologies in qualitative research, I have tried to introduce a little bit of the sublime into my teaching. I always encourage my students to be active agents of their own stories, to question what is considered 'normal', and to see education not only as a knowledge transfer but also as a transformational journey. In such a perspective, I have realized that research and teaching are not different fields but complementary aspects of the same journey in understanding, empathizing, and finding beauty in the educational landscape.

The year 2009 onwards, I started learning about social science research. I was scared of the term science in social science because I did not have the sensibility to make scientific endeavours in my teaching and research. I questioned science and was/is/will be included in arts. Still, science and arts are interpreted as dual qualities in academia. I would like to escape from the dual qualities of science and arts. As a result, I chose qualitative research as my area of study to think like an artist.

Let me share my experience while struggling to conduct fieldwork for my PhD with urban youth in Kathmandu. I was not very satisfied with the interviews and conversations with these youths. I was scared to use some experiments to collect data. I wrote to Helen Kara on 16 September 2015 to send a paper by Blodgett et al. (2013) to understand arts-based research methods. This was a way forward to understanding the power of moving beyond words and representing such things in research. This gave me the confidence to experiment with logic and genre in research and writing. Then Kara sent me a book on creative research methods, which made it easy to process creative approaches to research methods. I gained the confidence to play with data, text, and context. Experimentation with collecting data, such as storytelling, visual arts, or even drama, in a way that cannot be captured using traditional methods (Blodgett et al., 213). Several other creative researchers might have adopted the sublime as Longinus envisioned, endorsing the power of creative, expressive forms to relay complex ideas and experiences.

While having conversations with participants and presenting them in the text and images, my efforts were engaging and meaningful as a creative researcher not only to get information and to use it but also for a more profound level on an emotional level, which harmonizes the affective power. This notion was prevalent among auto-ethnographers as an affective domain; however, they get blamed as narcissists for telling the one-sided stories of the researchers. I have experienced that creative methods are thus more likely to engage participants more profoundly, even emotionally, ascribed by the sublime way of expression as Longinus deals with. Just as in Longinus' sublime, which exceeds ordinary language and thought, creative research methodologies often exceed standard research paradigms and can afford new insights and views, especially when traditional modes fail.

It is in this sense that, within educational research, the ancient concept of the sublime can be invoked as a deep methodological inspiration through the work of Longinus. Longinus' treatise, "On the Sublime," suggests that the power of language and expression can transcend the ordinary, much like how sublime literature captures the essence of human experience in elevating and transformative ways. Coupled with this idea, research methods would become innovative beyond conventional (Doran, 2015) data collection techniques and involve creative methodologies that mirror the depth and passion evoked by the sublime. Here, Kara's (2015) work meets Longinus's philosophy, advocating creativity in social science research methods. Both are proponents of research practice in which the synthesis of cognition and affect is paramount, research that informs and moves, which touches the human spirit in ways that might not be as accessible with more traditional approaches. This would be about constructing research that dignifies and elevates human experiences, somewhat like the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of the sublime, whereby the pursuit is not just knowledge but also the enrichment of the experiences of the research participants.

Script 3: Reading Qualitative Research from a Sublime Perspective

During my career as a teacher and researcher, I encountered several sublime researchers and authors who have experimented with sublimity in their work. I have much presented a few who influenced me a lot. The first time, I was stuck when I read Butler-Kisber (2008), who shows an inquiry to patch up the work and product as the form of arts-based research that includes visual arts in the research methods to uncover

human experience, thoughts, and emotions. This process, for me, is nonlinear in terms of narrative sublime.

I came to learn that we can write stories in the research. This was another exciting sublimity to delve deeper into the participants' stories; I thought I could be Polkinghorne (1988), who often writes about the deeply rooted conscious and subconscious state of mind of people, which shapes the meaning of becoming a cognitive form. Later, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) connected and developed the usefulness of narrative in understanding teachers and students in the educational context. As a result, I attempted to describe the narrative of urban youth and their ways of learning in the contested space. Narrative inquiry has blurring stories and knowledge as the sublime aspects of research (Gautam, 2017).

No, matter I can write stories in research, but we can also write a poem in research; another exciting reading of poetic inquiry with poetic sensibility has been a sublime aspect of exploring the educator's role in using poetry in their teaching practices and professional growth (Gouzouasis, 2006). Likewise, Prendergast (2004) focused on poetic forms and used new lenses to understand educational phenomena. However, these sublime aspects of poetic inquiry focused more on qualitative research outcomes. Leggo (2018) described the art of poetic inquiry as a method and means.

While exploring the sublime aspect of ethnography, I often remember Alice Goffman's (2014) "On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City" where she not only experiments with the process of doing ethnography but also its outcomes for social justice, why are people searching for accuracy of Tim and Ronny (main characters of Goffman). We are the crowd of people checking the narrative's authenticity through the lens of naïve realism, which kills the sublimity in social science research. There might be several other stories, collages, poems, and songs- examples of creative research methods that we will not accept as 'authentic' and will kill social research's sublime aspect.

I usually remember van Manen (2016), who was known as a phenomenologist. His work of art, 'Writing in the Dark', deeply engages with human experience. He demonstrated that writing is a means to express and illuminate the world inside and outside of human existence. Van Manen's play with rhetoric, ideas, the human condition, and the environment is a true example of the phenomenological sublime.

Such experiments in creative research methods lead to uncovering the ideas of the Sublime, which are closer to the Longinus. For Longinus, the sublime provides an idea to the audience about a great height of experience and feeling, which can be amazement, wonder, and sometimes even overwhelming emotions. For him, the sublime experience stirs the soul through lofty expressions, vivid imagery, or striking metaphors. It also connects with the emotional feelings of a reader or listener.

In a more organized way, all these aspects of research came together in Helen Kara's (Kara et al., 2021) contribution to make research creative and engage teachers, students, parents, and researchers as the great contribution to make social and educational research sublime. Phillips and Kara (2021) also give some tips for practitioners using creative research methods, which can lead us to the sublime domain of research. There are several other known and unknown writers and researchers who have led the sublime journey of creative research methods.

These are a few examples of searching for sublime effects to break the silence of advocating creative research methods in social and education research and practice. I as a reader and researcher, seek the engaging ability of the research for the audience and their context which we need to cultivate for community and scholarly engagement.

Postscript

After a massive grinding job as a researcher and thinker, I feel relaxed saying that the conjunction of Longinus's sublime with Kara's call for creative research methods resists the dominant academic conventions in a way that was very typical of Longinus's resistance against rhetorical conventions during his time. It calls on the researchers to step out of the conventional questionnaires or interviews and use an artistic and emotive evoking method, somewhat unorthodox, to tap into the richness of human experiences. It would involve either narrative inquiry, visual arts, or performance-based research to uncover the richness of life's complexities, which may be hard to disclose using conventional data. The tribute to Longinus here is not merely academic but one of practice in applying his insights in making research not only a quest for understanding but an act of artistic expression. By so doing, education research can aspire to the sublime, not just in the findings of its work but in its very execution, creating an environment in which both the researcher and the researcher can be uplifted, engaged, and enlightened through the process. The combination of ancient philosophy and

modern methodology is perhaps the pathway to a new paradigm where educational research is not only a scientific enterprise but also an art that can change both the observer and the observed.

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To cite this editorial:

Gautam, S. (2024). The art of sublime educational inquiry: Tribute to Longinus and Kara [Editorial]. *Journal of Education and Research*, 14(1), 1-9.
<https://doi.org/10.51474/jer/16191>
