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Original Article

More than a 'Jágir'¹: Representation of Transformative Ethos in English Teachers' Solicited Reflections

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Abstract

This article is based on a generative reading of six English teachers' solicited responses to reflective questions framed by undergraduate students of science, engineering and management in Kathmandu University. The reading unfolds four aspects of ethos in the participants – *spontaneity*, *specialties*, *specialization* and *stability* – and six frames of reference corresponding with the transformative journey of each participant – *teaching is living*, *made for teaching*, *making things happen*, *empowering female students*, *performing the ideal image* and *positioned in the opposition*. The paper further infers three general traits of the participants as transformed teachers: first, the personality that transcends grumbling and regretting for trivial lacunae involved in the field of teaching; second, the portrayal of a positive picture of teaching as a gifted field; and third, empathy for the students and emphasis on their responsibility of bringing positive changes in students' lives and in the society at large.

Keywords: *Transformative. Ethos. Reflections. Probing questions. Representation.*



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¹ A job, usually connoted as commonplace and mundane.

The Prologue

In the months following the devastating earthquake of April 2015, and the political turmoil accompanying the promulgation of the Constitution of Nepal, I experienced an alarming degree of slackening and demotivation at work. This was after having taught English and professional communication at the undergraduate level for more than one and half decades. I initially attributed this to the relative passivity reflected in the way people around me, including students, responded to the situation outside the university. I also ascribed the passivity to the lack of novelty in my performance as a teacher. When, in a reflective assignment for the then semester, quite a number of students commented in their journals that the semester would have been more enjoyable if the classes had been more interactive and engaging, I got what Wood (2018) terms “a melancholic epiphany” and the awareness that I was not acting as “a Socratic teacher” (p.132). I had to initiate a convenient two-way communication channel to facilitate learning and emancipate both myself and my students from the ongoing languor.

Consequently, in the spring of 2016, I set engagement and performance as two key priorities for my classes, and framed a simple assignment named ‘probing pupils,’ which would require me to be more active and make students as active and engaged. The idea was that instead of me asking questions to students, it was them asking me ‘good questions through emails.’ This was a sort of formal mandate to keep alive the spirit of being useful, and an attempt to “bring out the best in students” (Rijal, 2016, p. 155). The assignment (i) opened a formal horizontal channel for me to interact with students through writing beyond the class hours; (ii) kept myself regular and disciplined in crafting rhetorical answers, and (iii) allowed my students to see my style and sensibility as a writer.

I now realize that with such initiation I had idealized what Kirschner (2018) would postulate as communicating to become “human,” by using emails as the key channel to convey to my students that our writings “should and must be in tandem, because we might become separate” without infusing humanness representing the environment we shared (Kirschner, 2018, p. 99). Asking and answering probing questions enhanced our intimacy. Since questions oblige the person being questioned “to act in response,” and questions “exist to inform and provide direction for all who hear them” (Brown & Keeley, 2007, p.2), I was bound to remain agile even beyond regular class hours crafting convincing responses to dozens of questions. The activity made the idea of engagement and performance tangible on both sides.

Since Spring 2016, I must have been asked hundreds of questions. This is because once a semester I ask each student I teach to email me any three questions. I stress that I would answer only those that ‘bring a smile to me’ and make me ‘feel an itch to write’. In this process, I have received questions with themes as diverse as meaning of life, music, parenting, personal upbringing, view on student behavior, relationship with colleagues and, above all, my philosophy of teaching. I have posted selected questions and the answers on my blog under the category ‘dialogue’ (hkafle.com.np/category/dialogue/) after minor revision. Some of these carry the keyword ‘probing,’ such as ‘probing pupils,’ ‘more probing pupils’ and ‘more from probing pupils.’ Thus, my communications with students have evolved into public content.

The idea of carrying out a study of the present type occurred in November 2019 in my Master of Philosophy (M Phil) class on Academic Writing and Research. While I was discussing the idea of taking a unique topic in order for writers to feel inspired to craft academic papers, one of my students, who is also a participant writer for this study, proposed to go through the academic posts on my blog and find a curious idea. I agreed, in acknowledgment of him as an “autonomous thinker” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 11), while assuming my own position as that of a “collaborator” (Taylor, 2008, p. 9). I hoped that the task was going to be a “reflective research” helping me to “enact” in a more substantive form “the educational praxis that I [held] dear” (Wood, 2018, p. 131). In the class that followed, the student came with a selection of five

questions and corresponding answers from my blog, all of which represented ‘teaching.’ The questions, taken exactly the way they were originally worded by students, included:

- a) Why did you decide to enter the field of teaching? Who inspired you to take teaching as a profession?
- b) How was your experience when you first taught the students in school/university?
- c) What do you think is best/worst about being a teacher/professor?
- d) Do you feel that you have had an impact on the students that you have taught? If so, in what way?
- e) Are you happy so far with what you’ve achieved as a teacher?

The selection unfolded a curious thematic sequence signifying the evolution of a teacher from their formative years to being experienced, established and emotionally attached to the profession. In other words, the questions respectively helped enunciate the entry context, initial exposure and experiences, internalization of the merits of the profession, assertion on the competence to influence, and admission of happiness and satisfaction after being immersed in the profession. The last two questions also echoed the reflective queries recommended by Ramchandran (2008) regarding what attitude professionals should be prepared to form about their vocation: “How much impact have I had? And how much fun?” (p. 307).

I realized that the questions would serve for me as a set of interview questions to explore the evolution of some English teachers I knew were experienced, established and emotionally attached to the profession. To set out on this research journey, I asked my M Phil student to craft his own reflective answers to these questions and also to request one of his colleagues to do the same as a research participant. I also emailed the questions to two of my acquaintances who taught English in two separate universities of Nepal requesting them to write reflective responses as participants for my study. All four of them appreciated the idea and cooperated with me. I had thus four sets of questions and answers ready for a close reading. However, following the outbreak of COVID-19 in Nepal in early 2020, I postponed the study. I resumed it in March 2021 having requested two M Phil students of different groups I was supervising/teaching to answer the same set of questions. After they wrote back, I had six sets of answers from six teachers (three females and three males) from different institutions. To my relief, my participants, who were established teachers of English, each in the profession for more than a decade, diligently wrote their answers. In this way, I received six interesting autobiographical sketches, which I could treat as well-crafted artifacts, and their authors as authentic people for their long-term engagement in the field of teaching English.

