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Original Article

The Saga of Performing 'Untrained': A Currere on a University Teacher's Evolution Through Assessment

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Abstract

Like any educated individual, I have lived a two-dimensional life. First, I have been a student through many formal levels of education; I have been a constantly assessed learner. Second, I have been an educator at different places and through many levels, which means I have been an examiner and an assessor in various systems and levels. I have been a learner in both roles. This paper presents my currere in relation to assessment. With a cursory glance at my life as a student-learner, I focus on my four-phase evolution as an educator-assessor: imitative-informative past, applicational-transformative future, emulative-formative exposures and educative-transformative present. I reveal that the life of an educator-assessor embodies a constant deconstruction of formal education in the backdrop of the need to adopt innovative and evolutionary assessment parameters.

Keywords: currere, assessment, informative, formative, transformative

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Introduction

The headmaster's office was a small room with a modest set of furniture like one table, a few chairs and a cupboard. My father took me in and reported to the tall, stern-looking gentleman sitting on the headmaster's chair that I wanted to leave the school since I had failed the first grade. The gentleman looked at me fiercely and asked, "How did you fail?". I was clueless because of the suddenness of the visit and the question and, therefore, remained silent. My father said to the man, "Please take one more round of tests. He has the knack to go to grade two." The headmaster then began my life's first-ever unforgettable test. He asked me a few questions related to addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. Then he thrust a sheet of paper in my hand and dictated in Nepali such expressions that represented my mood at that time:

> *"My name is …; I live in …, I want to leave this school because I failed in grade one; I will go to Safewa school; My siblings will remain here because they have passed grade two*."

My father stood there watching the scene while I faced the quizzes and dictations. When the headteacher had done enough of questioning, he took me by my hand out of his office to the school assembly and placed me in the row of grade two. I stood there confused while the kids from around gazed at me with utter disbelief.

This boy who had momentarily failed grade one is a university teacher now and still waits for about half a dozen tests to be administered to him within six months. I mean to say, I look forward to taking formal examinations because I am still a learner and a struggler. For example, at this moment, three course facilitators are assessing my written assignments for the Master in Higher Education program. I am preparing two final presentations and one full-length independent study to be submitted for review, acceptance and grading. On the career front, I am keenly waiting to be grilled for the position of Professor of English Studies. This much-anticipated ordeal comprises a task-based performance test and a comprehensive interview with an international expert.

The school scene above is from a day in December 1979, the day after the Kalika school had published its annual results. I had failed grade one and did not want to remain in the school any longer. I had turned seven just a week before and was supposed to know what taking exams and passing or failing them meant. But I did not

know these until the moment I had been excluded from the pass list the day before. My father, a one-time schoolteacher himself, had adequately discussed my promotion with the headteacher and pulled me to the headteacher's office. The short-term failure, the quick re-examination, and the promotion lent me enough impetus to understand the studies and examinations that would follow in the ensuing days. If I had not failed, "my life would have been minus one lesson," and that lesson was "big enough to steady my steps" (Kafle, 2022).

I remember facing examinations or assessments both as rituals and ordeals. During the school days, examinations were twice-a-year episodes with the slightest personal alarms. Most examination days began with filling up old fountain pens with school-supplied ink, writing whatever could be recalled, and leaving the exam room with minimal repentance. Tests, results, class promotions with admirable ranks and a couple of prizes on the school's annual day formed the saga of my basic education. The only most discomforting examination I remember to have undergone was the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) send-up test in September 1988 when I had conjunctivitis and wrote answers with tearful burning eyes and runny nose – a handkerchief in one hand, a pen in the other as the crucial amenities of the moment. The so-called 'iron-gate,' the SLC examination of January 1989, was like a life-changing adventure. I stayed away from home, self-studied, took tutorials, rambled with friends, went to the venue of the 'iron-gates' guarded by constables and a formidable 'superintendent,' and completed the examinations.

My university education was no different in my formative years. All the way from Intermediate of Arts (I. A.) to Master of Philosophy (MPhil), I sat for three-to-four-hour final summative examinations. I even failed a subject called Nepal Parichaya in the I. A. second year and got detained for a year. I took a compartmental examination and cleared it the following year. This failure, like the first one mentioned above, has been one of my life's great mysteries. What was so pathetically wrong about the regular examination that I failed the subject and so exceptionally right about the compartmental that I passed it with 64% marks? Was it the problem with my performance or with the assessment system that caused me to lose a precious year of my educational journey?

