Editorial

Transformative Educational Research: Fleshing Out the Concepts

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In reference to this special issue, the idea of transformative educational research (TER) brings into light the integrated meanings on 'the what', 'the why', 'the how', 'the who', and 'what next' of transformative research approach in education, bringing together the ideas shared in the conference, and existing theoretical referents in this area of knowledge/ practice. This concept note, thus, primarily seeks to define transformative research approach in education, taking into consideration what an associated research and practitioner agenda might look like. So as to achieve this purpose, this paper frames TER practices so far, and creates space to think on future directions for education, and educational research through different sub-headings: (1) TER as multidimensional approach, (2) TER as a response to paradigm shift, (3) TER as arts-based multi-paradigmatic space, (4) TER for emerging leaders at various spheres of life-world, and (5) TER as imagining the world beyond the given.

TER as Multidimensional Approach

Transformative research in education, simply, is a response against partially conceived mainstream learning/researching as a purely cognitive/analytic process. In its realisation that the linear and fragmented approach to education and research is unlikely to address present perplexities of human beings, TER moves away from this conventional educational and researching practice. Exploring 'the what' of TER, however, is not so straightforward for it has already walked a 'short' distance ahead, seeking various possibilities in education and social science research. This multidimensional approach needs close observation on various imperatives it touches. In this relation, here, 'the what' of TER is explored bringing together the classical foundation of TER and perspectives of key speakers in the conference.

To begin with, the foundation of TER goes back to Freire's (1972) undertakings of transformative learning as a socio-cultural approach. This approach is to be understood in terms of conscientisation framework (Freire, 1972). In this educational researching/

meaning-making process, an individual/learner/researcher engages dialectically on pre-constructed biases and comes with emancipatory values. Likewise, Kolb's (1984) experiential approach to meaning-making sets another foundation for TER. Here, researching as part of learning is an ongoing process of experiencing world, where previous (concrete) lived experiences are cautiously integrated so as to formulate abstract concepts and reach conclusions. Such meaning-making through experiencing may eventually lead to new concrete experiences and future directions. Mezirow (1991), in addition, understood transformative learning/researching in terms of personal transformation and empowerment. In this educational researching approach, culturally, and yet uncritically embedded assumptions are questioned. As such, Mezirow's approach to researching is psycho-critical model of meaning-making, where critical observation of lived experiences is vital for personal/professional development of the researcher and the researched.

Living-education-theory approach (Whitehead, 2008) is yet another foundation for transformative research in education. In this approach, self-study researchers explore the question, for example – how can I possibly get engaged in my work/profession in more effective ways? This approach enables educators/researchers to explore themselves as knowledge-creators. The knowledge created is the practitioner's/ researcher's value-based explanations of improving praxis (Whitehead, 2014). Many other holistic/participatory approaches (e.g., Ferrer, 2011) are yet in the process of emergence, where participatory spirituality, integral envisioning, along with researching for sustainable reverence, peace, and happiness are supposed to be the means and ends of education and researching. This approach to TER accounts for the perplexity of the human being, consisting of mind, body and spirit in their holistic form.

The conference, in addition, taking into consideration the above mentioned foundations of TER, brought many other current issues and spaces of educational research into light. Such issues were discussed in detail, bringing together the challenges and opportunities so as to address them constructively. Arriving at this stage, we argue that TER is an educational researching approach providing post/Enlightenment thinking for addressing the current educational needs (e.g., sustainable development, climate change, peace building) of our rapidly globalising societies. It was to produce graduates with higher-order abilities, who are not only critical but also creative and innovative for constructive observation at the challenges. It raised a question – can we readily come with enough knowledge sources for such higher-order abilities? Scholars sought such possibilities of higher-order abilities within knowledge heritage of the local values and practices, which potentially would give its people a particular perspective on living, being closely aligned with the nature. Unfortunately, in fulfilling colonial agenda, modern education and the research endeavour it worships has ignored this Knowledge Heritage, which has eventually created a gap between the meaning-making approaches and the cultural perspectives, giving space for perspectival conflict and heightened humanitarian tension.