Since this paper was intended to be a contribution to transformative praxis, I decided to align my study to transformative education while taking my position within the frame of rhetorical discourse. As I had set out as “a more participating facilitator” both as a teacher and inquirer, I also had the motivation to adhere to “research as reconceptualizing self” (Luitel, 2019, p. 23), and to read the participants’ reflections autonomously by juxtaposing them with my own experiences as a teacher. I needed a rhetorical perspective that took a “bottom-up methodological approach” (Biasin, 2018, p.6) as transformative research, and guided close reading, interpretation and analysis of the texts/artifacts. Subsequently, I selected Generative Method, a method of rhetorical criticism suggested by Sonja K Foss in her book *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*. The method advises the critic/researcher to “let the data reveal insights ... independent of any preconceived theories” (Foss, 2018, p. 416), and recommends a process including coding the artifact in general, searching for an explanation, creating an explanatory schema, formulating a research question, coding the artifact in detail, searching the literature, framing the study and writing the essay (Foss, 2018, p. 387). I have stood this advice, and taken an emic perspective of rhetorical reading. “An emic orientation,” according to Kuypers (2009), “would allow for a more nuanced description of the rhetorical

artifact, and also provides more room for the critic's personality and intuition to play a part in the criticism" (p. 24).

The subsequent reading of the artifacts gave way to two research questions: How do the six English teachers perceive their overall evolution in teaching? And, what do their reflections imply about English teachers' professional standing? In what follows, I attempt to elucidate what I inferred as the broad answers to these questions, which also form the two theses of this paper. First, in the accounts of their evolution from novices to established professionals, the six teachers reveal their transformative sensibility and genuine attachment with the profession. Second, the six teachers' sensibility and attachment reflect their professional ethos in general and transformative ethos in particular.

I treat the six research participants as experts in the field in that they deserve to be called the authorities of what they express. Foremost, each of them has spent more than a decade in teaching. And they all hold University degrees and, except one, all are pursuing studies to earn higher degrees. Specifically, K. Sigdel and B. Sharma are lecturers in Tribhuvan University (TU) and Nepal Sanskrit University, respectively, and are carrying out doctoral researches under TU. K. KC, a lecturer in a college based in Butwal, and H. Karki, a school cum college teacher based in Kavrepalanchok, are currently M Phil scholars in Kathmandu University. D. Gurung, a school cum college teacher based in Pokhara, is pursuing M Phil in Nepal Open University. M. Dhakal, who holds a Master's degree, is a senior secondary teacher in a private school based in Kavrepalanchok.

I have maintained moderate confidentiality in treating the respondents' identities, by taking initials of their first names and the surnames so as to lend them the appearance of pseudonyms. As conventional in rhetorical criticism, the author and the context of creation are inseparable from the artifact and the reading is mostly informed by the author's intention and points of view. Also, I treat the respondents as experts whose expressions inform the key aspects of interpretation and analysis. The paper is structured in the general standard of an essay in rhetorical criticism, following the steps of contextualization, description, explication (interpretation and analysis), conjectures and conclusion.

The Five-Phase Evolution

The five interview questions articulate a thematic sequence of five representative phases in each research participant's engagement in teaching. This includes the transition, the exposure, internalization of the merits of the profession, development of the power to influence, and achievement of happiness and satisfaction after being immersed in the profession. In the section that follows, I elucidate the responses of the participants in the same thematic sequence and highlight the key aspects of their experiences and personal and professional growth in the respective phases.

The Transition

My six research participants, despite being from different social backgrounds and times, reveal an analogous reason for transitioning to teaching, such that entering the field was a practical necessity. M. Dhakal (email, November 20, 2019)², decided to join a school after a friend's advice because she needed to "quit idleness" and also because the joining justified her belonging to the faculty of education. D. Gurung (email, March 20, 2021) made an early entry,

² The citations from the participants in the following sections refer to the same personal emails. Repetition of details is therefore avoided for conciseness.

even when she was just a teenager, because she needed a stable source of income to support her and her siblings' education.

Similarly, H. Karki (email, November 20, 2019), wanted to give meaning to his academic pursuit in education by joining teaching, in addition to being attracted to the profession where his peers appeared to enjoy a meaningful time. In a slightly different context, K. KC (email, March 13, 2021), came to the field as a prescription from her father, who had dictated that "teaching was suitable for girls," and to ascertain her entry into the field, she had to graduate in the discipline of education with English as the major. B. Sharma (email, November 29, 2019) aimed to realize the life of a teacher, whom he idealized as "well-dressed up, morally upright, stern looking with immense wisdom." K. Sigdel's (email, November 25, 2019) coming to teaching was a part of family responsibility, a natural engagement defined by the need to support and look after the school established by his father, who believed that only education would prepare people for change.

Except for two (such as KC and Sigdel), who confess a family-induced obligation or motivation, the participants' transition to teaching appears spontaneous in the light of career choice. But for everyone, the decision to join teaching was a blessing in disguise. Though the practical conditions slightly vary, all of them share relatable push and pull factors. The push aspect, for instance, was the motivation for greater meaning for life. It was either the pride and inspiration "to take teaching as a profession" against the condition of going "mad" in idleness (Dhakal), "inspiration from a *Guru*" to "outstand" in humanities, English and teaching (Gurung), or "strong desire to positively influence and educate children" (Karki). In the same way, it was the realization of sustaining in the profession being "expressive, disciplined, dedicated, patient, convincing and ... assertive" (KC), or the "infatuation for an ideal image of a teacher" (Sharma) and idealization of education "as a tool for social change" or of "life as an educator" (Sigdel).