Only the viva voces of the Master, MPhil and PhD dissertations felt like real qualifying tests for the immediacy, rigor and presence of mind required of a student. As

a student, I always found oral presentations and research papers more engaging and learning-oriented than sit-in examinations. But I never got an opportunity to realize how I was being assessed all those years. I was not aware of any assessment grid or performance rubrics when I was struggling to pass written examinations targeting marks above 60 out of 100. Only in my Master in Higher Education did I come across rubrics developed to assess my performance. And I learned the fundamentals of assessment only after studying a course in assessment. Ironically, it was after having gone through nine levels of formal education[1].

The above narrative sums up my lived experiences as a student in Nepal's formal education system. I term it my currere as a student and an examinee who was assessed and graded for countless subjects and in diverse ways till he attained his last formal degree. I have partly tried "re-experiencing prior, even archaic, forms of life" in an attempt to present the "concept of the individual in curriculum studies" (Pinar, 2020, p. 50). As this saga of nine levels and forty-five years requires a more comprehensive space, I do not want to compromise it within a few paragraphs. What follows, instead, is my currere as a university teacher. I consider being an educator and assessor equally a rewarding opportunity because such an opportunity begins when formal education ends and the applicability of one's past curricular exposures is continuously tested and realized.

Currere is defined in relation to curriculum. It primarily means running an educational program. It can, therefore, be related to making education happen, allowing educators and learners to exist, and letting the entire system function in perpetuity. In a more exclusive sense, currere is the place of an individual learner within and beyond the curricular process. It accounts for the individual's entry, struggle, growth and exit from educational settings with recollections of fond exposures, and appreciation for opportunities and epiphanies. In the present case, my currere entails my growth as a teacher-learner as a part of the curricular system of Kathmandu University (KU). I adopt currere as a "profound method of personal reflection" (Reiff, 2017, p. 12), to recount the crucial facets of my journey as an educator-assessor. Currere offers me

[1] I have come through (i) Primary (grade 1-5); (ii) Lower Secondary (grade 6-8), (iii) Secondary (grade 9-10); (iv) Proficiency Certificate; (v) Bachelor; (vi) Master; (vii) Master of Philosophy; (viii) Doctor of Philosophy; and (ix) Master in Higher Education

"power of contemplation, reflection, introspection, and imagination" (Baszile, 2017, p. vii) through which I can relive my past, reflect its link to my present, and see how both past and present influence my future courses of action. In the process of making a connection between past, present, and future, I also can identify and unpack my prejudices (Mahjani, 2018). Currere helps me maintain modesty as a continuous learner and educator.

Currere as a method of inquiry involves the documentation and close observation of the four phases in one's curricular life (Pinar, 2020). My discussion here represents the same about me, i. e., the four phases of my curricular life. In the first, the "regressive phase," I try to return to the past while recalling the crucial moments of exposure and learning. In the second, the "progressive moment," I imagine some possible extensions and applications of my learnings to future roles. In the third, the "analytic moment," I attempt to understand the mundane yet meaningful facets that might have been forgotten and "obscured by [my] submersion in the present" and idealization of the future. In the fourth, the "synthetic phase," which is "a new subjective site," I make sense of the present by drawing insights from the past, present and future (Pinar, 2020, p. 50). Thus, currere provides me a discursive guideline for crafting a semi-autobiographical account of my educational efforts, encounters, experiences, and imaginations.

Imitative-Informative Past

Three images come to my mind when I think about my early days as a faculty member at KU. The first comprise eight pieces of white parallel wire hanging along the door-side corner-walls of the eight rooms of Block 06. The second include the around-two-dozen audio cassettes stacked in a cupboard in the Guidance and Counselling Cell in Block 10. The third is now-extinct litho printing machine that housed a small locked-up cabin at Block 06 till 2010. The pieces of white wire embodied the time when teaching and testing listening skills in English was as much a mandate as a pleasant exposure. Each of the pieces used to play one massive speaker connected to an amplifier placed in the nearby Department of English. The cassettes contained the audio file of the listening tests, which used to be played on the amplifier and broadcast to the eight rooms. The litho machine produced all the question papers of terminal examinations and internal tests.