If so, is heightened conflict and tension the inherent and yet irreversible destiny of modern education? Research, for instance, is at the heart of educational endeavour, which potentially challenges current understandings, and emerges with pathways to new frontiers. Against this background, it is likely that a certain researching approach in education is supposed to be an effective means so as to improving wellness. There are calls for progressive educators and researchers to assume major roles of educational research in addressing global challenges associated with wellness of humanity. Human miseries, anxieties, restrains, and sufferings are rooted in our own uncritically adopted life practices. As per Eastern Wisdom Traditions, its primary causes and consequences are deeply rooted in the human mind, and therefore, the solutions must be searched within the human sphere. In this realisation, transformative education practitioner and researcher needs to search for resilience thinking. It is to explore the capacity and willingness of humans to transform them using wisdom tradition rooted in their own culture/knowledge heritage.

These ideas bring into light the multidimensional nature of TER. As expected, bringing these ideas together, one may possibly come with 'the what' of TER to some extent. It is not something to define from any given single perspective. It is rather an additional 'practice' in education; an exploration of situatedness in self and others in its dialogic and dialectical relation to each other; an extension of high-order/innovative outlook at emerging challenges; and a personal/professional/cultural shift oriented towards wellbeing.

TER as a Response to Paradigm Shift

'The what' of TER as discussed above may potentially lead us to think of this endeavour in terms of multidimensional approach. This meaning-making from collaborative interactional texturing of classical foundation and recent discourses now seeks the justification for these emerging approaches. So as to achieve this purpose, this sub-heading, thus, is an attempt to address 'the why' of this form of research practice in present academia. 'The why' seeks the need or the significance of the issue at hand. As TER carries broader meanings, its significance, thus, has to be understood from multiple perspectives, taking into consideration the different spaces it has created.

First, the need of TER is inherited within the weakness of conventional research practices as guided by the positivist paradigm. Under Cartesian reductionist agenda of modern education (Kauffman, 2007), our learning and meaning-making witnessed local and global anxiety regarding the lack of strength and potentiality of its research enterprises. The dominating rigidity within it (Snow, 1993), eventually, made a call for deep structural shift in learner's thinking, feeling, living, and working styles. TER, in no other way, is the consequence of this call.

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Second, TER is a dynamic process of meaning-making that has evolved and fostered continuously, parallel to the paradigm shifts exhibited in the ways of thinking and acting (Molz & Gidley, 2008). It signals transition from Newtonian mechanical physics to Einstein's relativity and quantum physics. This shift in worldview calls subjective truths (Snow, 1993), which is contextual in nature. Likewise, the philosophical transition from modernism to postmodernism/ post structuralism makes call to challenge linear hierarchy, and seek new/innovative possibilities in the ways of doing things. The transition from disciplinary to multi-, inter-, post- and trans-disciplinary, in addition seeks collaborative meaning-making. Most importantly, the emergence of new rational discourses on spirituality, not limited by religious doctrine (Ferrer, 2001) brings new insight to knowledge heritage. The significance of TER, in a way or other, is in addressing this paradigm shifts.

Such shifts exhibited in natural science, social sciences, and spirituality, has eventually come with few other emerging possibilities and spaces so as to foster the learner's/ researcher's ability to innovate and provide constructive leadership at it. Transformative research occurs when learner/researcher confronts a new and challenging ways of thinking. It follows through to make a significant life changes. This change may exhibit in the form of personal or professional transformation (e.g. Mezirow, 1991; Whitehead, 2008). This emerging need has evocated the footprint of humanism and value based educations, which are supposed to substantially solve the existing adversities in human life. The significance of TER, thus, seems crucial in shaping constructive leadership, possessing values-driven sensitivity and compassion to human beings and natural heritages.

As discussed above, transformative research is not confined to single direction. Several notions of transformative practices in and among various disciplines may express and highlight various spaces such as indigenous space, post-colonial space, peace space, inclusive space, humanitarian space, ecological space, and cosmological space among others. Each space carries transformative potential of its own. It, potentially, create further and yet broader space to discourse on pedagogy of human care, ethics, and spirituality (Ferrer, 2011); which demands broader perspectives at looking the phenomenon.