None of the participants appear to be willing to switch to any other field ever since they came to teaching, and none unwilling to struggle further in the field. Each of them moved early, made no attempt to relocate and thrived both in the profession and in higher education. They confess the fact that teaching has changed them. The key pull aspect, therefore, was passion and joy that they all experienced in being settled to educate and learn at the same time. This was somehow despite having limited prospect for economic rise in the field.

The Exposure

Inhibition during the beginning phase forms an essential aspect of one's evolution in teaching. The fear of inadequacy is mostly compensated over time by success and feeling of being rewarded. My research participants admit to have come through such experiences in their formative days. For Dhakal it was "awkward" in the first day because she "even did not know the techniques of teaching." But the same day she felt that she "had potentiality to be a teacher" as the students showed liking for her class. Gurung admits entering the class early as a teenager without "experience of dealing with little kids," and soon "enjoying being with kids." The classes did not only demand performance from her but that she was also "learning with them" in the process. Similarly, Karki was "a little nervous" at the beginning though "quite excited" for the opportunity of being a teacher. He discovered that his students were "satisfied and curious" in his first class itself. He admits this early discovery to have made him realize his "little potential in teaching," which was enough impetus for him to continue.

KC had similar apprehension at the beginning. She was "nervous with the English-speaking environment" of the boarding school she had joined, and not sure whether she could "do justice" teaching a poem in the first class itself. But she was also "quite excited" because of being a teacher at a boarding school. Her initial inhibitions vanished and she was "quite

satisfied” seeing the students happy at the end. Sharma confesses having even more acute sense of helplessness at the outset. His “diurnal teaching activities” initially were “threatened with agonies, fear of failure and uncertainties.” Consequently, while he would find himself “in the whirlpool of apprehensions, fears of betrayals, lampoons and invectives,” he would come out of the classes with “flying colours,” with the sense of achievement. He then termed every day “an achievement day, a day to celebrate with a cup of tea in the evening.” Unlike other participants, Sigdel does not mention any initial inhibition or helplessness. This can be because he had started in a school his family owned, and was not in a position to be judged by the school administration for under-performance. The only little qualm he felt was when he formally took up permanent faculty position in a university and his mother questioned him why he had not taken up a job but joined teaching. He claims to have adapted well in the field because he was passionate about teaching and enjoyed doing it.

I internalize from the above expressions the general dilemmas faced by novice teachers. The formative days involved the mixture of confidence at being qualified, and nervousness in the lack of training and prior exposure. However, nervousness/apprehension resulting from the transition to a new environment or higher-level classes seems natural. It is an obvious form of consciousness and acknowledgement of the challenge inherent to the job itself. My own lack of confidence in the early years in Kathmandu University was the effect of my understanding that the students were as smart and intelligent as I because they hailed from well-to-do families based in urban centers of Nepal. The inhibition KC underwent at the sight of adult male students in a Master’s level class spoke of enacting a stereotypical role as a female, having been taught since her childhood to “feel inferior and protected from senior males.” This was a cultural aspect not linked with formal qualification, training and prior exposure in teaching.

The anecdotes about early days of teaching equally entail a narrative of early transformations in the persons involved. Every participant got an epiphany about being fit in the profession very early in that the general response about their teaching was positive and the post-class feedbacks and reflections revealed their potential to thrive in the future. In other words, the anecdotes delineate the participants’ overall transformative potential – both for making impact on the pupils and internalizing the influence of that transformation in the form of personal evolution.

Internalization of the Merits

I believe teaching does not require to be justified as a good vocation anymore, and may hardly be judged by the standards of loss and evil. Teachers are probably the longest serving people having direct contacts with the society, and with a chance and mentality to inspire hundreds of aspiring minds every day. Teaching is a perennial human responsibility.

My research participants acknowledge a number of good aspects involved in the profession. Dhakal considers being able to see the achievements of those mentored as the essence of teaching. She finds happiness in the fact that her students are prospering, and she loves to realize the fruits of her contributions in their successes. She stresses, “When I realize that the successful ones were once my pupils, I feel praised.” Gurung values the prospect of being called a role model. Teaching for her is a calling that only requires her to develop virtues of being a change agent. She emphasizes, “Teachers are expected to be self-disciplined and that makes them be good citizens who are responsible in the positive transformation of the society.” In the similar note, KC regards the respect teachers earn in the society as the main good aspect of being a teacher. Teachers, she avers, are “respected not only by the students, but the entire society shows a great respect to them.” The consequence of this is that teachers choose to remain the ideal members of the society.

According to Karki, teachers receive opportunities to share new ideas every day, and this forms the key optimism involved in the profession. Teachers maintain the integrity by contributing bit by bit every moment to “shape the foundation of the future of little kids.” For him, the experience of “guardianship” that one constantly feels, the trust and belief of students, and being empathic to their pleasures and pains ultimately accords them to the responsibility of “social transformation directly or indirectly.” In the same way, Sharma values the aspect of being “acknowledged as a source of inspiration,” which offers a “genuinely good reason to smile” and take pride in the profession. He calls it the “tribute from students” when they admit that he was instrumental in their growth as qualified and successful individuals.

Sigdel’s thoughts reflect beyond the general understanding of a teacher’s role underlined in the responses of other participants. He respects “the liberty of a free thinker” as the most important aspect of the profession. As a university teacher, he does not have to “subscribe to the idea of the party in the government,” or need not “market the product of a company” which he does not trust. Such freedom, therefore, keeps him and his colleagues “positioned on the critical side of the social fabric – critiquing and commenting on the social and political nuisances.” With this freedom, they train students in the “critical traditions” and try to ensure that they receive adequate skills and knowledge “to understand the society when they go into their professional fields.” Being in opposition is guided by conscience. He claims, “We are free to oppose when our conscience asks us to oppose.” This, he stresses, is the greatest dignity a teacher should enact as a human being.

Teaching as a job, however, may not always be a bed of roses to some people. KC notes that teachers “need to think a lot” before they speak, dress up, and “enjoy in public places.” This is to admit that they face the burden of constant scrutiny from the society, being expected to follow norms of decency and propriety all the time. She confesses the willingness to live as ordinary folks sometimes, thus: “After all we are all human beings and want to live the way we desire.” In Sigdel’s observation, the one “tragedy” that teaching, especially in higher levels, involves is having to “live the life of an opposition despised by the people in power.” My own understanding is that the society, which is full of diverse social and political inconsistencies within, expects the teachers to act with consistency and commitment most of the times. Such expectation, at times, looks a little more than teachers can maintain as ordinary humans under constant personal, societal and institutional pressures.