These amenities represent the very early days of my role as an assessor at KU. Very mundane the things might sound when described now, and many people but recount those indelible aspects of my professional beginning. The following two screenshots of the question sets (figure 1 and 2) I prepared in 2005, reflect the type of assessment faculty members in English designed in those days. These, in fact, carry the key to a narrative thread: 'the faculties in English assessed students' listening skills by administering standard listening comprehension tests through audio cassettes played simultaneously in eight examination halls.' The narrative could partly allegorize the contributions of late Prof. Tuladhar, who served as the Dean of School of Science when the building was constructed and the amenities established.

Preparing listening test items was time-consuming, including selection of audio and script, filling up announcements and instructions, tape-recording and dubbing. Administration of the test involved carrying and fixing the speakers, running back and forth between the control room to the exam halls making sure the sound worked. We printed the term test questions in litho sheets through a dot-matrix printer and a lab boy (mostly Pancha or Pasang) from one of the science departments operated the machine to produce hundreds of question sets. We the faculties stapled the question papers at the department and went for refreshments once the manual task was finished. The process of assessment was, therefore, as much a duty as a pleasant ritual symbolizing collegiality.

The litho machine represented the culture of imitation and compliance. During the initial days, I imitated the ways of my seniors, and they complied with the ways dictated to them by the university authority. Even though the final examinations had question sets in laser prints, the Office of the Controller of Examinations (the exam office) asked the setters to submit hand-written drafts of questions. These drafts were produced after samples of questions prepared earlier, which came accompanying the letter of appointment. Someone in the exam office typed the questions and someone from the department moderated the set before printing it in hundreds. The question setter was not expected to be creative, only making sure not to repeat previous years' questions and yet not to divert much from the standard. The moderator was very likely to reject or replace the set that repeated old items or departed from the given standard.

Figure 1

Sample of Questions for Listening Test (I Sc)

KATHMANDU UNIVERSITY
Final Examination
May 2005

Level: Intermediate — Subject: English
Year: II — Paper: II
Date: — F.M: 45
Roll No: — Time: 45 mins.

Section A
[Listening Comprehension Test]

1. Listen to the speakers carefully and fill each of the blanks below with the missing word. 4

The trouble with education in ……., I think, lies with the teacher. I don't think teachers get nearly enough training in actually how to teach rather than the subject. I think they are too serious, too ……; they are not imaginative enough. And that means that there's not enough ……. in the classroom for children to get interested in the subject.

Yes, I agree. I think there is too much theoretical teaching given and not enough practical education, with the result that ……. are far too busy studying for exams to have time to learn about …… itself and how to, how to live in the world.

I think, all teachers should be at least …… before they start teaching. I think they should be …… to live in the outside world, rather than go from the classroom to the ……..and back to the classroom again.

2. Listen the recording and CIRCLE the correct alternatives. 6

a. The young Greek had a business of ….
   i) exporting tobacco into Argentina
   ii) importing tobacco into Argentina
   iii) exporting tobacco from Argentina
   iv) importing tobacco from Argentina

I realize now that I grew up through the culture that mostly adhered to assessment of learning, "with teachers firmly in charge of both creating and making the test" and teacher effort in assessment "taken up in marking and grading" (Earl & Katz, 2006). The examinations were scheduled events passing alerts from the controller of examinations to the lab assistant. One of my old colleagues used to joke about it as a "Suresh to Suresh" affair, implying the concerns and engagement of people from the Vice Chancellor (Prof. Suresh Raj Sharma) to the sweeper at School of Science (Suresh Deula). The teachers were the busiest in the lot, marking or grading hundreds of papers with deadlines and classes conflicting with their personal routines. In the frenzy of disposing the formidable piles of papers, they would not necessarily take account of how much students had grown from these examinations. Representing the motto of assessment of learning, these examinations were "designed to confirm what students know" and to "provide evidence of achievement to parents, other educators, the students themselves, and sometimes to outside groups" (Earl & Katz, 2006, p. 55).

Figure 2

Sample of Questions for Listening Test (Undergraduate)

KATHMANDU UNIVERSITY
End Semester Examination 2005

Level: B.E/ B.Sc./B.Pharm./B.Tech.	Course: ENGT 101
Year: I	Semester: I
Roll No.:	Time: 45 minutes
Date:	F.M.: 30

Section A
[Listening Comprehension Test]

1. Listen the script carefully and tick the right word from the choices given. 3

China's wasted no time in setting out the latest plans for its **(prestigious/ambitious/vicious)** space programme. A senior official said the next manned mission will be in 2007, when the astronauts will attempt a space walk. After that, scientists will focus on developing the capability to **(rend the vow/rendezvous/run the vow)** and dock with other spacecraft. He added that China also wanted to **(recreate/re-creed/recruit)** female astronauts in the near future.