These Shifts have emerged with multiple challenges and possibilities in the field of education and researching. On the one hand, it has to produce a highly skilled professional workforce that is essential for improving infrastructure, social services and standards of living. On the other hand, it has to shape individuals with positive outlook in their own cultural identity, capable enough to make constructive shift, challenging the status-quo. However, under colonial worship, local cultural capital is excluded from curricula

(Luitel, 2009), contributing to the ongoing loss of cultural and linguistic diversity across populations. Today, cultural extinction in rural communities has been recognised as a major contributor to the ongoing loss of humanity's treasure of indigenous wisdom. It has eventually broken the spiritual link between humans and nature. Under such circumstances, there is not much time left to respect this opportunity to pursue prosperity of the amount of natural, cultural, and linguistic diversity that are still available in front of us. The significance of TER is somewhere around it.

Bringing these ideas together, it is perceptible that TER as multidimensional approach is a response to paradigm shift exhibited in human ontology and epistemic values. As it has touched almost all spheres of phenomenon, educational researches are expected to address these emergences. 'The why' of TER, thus, is again a multidimensional approach. Beginning from Freire's (1972) transformative meaning-making as socio-cultural approach, to Mezirow's (1991) psycho-critical approach, TER has already touched multiple spheres of human understandings. After all, it is to address the weakness and liminalities embedded in conventional research practices; to address the paradigm shift in terms of thinking and acting; to foster constructive leadership full of compassion; and to seek emancipatory value within one's own knowledge heritage.

TER as Arts-based Multi-Paradigmatic Space

TER as multidimensional approach, which emerged as a response to paradigm shifts may lead one to think on its procedures and approaches, which forms 'the how' of this area of knowledge and practice.TER advocates the need of new ways and approaches to understand things. Every spaces that has emerged within the sphere of TRE, has come with their own unique approaches and originality. As such, making-meaning on 'the how' of this practice is perspectival as well.

We argue that liberatory epistemology is the core of TER; which according to him, is a much needed perspective in researching for empowerment, social justice and meaning-centred education. It seeks flexible, and yet innovative approaches in education, and educational research, which challenges the widespread belief among some groups of academics and researchers, for whom educational research should be entirely guided by deductive, analytical and propositional logics and genre.

TER inherently embraces pluralistic vision of knowing (Taylor, Taylor,& Luitel, 2012). Acknowledging epistemic integrity of polyglot facets of research methods, it ensures knowledge construction through referential use of diverse forms of epistemological practices. It, thus, seeks possibilities in multi-paradigmatic design space, which possibly is the radical reaction to realist agendas (Baldwin, 2006). This synergic interplay of multiple paradigm may come with Interpretivism i.e., knowing as interpreting, and knowing as constructing (Luitel, 2009); may come with criticalism i.e., critical self-reflection (Brookfield, 1994) and cultural and ideological critique (McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007);

may come with postmodernism i.e., knowing as breaking linear/structural hierarchy (Wagle, 2016); and may come with Integralism i.e., knowing as holistic envisioning.

Multi-paradigmatic design space as such is likely to provide transformative researcher an opportunity to embrace multiple loci. In bringing these perspectives, here, sometimes, living body at cultural interaction is recognised as an underlying part of education and research endeavour. In doing so, it legitimise 'self as data' (Ellis, 2004). Autoethnography, a synthesis of postmodern ethnography and postmodern autobiography for example may, sometimes, be an effective tool so as to enable researchers/readers to reflect critically upon their own construction of the self.

TER stresses increasing interest in aesthetics (arts based methodological practice), which stitches together different genres of writing into synergic whole. It is to synthesize mind-centred/intellectual approach together with creative participation of non-mental human attributes. In other word, it is to add bricoleur effect in portraying things and events. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) understand 'bricoleur' as a postmodern and post-experimental literary turn that brings aesthetics in representation. In representing this interaction of multiple discourses, this arts-based inquiry practice employs various genres of writing (including narrative, poetic, photographic, and performative) incorporating it with additional rhetorics like metaphorical writing, dialogical reasoning, and ironic representation. It not only brings what is hidden into surface, or speaking of what has been silenced but also adds creativity in knowing and dealing with the phenomenon.

The multidimensional nature of TER as a response to shifts at various spheres of human life, thus, has come with emerging approaches of research in education, which eventually has sought arts-based multi-paradigmatic design space. 'The how' of TER is somewhere around these practices. Different other new and innovative approaches of meaning making in TER are still in their emergence. In short, TER is a call for liberatory epistemology; which embraces pluralistic vision of knowing; which stresses increasing interest in aesthetics. Additionally, it also calls for many other ways of meaning-making, which are yet to be explored from various knowledge heritages.