Limited and least frequent discomfort as noted by KC and Sigdel aside, there can be no denial about the respect the society accords to the profession of teaching. Being role models for young minds, and acting as agents of transformation are the perennially acknowledged facets of teachers. The assertion about having a permanently critical and oppositional standpoint against the authorities in power is an aspect identified mostly by teachers of public colleges and universities in Nepal. I subscribe to having the identity of a free thinker as essential to inducing the process of personal and societal transformation, and as an undeniable good aspect of a teacher.

Influence on Students

One aspect of feeling established as a teacher involves the belief that you can positively impact the lives of those whom you teach. In fact, your claim of being impactful is based mostly on intangible indicators, such as what Dhakal calls the “behavior and skills I have implanted on them.” She concedes that she gains the spirit to continue teaching by seeing a “spark” of herself in her students, and by hearing their feedback about her teaching style and the way she helped them to cope with their learning problems. This is also to acknowledge that impact through teaching is reciprocal, which is to say, students and teachers help change each other. Gurung asserts her influence in three relatively more perceptible respects. First, some of her students

have been teachers now and some “aspire” to be a teacher like her. Second, there are many who wish to develop some of her qualities like “being punctual, fair, hard-working and self-disciplined.” Third, she is informed that some of her students are “doing good in all the sectors.” As its tangible evidence, she claims, “They still remember me and my teachings.”

When former students reconnect with the teacher and let her know the way their life was influenced, the teacher naturally feels to have been instrumental in the change. KC finds evidence of her being able to make a positive impact in the way many students now tell her that she had “encouraged and appreciated their potentiality” which ultimately helped them later in career building. Above all, she has a special goal in her life, which is to empower female students as much as she can. She reveals, “I encourage girl students to be independent and uplift many other girls who have less opportunities or no opportunities at all.”

Karki echoes a general, taken-for-granted notion about being meaningful. He admits, “Sometimes, we cannot physically see the appreciation and impact we’ve made but just know that it’s there.” To him, it suffices to believe that there is “nothing more rewarding than knowing and seeing the evidence” that he has influenced the lives of many young people. His focus is on how to transfer his skills to them with this firm notion: “I see me in my students.” A more visual evidence, however, involves what he terms the “greatest compliment” that comes from a former student who approaches him in a bus or market place and confesses: “You really helped me learn.”

Sharma claims it “gratifying” to note that he has “produced some dedicated young people who believe in hard work, struggle, performance, professional integrity, fortitude and ...in optimism.” These values, he underlines, have “stood with them in good stead” whenever they had difficult times and “helped them to persevere at various times of struggle.” According to Sigdel, though impact is “too abstract an idea” to claim about, he can “sense” that he is making an impact. He rather gauges the extent of his influence from the comments students write to him admitting how his teaching “impacted their learning, their skills,” and “what they achieved” by taking his classes. In more pragmatic grounds, as he notes for teachers in general, “it is not only the content that our students take from us; they also observe our integrity as a person, our social conducts, and take inspirations.”

The discussion above suggests that impact is reciprocal, a two-way transaction between the teachers and the students. Teachers influence students and undergo transformation in the process. But the awareness of a positive impact is the lifeblood of teaching and the teachers’ determination to continue. I infer from the responses of my participants that in their respective institutions, a mandate for open feedback and interaction between students and teachers is yet to be implemented for each of them to be aware of the efficacy of their teaching. An institutionalized feedback system would bring forth more tangible information on the nature of impact, the foundation of one’s passion and perseverance as a teacher. But the accounts of all participants’ personal contribution, along with the immaterial indices of positive influence, corroborate the maxim that teaching to them is more than a mundane errand.

Immersion in the Calling

Once you decided to devote your life to teaching, once you allowed yourself to be immersed in it, life went to performing the virtue of making learning and growth possible. Thinking about the causes of unhappiness, to me, entails thinking about the injustices I have done to the profession and to people involved in it. Since I have never consciously even thought about being at odds with teaching, I would love to think about the happiness factor alone. My research participants echo this notion in varied terms. Dhakal internalizes teaching in relation to happiness and satisfaction, thus: “Even in a dream, a kind of voice knocks me: ‘How can I teach rigorously?’ She identifies the voice as a new way, new hope that “emerges on the way as

a teacher.” Her faith in and commitment towards the profession are reflected in her desire to “teach better” every day, which constitutes the “the storehouse of oxygen” allowing her to “breathe” and remain “alive.” In a similar note, Gurung concedes to have been “absolutely happy” in the profession. She clarifies how teaching helped in her academic upgrade: “If I were not a teacher, I would not be a good student and would not have the academic achievement that I have today.”

Karki also admits being satisfied as a teacher because the profession offers him opportunities “to build positive relations with students, colleagues, parents and the wider community.” For him happiness depends on the respect teachers accord to the profession. He stresses, “When we respect our profession and work, it makes our everyday an exciting day.” He takes every day as a new day and beginning tries to live up to the notion that “one of the major satisfactions of being a teacher is to enrich a student’s life.” Similarly, KC finds contentment in being “in the profession of educating people,” where she feels empowered for “making them aware of their rights and their own decisions,” in addition to “helping them enjoy their freedoms to live and lead meaningful life.”

Sharma claims not to have “had an iota of remorse of being a teacher” because he does not think he could have responded to his life in any better way. The key to his contentment is the fact that his family members “bear no grudge” of being a part of his life. Also, he acknowledges the “respect and credibility” that he commands in his community to be another significant achievement to keep him committed to the profession. Sigdel also admits happiness as he is in the job of his choice and is “passionate” about it. He does not have any “regret” that he “could not become anything else.” He is satisfied as one of those teachers “who sincerely work with students and prepare them as a workforce for the nation,” and who from a distance “silently cherish” that the students “grow as important people in the national life.”