The announcement comes just hours after the country's second manned space mission touched down in the remote **(grace lands/grasslands/gross lands)** of inner Mongolia. The returning astronauts have been given a hero's welcome, riding in an open car in a nationally televised **(parade/period/pirate)**. Thousands of soldiers and groups of schoolchildren lined the **(root/route/road)**, waving Chinese flags. It's a sign of the great importance China attaches to its space programme, viewing it as a source of national pride and international prestige.

Invigilating in the examination was an essential act at the university. The act was a mix of tedium and relaxation. It kept one glued to a room with youngsters who for that occasion could be defined as defaulters while you the law-enforcer. Students were expected to enter the room empty-handed except for calculator, pen, pencil and some geometry equipment. But some exceptions emerged here and there. On one examination day, students of mechanical engineering entered the room with bulky textbooks and elaborate note papers. These resources were allowed in an open-book examination set by a foreign visiting faculty. As this practice was exclusive for one of the final-semester courses of one of the programs only, I used to wonder how such an unconventional approach could be introduced in summative assessment. I wanted to bring the same to my own practice but was apprehensive considering myself too junior to justify such novelty.

The teachers of English and communication skills including me seemed relatively more new-fangled in those days. We would allow students greater autonomy in the choice of subjects for their presentations, reviews, and oral interviews. The final in-semester assessment item used to be an elaborate formal presentation, and the semester ended with an oral interview. Students were asked to come in professional-looking attires on these occasions. The presentation and viva days felt much like festivals and cultural shows. I now realize this represented the culture of assessment for learning. My oral interviews looked much like "student-teacher conferences" in which I tried to utilize the students' personal knowledge and their "understanding of the context of the assessment and the curriculum targets to identify particular needs" (Earl & Katz, 2006). The oral presentations, intended to train students in professional public speaking soft skills, helped "make each student's understanding visible," through "individual and idiosyncratic ways" (Earl & Katz, 2006, p. 29).

Every season
A pile of papers sneaks into my abode;
Then it invades my toddler's little world
Stares at my meager amenities
Sneers at my expectations
Steals the peace of my home

I unpack the pile, as I must,
Eager to dispose it at the earliest;
As I turn the scribbling,
Myriad faces and emotions haunt me;
But I pretend being untouched!
Who are they but fugitives of an ailing country?
What do I do but measure my own failure to instill commonsense?

I ply on, through the pile, as I must
Intent yet unclear
Committed yet confused,
While my toddler timidly asks from the door:
"What do you read, papa?"
With no time to lift my eye
To read his appealing face
I only manage to blurt out:
WORDS, WORDS, WORDS, WORDS

[From *Six Strings*]

Overall, assessment was largely a physical engagement involving a lot of resources. It was an investment in several aspects. It was human resource mobilization, and I was one of the significant employees to comply with the terms of references that included assessment and exam conduction. It was security management, and I, like many colleagues, guarded examinations against any anomalies. Exam superintendents and invigilators behaved as police officers in the hunt for culprits and remained alert as if against raid or vandalism. But at heart, I celebrated it as an opportunity to affirm my conviction that the process of examination and evaluation was not a mere assigned duty, but a reward for those who were in the system of teaching and learning (Kafle, 2004, p. 4).

I performed as a question setter and an invigilator and observed minutely the administration of summative assessments. But the above snippets count among the earliest milestones of my role as an assessor, which I have used for "examining my own past as a rich data source" (Adams, 2014, p. 5). The time before May 2005 (as reflected by the heading of question set above) forms the imitative-informative phase of my career as a faculty member. Imitation involved almost a verbatim compliance with the existing practices without both power and intent to influence the models of and decisions for assessment. It was what Frenk et al (2010) might call the "informative phase" spent meaningfully "acquiring knowledge and skills," (p.1924). It was also the phase of preparation for more creative and critical roles ahead.

Applicational-Transformative Progression

Years of work at the university has lent me ground to claim my reasonable understanding on and reliable competence for conducting assessments. When I "look toward the future: toward what is possible" (Adams, 2014, p. 5), I see myself involved in a number of performative arenas "developing leadership attributes" (Frenk et al, 2010, p. 1924). I mean I will be in the academic administration which will mandate me a close coordination with the Office of the Controller of Examinations for management of assessment practices in the programs and units I lead. I will serve and facilitate curriculum teams, academic audit teams, subject committees, the Faculty Board and, probably, the Academic Council in later years. As is the common scope, curriculum teams closely develop curricula ensuring coherence between overall course objectives, unit-wise learning objectives, test types and test items. Subject committees formalize and periodically review the curricula and the syllabi. The Faculty Board reviews the curricula and recommends their approval. The Academic Council approves the curricula and allows program launch. In all those formal phases, I will ensure systematizing assessment through an integrated approach with inclusive test items.