TER for Emerging Leaders at Various Spheres of Life-Word

So far, this concept note on TER has already come with the conceptualisation that transformative research approaches in education is multidimensional phenomenon. Its significance lies in addressing shifts in various spheres of life-word through innovative research practices in education. Arts-based multi-paradigmatic design space, among many other emerging design spaces is acknowledged as method/methodology within it. In reference to it, present sub-heading explores 'the who' of TER.

For Freire (1972), transformative learning and meaning-making is for those who are in the process of conscientisation. Here, a learner (may be a researcher) engages dialectically on pre-constructed biases embedded within socio-cultural practices. A learner under

conscientisation is one who look critically (may be dialogically or dialectically) at the (educational) phenomenon, and come with emancipatory value out of the restrains within the phenomenon. It highlights that TER is for those who seek to be aware on hegemonic power-relationship, inequalities, minorities, and many other social issues through research as educational endeavour. They possibly seek advocacy for social justice. Likewise, TER is for those educational practitioners who undertake researching as a part of learning; an ongoing process of experiencing world (Kolb, 1984). It acknowledges transformative research as/for personal/professional development of the researcher and the researched. Such researchers may engage themselves in experiencing life-word of any give sphere, may describe it, may interpret it, may reflect on it, and finally may formulate abstract concepts and reach conclusion, which potentially may give future directions to look at and act within that sphere (e.g., education, science and technology, ecology, spirituality) more effectively.

Slightly in relation to this understanding, as discussed earlier, for Mezirow (1991), transformative learning/researching is for those who seek personal transformation and empowerment. To achieve this ends, they are supposed to look critically at their own uncritically embedded assumptions, and lived experiences. This concept of 'the who' of TER is well addressed by living-education-theory approach as well. For Whitehead (2008), TER is for those self-study researchers, particularly in the field of education, who are inclined to add value at their work/profession (e.g., researching, teaching, leading, supervising). TER in addition, is also for many other holistic/participatory life practitioners (Ferrer, 2011), who are oriented to add spiritual/transpersonal value within the sphere of their concern.

TER is possibly for many other emerging leaders inspired in addressing the current educational needs (e.g., sustainable development, climate change, peace building) of our rapidly globalizing societies (Taylor, 2016); for those who seeks possibilities of higher-order abilities within knowledge heritage of the local values and practices (Parajuli, 2016); for those, who are inclined to addressing global challenges associated with wellness of humanity (Tobin, 2016); for those who seeks resilience thinking towards wisdom tradition (Sitaula, 2016); and possibly for those who seeks possibilities within liberatory epistemology (Luitel, 2016) of knowing and researching.

TER as Imagining the World Beyond the Given

TER inherently is emerged in and from our (progress oriented educational practitioner's) vision to transform lives (particularly the marginalized) through education. In doing so, it has already paved few ways on culturally contextualized curricula and pedagogies (Luitel, 2009). It has also come with some texturing on human-rights-based education and community development models. Qutoshi (2016) has already come with his own living education theory through soulful inquiry. Psychological exploration of cultural phenomenon at educational settings through self-reflective inquiry (Wagle,

2016) has set its interdisciplinary possibilities. Beginning from this, TER is embracing many other directions. Among them, one is to harness local cultural capital and foster an ethic of planetary stewardship, which possibly is the 'what next' of this form of research approach in education. Likewise, addressing indigenous knowledge systems and local practices is other future possibilities inherent in it. The recent exercises on 'beyond the trend' epistemologies like mandala paradigm, and mindful observation on mindfulness in education at KUSOED suggests these future directions.

Finally

Given these multiple dimensions of transformative educational research, this special issue showcases some of the research studies that were presented during the First International Conference of Transformative Educational Research and Sustainable Development. It has come with 'the what' of TER, which possibly is multidimensional in approach. Likewise, it has come with 'the why' of this area of knowledge/practice, which possibly is to address paradigm shift at every sphere of life-world. It has also come with 'the how' of ERT. In this regard, it proposed arts-based multi-paradigmatic space, which may come with many other emerging spaces. TER, possibly, is for emerging educational leaders at various spheres of life-world. It is still exhibited further in the process of emergence and transcendence, which thus, is possibly directed in imagining the world beyond the given.

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