Unlike other participants, however, Sigdel confesses his inability to do full justice to his role as a university teacher. He admits, “I could have done more in this role as a teacher in the university.” Though he does not elaborate this unease with examples, it signals his desire for a more meaningful engagement as a critical thinker and educator. He also reveals, “The system too is partly responsible for it.” This indicates that the university where he works is in need of initiating reforms, so that teachers like him could contribute more to justify their roles. Delving into this thesis, however, is not the scope of this paper.

Conjecture: Transformative Ethos

The reflective responses explicated above represent an ideal character for each respondent. I would term this character in relation to *transformative ethos*. The characterization is based on basic conceptualizations from the domains of classical rhetoric and transformative education. I operationalize transformative as a qualifier for ethos, thereby suggesting two semantic strands: the dimensions of human characters informed by the concept of ethos, and the dimensions of transformation by the theory of transformative education. Thus, transformative ethos as a new theoretical construct is used hereafter to refer to the personality that has adopted and undergone a transformative course in the field of teaching. Through this effort of aligning rhetorical studies with transformative education, I mean to inaugurate my own journey towards what Luitel (2019) terms, “epistemic pluralism” (p. 22), suggesting that many more avenues are now open for my own future scholarly engagements across the disciplines of rhetoric and transformative education.

As one of the modes of appeal underlined in Aristotle’s postulations in the art of persuasion, ethos entails appearance, practical wisdom, virtue and goodwill (Baumlin, 2006, p. 280). Ethos is also broadly used to denote “being ethical, desirable, right, just” (Lyons, 2010, p. 54). A more elaborate definition can be taken from Smith (2017), who explains it as the

composite of credibility (“power to inspire belief”), charisma (“power of personal charm”) and control (“command over the audience”). Furthermore, ethos is categorized as “invented ethos” denoting the fact that individuals can and do build characters “suitable to an occasion,” and as “situated ethos” meaning that the community ascribes positions and attributes to individuals on the basis of their “reputation” in a social context (Crowley & Hawhee, 2004, p. 167).

In the light of transformative learning theory or transformative education, being transformative involves acquiring the “process of effecting change in a frame of reference” which is “inclusive, discriminating, self-reflective, and integrative of experience” and composed of “habits of mind and a point of view” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). Likewise, being transformative is meant to entail the process of “constructing and appropriating new and revised interpretations of the meaning of an experience in the world” (Taylor, 2008, p.5). In simple words, in relation with transformative education, being transformative is “about changing paradigms of our students, giving them hope and a sense of purpose” (Taylor & Medina, 2019, p. 53), which is to imply bringing perceptible shifts in designing curricula, pedagogies and relationships with the learners.

Ethos in the Participants

The reflections of the research participants represent their ethos in at least four aspects. I present these as spontaneity, specialties, specialization, and stability.

Spontaneity

Foremost, the participants reinvented their characters by allowing transformation in their lives through transition to teaching. However, each of them entered the field in a natural course of life, without a long-drawn plan but with some swiftness in making decision. It appears as if each was instinctively prepared to plunge into teaching and waited only for a minimal trigger or inducement from someone more credible and virtuous. For example, for Dhakal, the advice by one of her acquaintances to join a school, plus her formal orientation to the discipline of education, sufficed to “quit idleness” and to build a more vibrant character and personality for herself in teaching. Gurung also made an early transition, with a suggestion from her mentor to build competence and credibility in humanities and in teaching. In case of KC, even though she received a solicited enrolment in faculty of education and English language studies, her transition to teaching was a spontaneous inducement by the field itself. She had found it unnecessary to juggle with alternatives, but subscribe to the credibility that the field of education would bestow her.

I believe that people choose a career path spontaneously if they have instinct for it – when they are naturally ready for it. Spontaneity is not only the urge to decide without inhibition in one single occasion, but also the competence to respond to changes or anomalies with the same degree of readiness and to continue without slightest tinge of nervousness and remorse. Karki, Sharma and Sigdel reveal similar aspect of spontaneity. Karki made a natural move from a different less credible job to teaching as he realized his worth and eligibility in it. Sharma was only waiting for a small trigger amid “an irresistible urge to read out a story or two in front of school children”; and when a school principal (a more qualified person than he was) invited him to teach, he “wasted no time in grabbing the opportunity.” Even more spontaneous was Sigdel’s entry into teaching. It was as much a personal responsibility to contribute to the school his family owned as the natural manifestation of his “realization of the worth of life as an educator.” It was an ‘ethical’, ‘desirable’ and ‘right’ act to join the family-owned school, and to prioritize enhancing the quality and credibility of the institution.

I discern three more aspects of spontaneity in my research participants that defined their credibility as teachers. First, for most of them teaching was the immediate first option available and they took it up without wavering as if they already knew were made for it. Second, they all decided to join the profession as a response to a minimal stimulus as if they were already at the threshold and waited only for a final signal to be in. Third, they all frankly admit naivety and inhibition undergone during the formative days and explain how they came out of that stage to become knowledgeable, trained and capable of inspiring belief and change at large. Frankness, in fact, is an important facet of ethos, a virtue that gives a person ‘the power to inspire belief’ and situate herself in the community.

Specialties

Specialty can be understood in two dimensions. In the first place, it is a natural faculty of being good and prepared to act upon things that others do not accomplish without rigorous training. Second, it is the quality that one develops through a prolonged exposure to or practice in a field. In simple words, it is your favorite subject internalized as you have dirtied your hands while learning to master it, and been attached to it without ever formally being educated in it. It is your passion and you feel incomplete without it. And you have inborn inclination to get induced to your field of interest, and the field of interest gradually builds your character and credibility.