My efforts in the days ahead will be to popularize the culture of assessment as learning. This is to "emphasize the role of the student, not only as a contributor to the assessment and learning process but also as the critical connector between them" (Earl & Katz, 2006). Such a shift of responsibility to students is possible in my case since most of my curricular work involves graduate and postgraduate programs where we value learner autonomy. To my colleagues and I, "learning is not just a matter of

transferring ideas from someone who is knowledgeable to someone who is not"; it is rather a flexible process of "cognitive restructuring" which becomes possible "when individuals interact with new ideas" (Earl & Katz, 2006, p. 41). Assessment is no longer merely a practice operated with how-to manuals to manage routine tests, "a disciplinary field" in its own merits "with evolving directions, dialogues and scholarly debates" (Jankowski & Baker, 2019, p. 19). I will most likely organize an expert team to develop and formalize an immersion course in innovative assessment practices targeted at university faculties. This would be an appropriate justification for my realization that assessment deserves the credibility of a professional discipline side by side with but not inferior to curriculum and pedagogy.

My university rarely audits assessment practices across its programs. Periodical assessment audits, through the analysis of alignment between unit-wise learning objectives and the representation of cognitive domains and test items, would help reveal the fault lines of existing assessment practices and expose areas for improvement. One of my responsibilities as an academic leader would be to help systematize assessment at the university. It would be by performing periodical assessment audits program-wise on the foundation of program-wise curricula and syllabi. I see the possibility of developing competency-focused learning objectives, subsequent performance task items, and rubrics that can compositely enhance assessment as learning. Two assessment categories, self-assessment and peer assessment, would remain mandatory among the overall assessment parameters. Self-assessment would empower students "to guide their own learning and internalize the criteria for judging success" (McMillan & Hearn, 2008, p. 40), while peer assessment would encourage critical collegiality among students as they "assess the works of other students, their peers" (Ashenafi, 2015, p. 2) through credible assessment rubrics.

Emulative-Formative Exposures

In what follows, I try to make sense of the analytical phase of my currere. This demands "looking backward to the past while examining the present" (Pinar, 2020, p. 50). My vision for the future, which I have outlined above, may reflect my confidence and ability as a potential academic leader. Such confidence has stemmed from at least three decades of exposure as a teacher, including twenty-four years at a university. Confidence also bloomed in the phase of active engagement without obvious leadership

portfolios but with trust and credibility earned through compliance with the given rules and seniors' guidance. The phase was of formative exposures when I keenly tried "socializing … around values" (Frenk et al, 2010, p. 1924), the values that gave identity to the university in its own formative years. This was the time when the university fraternity highly emphasized the quality of students, teachers, resources, classes, and assessments, both in public forums and close meetings.

I believed early enough that I was someday going to claim my standing at the university. Though taking seniors as forerunners was as much a culture as an educational necessity, I believed in taking and emulating initiatives to popular acceptance, collegial application, and relative perfection. I placed myself in a professional race without letting others know and self-imposed the challenge to outrun undefined competitors "without trespassing their trails" (Kafle, 2016, p. 20). My past rather was my symbolic competitor. My present and future were the key impetuses. I refrained from competing with another real person but persisted in outrunning myself and the unknown.

I had worked in schools before joining KU. Thus, question setting, exam conduction, invigilation and evaluation were not unheard-of rituals to me. Beyond KU, I frequently taught English to higher secondary (grade XI and XII) students and got used to with higher secondary examination system. At least three terminal tests, according to the standard of the annual board examinations, comprised all that students and teachers needed to know about assessments. The teacher had a lot of work to do. The 100-marks sit-in question set constituted items such as vocabulary, punctuation, grammar, reading comprehension, short-answer questions, long-answer questions, paragraph writing, essay writing, and letter writing. In addition, I taught and set questions for PCL[2] Nursing, and Tribhuvan University bachelor programs. I prepared question sets for entrance tests of KU undergraduate programs in the later years. I confess at this point that all that I could do was informed by standard models. If following a standard could be called training or exposure, that only was the training or exposure I had about designing assessments during my formative years.

The initial years at the university brought no intellectual challenge because I did not have to learn or innovate much. I just had to follow what my seniors said and imitate

[2] Proficiency Certificate Level

what they had done earlier. But at heart, I wanted to rebel by becoming a little friendlier and more congenial with the students. I wanted to be independent in designing the form and content of assessments despite the apprehension of getting caught wrong if I deviated from the given standard. I could sense that the standardized assessments usually encouraged rote-learning and discouraged students from alternative pathways to evidence their learning. Those who could not rote-learn had either to fail or quit or cheat if they wanted to pass. In a system like ours, one had to be indomitably heroic to cheat to claim happiness after exams. I portrayed this reality in an opinion piece published in a national daily in April 2008, "Honest but 'unheroic' students are rarely happy after the exams. Examinations do not always distinguish good and bad (Kafle, 2008, p.4). In this I was implying the limitation of three-hour sit-in examinations in assessing the actual learning and competencies of students. No matter how systematic it was, the existing assessment system demanded that every student be highly intelligent to pass the tests to graduate. The idea of graduation ironically represented the situation of a "disconnect between the student and what he or she studies" (Morris, 2015, p. 105).

As time passed, developing semester plans including apart from the syllabi broad formats for field works, presentations, and grading parameters became an autonomous endeavor. I remained aware of the fact that students needed to be attracted towards assessments, and teachers motivated to facilitate the assessments. I do not know how I name the assumptions that guided me, but I assumed that examinations did not have to bring pressure but allow pleasure and free thinking even though the examinees were kept in a room for three hours. I particularly wanted to add the aspect of fun to the assessment items by injecting wit and humor here and there. I experimented with this aspect in the selection of reading comprehension passages and sometimes in context-based, long-answer questions. I would say I was aware of the need to entertain the examinees before being able to write answers, utilizing what Doll (2017) terms "shocking materials" and thereby "sparking student imagination" (p. 48). The samples below (Figure 3 and Figure 4) signal the kind of tasks I intended students to attempt in the examination. Since these were for a course in creative writing and communication skills, respectively, I believed creativity in the examination should begin with the experience of surprise and trigger.

I attended limited seminars and workshops on curriculum development. But each of such programs presupposed that the participants were well-trained. The workshops focused on preparing micro-content and selecting texts and references. Almost never assessment adequately featured on such occasions; it was supposed to be a predefined, institutional component isolated from curriculum and syllabi. Despite successfully running a semester system, most teachers celebrated summative examinations through sit-in examinations as a part or solely for in-semester assessments. The end-semester assessment involved three-hour sit-in examinations university-wide.

Figure 3

Sample of Questions for Creative Writing (Undergraduate)

KATHMANDU UNIVERSITY
End Semester Examination 2009

Level: BMS — Subject: ENGL 301
Year: III — Semester: I

Time: 2 hrs 30 mins — F.M: 40

SECTION "B"
[Writing]

1. The following passage is an example of how abstract concepts are made to sound concrete with the use of imagery. Read it carefully and create a similar but longer paragraph (in 250 words) on a subject like politics, success, poverty, etc. [10]

> *Civilization is a stream with banks. The stream is sometimes filled with blood from people killing, stealing, shouting and doing the things historians usually record, while on the banks, unnoticed, people build homes, make love, raise children, sing songs, write poetry and even whittle statues. The story of civilization is the story of what happened on the banks. Historians are pessimists because they ignore the banks for the river.*

2. Select a proverb (ANY ONE) such as "Never throw stones in the well you take water from" and narrate a personal experience that either illustrates or refutes the ideas in this saying. Your purpose is to explain to your readers how your individual experience led you to the wisdom of your proverb. [10]

OR

Imagine that you left your native country to start life in a new country. Write a letter back

Figure 4

Questions for Technical Communication (Undergraduate)

4. The following text is a part of a badly written adjustment letter. Write a response to its writer in a formal and neutral tone commenting on the language and expressions used in it. [5]

> Our staff reports that your technical hands, who are a poorly trained bunch of idiots who cannot distinguish wire from wax, caused short circuits in the computer lab. The damage occurred because they mishandled the machines like anything. So, I regret to say that we have no point in addressing your problems. Do as you like.