My participants express a firm belief in education and the transformative power of teaching. They have profound love for learners and learning and continue drawing inspiration from the success of the students. Another common specialty they hold is the determination to achieve higher qualification in personal growth and upgrade in the profession. They joined teaching when they were very young and had a lower degree but thrived both in their personal education and education of students. This is mainly rooted in their inclination to be inspired and guided by experienced teachers (e.g., Gurung, Sharma & Sigdel). Moreover, they assume a distinct identity because of their determination to continue without looking for alternatives, and rejoin if discontinued for practical reasons such as pursuing higher education (like KC & Sigdel) and exposure to activist roles (like Sigdel). In general, they have faith in the profession and are in it without what Sharma calls ‘an iota of remorse’ for being a teacher, and with full acceptance and internalization of the responsibility involved. Most importantly, the belief that teaching is a service more than an occupation is echoed as much in claims of their definition of the profession as in the way they act upon the definition.

I see at least one distinct form of specialty in each individual. For example, Dhakal dreams of becoming better every day; she considers her everyday experiences the ‘storehouse of oxygen’ that keeps her breathing. Gurung perceives her achievement in producing teachers like herself, or people inheriting some of her qualities. Karki finds confidence in being acknowledged for helping someone to learn. KC inspires a belief in the female students that they can become successful and empowered. Similarly, while Sharma experiences dignity and happiness in connection with his family’s satisfaction that he is a committed teacher, Sigdel takes pride in being in the permanent ‘opposition’ and making constant advocacy for reforms in the university system under which he works.

Specialization

The responses of my research participants also reflect the idea of teaching as a specialized field, a profession that transcends a commonplace job in demanding commitment, continuous learning and wider acceptability. All of them feel empowered with ethos because of their exposure to university level education, of being qualified in the fields of their interest. Three

participants (Dhakal, Karki & KC) who hail from the faculty of education took teaching as an essential first option as a profession, and took higher university degrees within the field of education. But they signal that teaching demands much more than a teacher learns from his or her higher studies. Teachers rather grow with the students and their colleagues and the university education enhances the knowledge and experiences they have accumulated through professional exposures. They need to constantly reinvent themselves with strong ethical character to ensure greater acceptance and ability to justify their roles as educators. My participants, who chose humanities (Gurung, Sharma & Sigdel) for university education, do not express any doubt about their qualification as teachers in absence of formal exposure to the faculty of education. Gurung's understanding that one can stand out in the humanities and thrive there as a teacher, gives a clear perspective that it is one's attitude and aptitude that creates a right niche in teaching. For them teaching is more of a social activity done with passion and joy, with the attitude of contributing to change in the lives of students.

Stability

The characters of the participants are marked with their tendency to remain stable in the profession. But their stability is not oxymoronic in relation to transformation suggesting resistance to change, but embodies consistency of passion and purpose and no tendency to regress. More specifically, it is the stage of having 'situated ethos' in congruence with the requirement of the job and expectation of the society. Transformation is inherent in my participants' everyday efforts and is evidenced by their evolution in the profession. Dhakal asserts her tenacity in teaching with such spirit that she lives both because she loves it and it loves her. Gurung feels to have been born to teach and aspires "to do much in the field." This reflects her wish to remain stable and to keep contributing to the field. She further claims, "I have built up my characters and the way people behave with me just because I am a teacher is enough for me to have chosen teaching as my profession." This explains that teaching has built her ethos which has subsequently shaped her attitude for prolonged association in the field and appreciation of the way people judge her because she is in it. Karki has internalized teaching as it provides him 'opportunities to build positive relations with students, colleagues, parents and the wider community,' and also makes his every day an exciting day. For KC, teaching has been "both challenge and opportunity" in the sense that it is "not easy for a woman" in general "to teach in two shifts for 1.5 decades in two different institutions maintaining her family and professionalism." She has thus tested her stamina and triumphed over the challenges with the determination to continue.

Sharma also implies the tendency of stability as he has "never had an iota of remorse of being a teacher" and has achieved the "courage to withstand any temptations" that would otherwise make him "miserable." Sigdel has taken up teaching after high-profile international exposures offered by advocacy organizations, having realized that life would be more meaningful by "doing something that gives you satisfaction when you sit to reflect your own work." His stability is evident in the fact that teaching is the profession of his choice, and he considers it "not just a profession, but a service ... to mankind."

The participants narrate no obvious retarding or distracting factor against their desire to last in the profession. They find constant internal boosts. While Dhakal bears along 'a new way, new hope' that "always emerges in the way as a teacher," Gurung continues with the "critical and creative skills" and the "decisive and convincing power" teaching has bestowed upon her. Similarly, Karki draws inspiration from "crucial role in social transformation" and being "the part of all the small and big accomplishment made by students," while KC gets it from "the respect we earn in the society" and from being appreciated by her students for encouraging their potentialities in the class. And, while Sharma has received inspiration and

impetus of an ideal teacher with the purpose, “to impart value, a perspective, and an ability to question,” Sigdel idealizes the potential to help his students “grow as important people in the national life.”

Transformative-ethical Dimensions

Each participant as a teacher evolved through phases of what Frenk et al. (2010) term the “informative, formative and transformative” (p. 1924) phases generally understood to be experienced by adults. The informative phase is related to “acquiring knowledge and skills,” while the formative concerns “socializing ... around values” and developing as professionals and the transformative in terms of “developing leadership attributes” (p. 1924). The entry context of each participant involved transitioning from one pattern of life to another, from being without a job or having a different engagement to being engaged in teaching. The transition phase marked the requirement to face new frames of reference like new space, new associations, new schedule and new objectives. The exposure, largely the formative phase, led to a condition of having to situate oneself in the environs defined for teaching and to invent a character compatible to the job. The internalization and influence phases, where they developed their own frames of reference (positive habits of mind and perspectives) matured the formative or developmental phase enabling them as adults “to construct new meaning structure that help them perceive and make sense of their changing world” (Dirkx, 1998, p.5). The immersion phase completes the transformative phase, where the participants have developed definite situated ethos having not only appreciated the profession as a source of happiness and satisfaction, but also experienced “actualization” themselves and their surroundings “through liberation and freedom” (Dirkx, 1998, p.5). This is to say, the immersion phase is from where the participants as adult learners will not “regress to levels of less understanding” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 152).