5. Write a personal diary that Damocles would write about his experience in king Dionysius's court. Focus on describing in minute details how you (as Damocles) felt a sudden shift of emotions from extreme happiness to extreme fear after seeing the sword. [5]

OR

Write an argumentative paragraph on "Human beings have no right to treat animals as their private properties." Your argument may be complemented with ideas from Lekh Nath Paudyal's "The Parrot in the Cage."

I remember attending a faculty workshop sometime around 2003, in which the original Bloom's Taxonomy was introduced as a framework for preparing multiple-choice questions. Apart from a quick orientation on the Taxonomy, the facilitator suggested a number of norms regarding the nature and composition of stems and options. The awareness I developed that day, especially the mandate of equal-length options, the presence of one distractor and three comparable choices, and the representation of all cognitive skills in the MCQs, became the mantra for developing selected-response items for the days ahead. Ironically, the workshop did not advocate the same for short-answer (constructed response) and long-answer questions (performance tasks).

I continued assessment practices with a bare minimum formal orientation. Yet I performed a number of roles beyond question setting and paper grading. These included moderating questions, scrutinizing graded answer scripts, and observing examinations held at the affiliated colleges. The university observers to affiliated colleges got such assurance for their roles, 'You can act the VC, Registrar, Exam Controller, Dean or whatever suits to maintain the dignity of the university examinations. You are the university!' Thus, exam observation was a heavy managerial operation of a few weeks. You were the university, strategically poised to act a police officer and a colleague to a team that secretly wanted to run the university examinations in their own ways, without your dictates. Most importantly, I served in the Examination Board as a member nominated by the Vice Chancellor. During my three-year tenure, in addition to being engaged in policy-making, exam conduction, and results publication, I helped audit question papers for different undergraduate programs.

When I became a Unit Coordinator in September 2013, a new phase of learning and management started. Since January 2015, I have taken up exam-related administrative roles such as (assistant) superintendent of end-semester examinations. The best strategy to justify such roles was to become comprehensively educated about the stated rules and policies. It was to fully internalize myself with the university system even though acquiring competence in assessment principles remained an unfelt necessity. I had to inform myself while aiming to educate others. During my early tenure as Unit Coordinator, I organized faculty development sessions on 'outcomes-based curriculum and pedagogy.' Based on the extensive discussion on the application of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy, these sessions implicitly recommended the alignment of

assessment with overall curricular objectives and learning outcomes. Subsequently, my communication skills team for the undergraduate programs of engineering and sciences on the central campus adopted Bloom's Taxonomy as a framework for reading, writing, and project development.

The biggest glitch in our system surfaced after COVID 19 caused a total lockdown at the university and forced us to halt all the sit-in examinations. When summative onsite examinations were impossible, everyone was bound to learn and emulate their ways by adopting a complete formative approach. As the university delayed till the summer of 2020 the decision to transfer assessment administration to individual course instructors, grading was halted, resulting in the sequential postponement of classes, exams, results, and graduation. When the Academic Council did shift summative assessments from the central authority to the departments and faculties, the scantily formative end-semester ways posed a lot of challenges. Consequently, the COVID-time assessments became disparate, producing inflated grades yet excellent pass results.

Thus, the analytical phase of my currere as an educator-assessor marked my informed shift from compliance to widely held assessment practices to reasonable autonomy to introduce more creative and learner-friendly ways of assessment. While emulating my own performances through self-directed efforts, I appeared to strike a balance between 'assessment of learning' and 'assessment for learning' because a total departure from the first to adopt the second would not be possible in a culture of summative examinations, at least in the undergraduate education system of KU where the Office of the Controller of Examinations regulated policy making, final assessments and results publications. And a shift to 'assessment as learning' was not even necessary because the existing practices worked fine in the given scenario except in the crisis like a pandemic-induced lockdown.

Educative-Transformative Present

After my transfer to School of Education in April 2022, I am living my *today* as an educator-assessor. I experience constant pressure to remain agile at the necessities of the immediate, though my past has not been without rewards and future without promises. I "reenter the present" (Pinar, 2020, p. 50) again and again to make sense of the missing link between the past and future. But where is the missing link? I see this in

my formal training, which has been devoid of instrumental-theoretical polishing in evolutionary norms of academic assessment.

I realize now that I should long ago have perceived the necessity of getting formally trained in at least three domains: curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. I should have been sufficiently oriented to make sense of my everyday responsibilities as an educator, so much so that I would take every opportunity or exposure very seriously. There is no reason to regret this, but every opportunity I got for twenty-two years was a task – a responsibility – to be performed with integrity and a sense of perfection but without robust theoretical-practical input. Development of curricula and syllabuses, management of pedagogical activities and conduction of examinations were assumed to be essential competencies ingrained in my three university degrees, none of which were in the field of education.

Figure 5

Sample Assessment Rubric

KATHMANDU UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

Assignment: "My Signature Pedagogy"

You are being challenged to prove yourself a seasoned teacher and mentor since you have been teaching for several years. You are believed to have 'invented' a typical style/format/structure/skill/tool/technique to facilitate learning certain aspects of English (grammar, discourse, literature). Write in 1000 words a discussion paper (personal/reflective) on your invention as "My Signature Pedagogy". Describe its genesis and different tools and strategies involved, and explain why it is unique and dear to you.

SPECIFIC RUBRIC

Criteria	A	A -	B+	B	B-
1. **Reveals** the moment of epiphany: the genesis 2. **Narrates** the evolution and addition of new dimensions 3. **Describes** tangible tools/materials developed over time 4. **Sets** an example of pedagogy different from others (research based) 5. **Uses** pedagogy as signature (performance, application, transferability and transformative attributes) 6. **Measures** attributes of the course 7. **Presents** in an acceptable format (performance/ manuscript)	All 7 criteria	1, 2, 5, 6, 7 (missing 3 and 4)	1, 5, 6, 7 (missing 2, 3 and 4)	1, 6, 7 (missing 2, 3, 4, 5)	1, 7 (missing the rest)

GENERIC RUBRIC

A	Originality claimed with evidences
A-	Done something new, but not original
B+	Has started doing something new, but still has to provide evidence
B	Has thought of doing something new with an outline
B-	Has thought of doing something only

Interestingly, I had the first-ever learning of rubrics development only at School of Education a few days after I joined it in April 2022. As assigned as a group activity, I worked along with my team members to prepare rubrics for an assessment item I had already administered in an M Phil course (Figure 5 above). I cannot yet name its category and rank but consider it very useful. I can develop rubrics now after having

studied a course in assessment under the Master in Higher Education (MHE) program at the school. I am yet to learn the intricacies of rubrics since the exposure to the subject is very recent. I must assert that the MHE program has been instrumental in assimilating me into the discipline of education. I see a lot to implement from my recent learnings in my ongoing and imminent curricular and pedagogical experiments at the graduate and postgraduate levels.

I am intrigued to make reasonable use of peer assessment and self-assessment, much to substantiate the aspect of assessment as learning. I may have sparsely incorporated affective and psychomotor domains in the assessment of presentations and team projects. I am now more aware of their significance in the activity and assessment designs. My present students, as much as I do, love to be my collaborators and to collaborate among themselves. Their assessments are conditioned to be based on what Brookhart (2010) terms "higher-order thinking as problem solving" (p. 8) where they expect to be equipped with the ability to grapple with their societal, professional and personal challenges.

Concluding Remarks

My exposure to the assessment system as a student was limited to being assessed and receiving marks once a year until I graduated with a Master's degree. Even the semester-system MPhil exposure was much akin to regular education except for occasional oral presentations and ungraded group discussions, independent study, and thesis. PhD was a solo, secretive affair limited to consultations with two supervisors leading to one or two rigorous oral examinations. The Master in Higher Education has brought to me an exceptionally transformative experience. This recent endeavor as a scholar feels to have deconstructed all past educational efforts into several meaningful factors suggesting transdisciplinary breakthroughs. I do not regret the past fault lines, much to the solace that professional work without rigid guidelines remains as exciting and revealing as a boundaryless adventure.

I believe that the realization of the need for transformation is the first major start of transformation. I sometimes feel I was only serving the standard parameters of a system, more as a keeper than as an experimenter, so that my naivety (if any) did not cause much harm. No matter how much trust the university had in my competence and performance and what my honest engagements resulted in, I am ready to affirm that my

education and training were incomplete as an educator-assessor. Moreover, as an academic leader, no matter how small the position was, I would have to be adequately trained first. I wonder how this did not matter much, and I know it did not because despite having a slight imbalance here or there, the overall assessment activities I supervised integrated essential items mandated in the rigorous formative and summative assessment parameters set by the university I devoutly served. My engagement as an educator-assessor continues with greater responsibilities now that I am more educated with knowledge and competence in assessment. The future shall be different, and different the bases of my currere starting the point I am today.

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The author declared no potential conflicts of interest concerning this article's authorship and publication.

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