The participants’ reflections unfold six different narrative strands representing the transformative-ethical dimensions of their journey as English teachers. Each narrative, corresponding to each set of reflections discussed in the sequence above, is inferred to carry an idiom as a frame of reference idealized as of now by the participant concerned. In what follows, I present the strands to establish connection with the notion of transformative growth in each participant.

Teaching is Living

Dhakal transitioned to teaching with a simple frame of reference: idleness leads to madness. Joining a school at her friend’s suggestion would save her from going into disuse. She also had identified clear purposes to substantiate that frame of reference, such as “to open a door of knowledge” and “to mold raw mud into different useful things.” However, the transition and subsequent exposure were not at all convenient. She had to invent her ethos, both appearance and personality. She felt insecure to the extent of checking herself in the mirror and not being able to eat properly before setting out to the school. She had a kind of “disorienting dilemma” (Enkhtur & Yamamoto, 2017, p. 199) at the outset, which prepared her to judge her own perspectives. But she got the earliest assurance through the positive feedback from students that she could thrive in the field. In fact, students’ friendly reception of her in the class proved a new frame of reference as a sense of security and adjustment. She moved further to internalize the good aspects of the profession. Consequently, through realization of students’ success and getting praised for inducing it, she saw herself becoming more and more adopted in the field. This was also her formative phase. As she worked further, she attained situated ethos; she adopted her own concrete frames of reference. She could see her own character

transferred to the students, which she calls “spark of mine on their eyes.” She thus reached a transformative phase having developed the skills to encourage horizontal communication with students, allowing them to share sorrows and happiness, and practicing “parenthood” as the habit of mind. The same habit of mind bestows upon her a perspective: teaching is living and the students are ultimate source of tranquility.

Made for Teaching

Gurung knew early enough that she was going to be a teacher. Inspired teachers were her key frames of reference to decide to transition from a novice teenager to a school teacher, when she was only sixteen. She had two purposes to give meaning to the transition: to excel in disciplines of humanities and education and to thrive in English teaching. During the initial exposure, she had to invent her ethos by learning teaching methods as quickly as possible. But despite her status of being untrained and subsequent realization for upgrade, kids’ happiness with her classes offered her key frames of reference so that she could hold on. During the exposure phase itself she realized she was “made for teaching.” This led to the early internalization of the merits of the profession. She experienced being a role model, being self-disciplined, and being responsible for the positive transformation of the society as the main habits of mind for a teacher. Her transformative sensibility and the potential to influence students now involve the key frames of reference based on her situated ethos, such as “being punctual, fair, hardworking and self-disciplined.” With these, she can inspire her students to be teachers like her. She now claims to have had such ‘built up characters’ as ‘critical and creative skills, decisive and convincing power’ and the aspiration “to do much in the profession.” Overall, a positive behavior is the key habit of mind that defines her professional ethos today.

Making Things Happen

Karki switched to teaching from another job, which had not appealed to him much. His friends’ pleasant gossips about teaching and students gave him new frames of reference to pursue. With a formal degree in education he joined teaching with two clear purposes: “to positively influence and educate children,” and “to enrich students’ lives.” The exposure was not taxing for him since he had already prepared himself partly through practice teaching. He gauged his adaptability in the job seeing the satisfaction of the students. In other words, student satisfaction was his important frame of reference to situate his ethos in the job. He internalized solely the positive frames of reference, which is to say, a positive habit of mind and perspective. He idealized teaching as an opportunity to contribute to the growth of children and identified his role with guardianship. He achieved the competence for influence having built horizontal relationship with students by “making things happen in the classroom and outside.” And he perceived his influence in the fact that students adopted some of his qualities, which he asserts by saying, “I see me in my students.” The evidence of his being fully assimilated in the profession lies in the maxim with which he moves ahead: Teaching is an opportunity to build positive relations. This is in what he has discovered and posited his character as a teacher of English.

Empowering Female Students

KC could not pursue commerce, the field of her choice. Her father prescribed education and ‘major English’ as a career track for her. Thus, she was obliged to adopt a frame of reference determined by her parent. But with education she found her purpose: English as the medium to ensure employment as a teacher. As a teacher of an English medium boarding school beginning her career, she had to invent herself by learning methods of teaching. Her appearance also shed

such a positive appeal to the small kids that they were happy to see her teaching every day. Happiness of the students, as a primary frame of reference during the initial exposure, enabled her to work for her further suitability in the profession. This was where she felt compensated for the inability to join commerce earlier. She internalized the merits of being a teacher with reference to the respect received from the society, and the demerits in being constantly scrutinized and situated within the general frame of characterization as good, decent, civilized and reserved persona. But the realization that teaching should transcend personal choices empowers her these days. Subsequently, she keeps evoking interest in the subjects she teaches. She has a slightly redefined purpose, a definite point of view, which is to uplift the female students by encouraging them to become independent. Immersed in the field now that she is, she values the profession within this ethical frame of reference: 'making students aware of their rights and freedom to live and lead meaningful life.'

Performing the Ideal Image

Before he entered a formal classroom, Sharma had identified with an ideal image of a teacher and looked forward to performing the image himself. With the opportunity at hand, he transitioned to teaching with a clear sense of direction: "to impart a value, a perspective and an ability to question." The exposure, however, challenged his understanding of himself and he had to build his teacherly character every day against "agonies, fears of failures and uncertainties." Despite such initial experience of personal insecurity, he struggled to sustain in the field even if it had to be with recourse to "meticulously prepared notes." He internalized teaching in the light of a teacher being a key source of motivation to students. This is what at present defines his understanding of influence teachers can generally claim. He implies working to help build ethos through the change of points of view and habits of mind: through "hard work, struggle, performance, professional integrity, fortitude and optimism." He now confesses only satisfaction in the field, which has built in him the "courage to withstand any temptations." This is to say, his immersion in the field has achieved a point of no return. He idealizes the joy he has been able to leave behind as a teacher and nurtures the perspective he can share as a scholar with the global academic community.

Positioned in the Opposition

Sigdel did not need to juggle with career options. A child of an 'radically' educated father who had owned a school, he joined teaching as a family responsibility and with the vision of preparing people for change. The key frames of reference that inspired his entry were 'education as a tool for social change' and 'worth of the life of an educator.' In the time of formal exposure, he was positioned to be an all-rounder, teaching multiple subjects. He discovered his passion for the job at this stage. Later, he tried his knack in journalism and advocacy activities as well. He made a comeback to teaching having joined a permanent university job and finally situating himself in the role of an educator. The merits he has internalized embody 'dignity' and 'autonomy' which enable him to oppose when his conscience asks him to oppose, to help "rectify the social wrongs" and inculcate in students the ability to question. He further asserts having developed the power to inspire change in students and in the society at large through integrity and social conducts. Since he is in the job of his choice, and has no regret for not becoming 'anything else,' he is focused to do more in his role as a university teacher.

The Epilogue

At this point, I see much ground to align my notions of performance and engagement, with which I began dialogues with students in 2016, with the practice of transformative education and building ethos. In those days, I had only scarce orientation to the field of transformative learning, yet applied a couple of its postulations, especially by encouraging critical reflections, functioning “as a facilitator and provocateur” and creating “equal opportunity for participation” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 11). By engaging in email communication beyond working hours, which is to say, by allowing mutual invasion of personal times, I had acted as “a political agent and on an equal footing with students” (Taylor, 2008, p. 8). Although the activity stemmed from the need to revive the ethos of students and myself in the aftermath of the great earthquake of April 2015 and subsequent political turmoil, it continued to be one of my signature methods for engaging with students. I personally felt empowered with renewed engagement in writing and creativity, and stated my standpoint, in these words:

The impact (we teachers make) need not always be outward, directed to changing our surroundings. It is equally important to experience some kind of transformation in ourselves. Any academic, creative task we do in a university should have the quality of giving direction to at least a few people including ourselves. (Kafle, 2016, p. 119).

I admit that my exposure to transformative learning theory is quite recent. And initiating to examine transformative learning and rhetorical criticism in their complementarity has expanded my research scopes. I internalize transformation as construction and consolidation of ethos which, alternatively, can be termed as building personality by adopting new frames of reference, changing habits of mind towards greater emotional power and openness, and getting rid of the points of view that deter critical engagement and progress. I expand the notion of ethos as the power to adopt and develop new frames of reference, and be liberated from regressive habits of mind and points of view.

Being in the transformative process, therefore, is being in a rhetorical process of changing perceptions and beliefs. This idea is best corroborated by the idea of taking recourse to one’s “constructed potentiality,” which entails using “symbolic resources as the elements available for use in the change process,” such as “spoken, written, and visual symbols, as well as the thoughts, interpretations, perceptions, and meanings” (Foss & Foss, 2011, p. 213). The constructed potentiality can be equated with the intangible resources with which transformative learners/teachers “move toward a frame of reference that is more inclusive, discriminating, self-reflective, and integrative experience” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). The benefit of working with such resources is that learners, as well as teachers, “never run out of new ways to configure and construct symbols” (Foss & Foss, 2011, p. 213).

I attest to the fact that students’ readiness to reciprocate in and out of the class is essential for teachers to realize their transformative potentials. The present study is a small initiative towards understanding “student’s role in fostering transformative learning” (Taylor, 2008, p. 13). As a teacher, I am further motivated to continue applying new dimensions of performance and engagement as facets of transformative practice. I subscribe to the broadly perceived “importance of engaging learners in classroom practices that assist in the development of critical reflection” and make an enhanced use of “reflective journaling, classroom dialogue, and critical questioning” (Taylor, 2008, p. 11) a signature approach in the days ahead.

Concluding Remarks

The taglines and corresponding narrative strands presented above, which represent each respondent's transformative journey in teaching (such as, 'Teaching is living,' 'Made for teaching,' 'Making things happen,' 'Empowering female students,' 'Performing the ideal image,' and 'Positioned in the opposition), embody what Sigdel idealizes for teaching as 'more than a *Jágir*'. I regard such perception of the profession as a form of what Dirkx postulates as 'actualization of the person and society through liberation and freedom' from mere adherence to individual whims and material gains. Individuals who internalize this ideal deserve to be named "enlightened change agents" (Frenk et al., 2010, p. 1924).

Overall, the participants' reflections embody at least three transformative-ethical dimensions. First, they have all undergone transformation from novice beginners to ones who claim confidence for influencing change in students and the society at large. They all bear empathy for the students, and emphasize their engagement beyond the scope of doing a commonplace *Jágir*. They have developed ethos, the 'power to inspire belief' in students and the community. Second, they transcend the personality of grumbling and regretting trivial lacunae involved in the field of teaching. In fact, they do not at all underline any serious fault lines, if any, involved in the profession. They have internalized the profession's optimistic dimensions rather than the limitations. They are rather focused on the 'practical wisdom, virtue and goodwill' the profession demands from its practitioners. Third, they maintain the ethics of portraying a very positive picture of teaching as a gifted field, highlighting the dignity, achievements, and reputations underlying it.

The participants converge to an ideal: teaching is for transformation and service. There is an apparent assertion that teachers undergo personal transformation resulting from the efforts to uplift the lives of students. Moreover, typical for English teachers of Nepal, the reflections also entail a popular advocacy that what English teachers should impart to students is the inspiration for embellished life. They do and should continue to inculcate universal values about being good and virtuous.

One key contribution this study makes is by operationalizing the concept of transformative ethos. I believe this conceptualization across transformative education and rhetoric, albeit to a limited extent, is a justifiable initiative for both domains. There is a huge research potential in cross-pollinating the diverse facets of the two fields of scholarship both in the fields of education and communication. Also, this study suggests at least two important extensions in the direction of substantiating the notion of transformative ethos as a new area of inquiry. There is a scope for analyzing the reflective responses of teachers from multiple disciplines, such as fundamental and applied sciences, management/ business studies, and law. There is also a scope for carrying out a comparative study of the perception of teachers across disciplines. Such extension would help make sense of how the profession of teaching has been or being taken in the context of Nepal. Based on the present study, I can simply stress that teaching continues to be regarded, and even celebrated, as a great profession in Nepal.

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