

FOSTERING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AMONG THE EDUCATIONAL
LEADERS OF NEPAL THROUGH CRITICAL SELF-REFLECTION: A LIVING
THEORY ACTION RESEARCH

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AN ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores the ways in which lived experiences and the emotions anyone feels in combination shapes their leadership journey as an educator. Two forms of analysis are within the scope of my research study. The first is the study of myself and my interpretation of an ideal woman in general, experienced and articulated as a part of growing up in the social and ritual structure of a particular Hindu community. Here I particularly weave my narrative with the emotions associated with motherhood and my mother. The second focuses on the journey that I made together with six other educational leaders working in different educational institutions in Kathmandu, Nepal during the covid-19 pandemic to nurture critical self-reflection among ourselves to foster emotional intelligence in our educational practices. Here, I explain the relationship between the men's and women's social roles and how it has gendered emotions and thus leads to disconnection and disharmony

within the self and their leadership practices. The theory of transformation and the theory of gender, and the living theory have guided me in this exploration.

Emotional Intelligence (EI) cannot be understood and nurtured in isolation from the socio-cultural context. Thus, it is very important to understand how men and women perceive and express emotions and how that perception shapes even their identity as educators. In other words, understanding and expressing emotions are deeply embedded with the values one nourishes, which eventually are part of one's culture. Lack of critical self-reflection leads to emotional illiteracy, leading to disconnection, frustration, and even meaninglessness in professional development. However, it is also an area yet to be explored and nurtured adequately within the existing educational leadership development literature and practices in Nepal. Within the constant debate and skepticism around the globe that sometimes left EI only as a glamorized concept of the West; and, the other times presented critical self-reflection, as a value of the east, the purpose of this (re)search was to (re)visit, (re)read, (re)connect, and (re)imagine a model for critical self-reflection to explore and nurture EI among educational leaders in Nepali context.

Active listening, the most important component of EI is what the notion of *Shravana* in Vedas also signifies; thus I adapted it and blended them and summarized it as LISTEN (श्रवण) (Listen, Introspect, Share, Try, Express, and Nurture) and used it in my action-reflection process. I explored the eastern Vedic paradigm of reflection wellness paradigm of being and explored the eastern notion of educational process *shrawana*, *manana*, and *nidhdhyasana*. Through them I developed a multi-paradigmatic space to foster connections within my inner self and also my educational practices. In my action phase (2020-2021), I did three action projects: Emotional

literacy workshops for educational leaders, an Understanding emotional identity workshop, and a critical self-reflection workshop. In the reflection process, I reflected on my living values, examined myself as a living contradiction, and then developed my living theory through two inquiry approaches action research and autoethnography. Methods like discussion, workshop, reflective journaling, observation, and also using art-based genres like narration, poem, metaphors, and painting, were part of my exploration.

I found that critical self-reflection helps build emotional vocabulary, which helps the understanding of emotions better, which further helps build empathy and social-relationship. Though these competencies are considered very important to foster EI, they can not be developed without regular practice. Thus another significant aspect of critical self-reflection is the acceptance of vulnerability and a sustainable approach towards it. Therefore building it in the form of habit, which in eastern notion, in the form of *dharma* is significant.

In short, the research explores the living model of critical self-reflection, which I have termed the hexagon of critical-self reflection that focuses on the context. The research concludes that the authentic expression of emotions and empathy is crucial to fostering EI. For that self-awareness is important. For educational leaders to be self-aware, critical self-reflection on their life journey and the journey of their emotional life is important to analyze. The research also highlights that navigating disorienting dilemmas for a transformative experience is not always linear but also a circular process and an interactive process that improves consistency in practice.

....., 2022

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that to the best of my knowledge this dissertation is original or otherwise acknowledged, no part of it was submitted earlier for the candidature of any other research degree to any university.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my students who chose to share their personal stories with me because of which I realized the need to look into my own story, values, and my everyday actions in order to improve my practice as an educational leader.

Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership dissertation of *Bhawana Shrestha* entitled *Fostering Emotional Intelligence among the Educational Leaders of Nepal through Critical Self-Reflection: A Living Theory Action Research* was presented on, 2022.

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I understand and agree that my dissertation will become a part of the permanent collection of the Kathmandu University Library. My signature below authorizes the release of my dissertation to any reader upon request for scholarly purposes.

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do as a supervisor when I went through a personal crisis in my second year of PhD. Dr. Subedi was the observant one, always checking in on me and keeping me on the timeline. I am particularly grateful to him for going through my papers line after line and helping with the editing process. They both sustained me through all the confusions and struggles I had. They both pushed me to bring the best out of me by helping me express with authenticity in this dissertation.

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Bhawana Shrestha, Degree Candidate

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CDC	Curriculum Development Center
EI	Emotional Intelligence
EWT	Eastern Wisdom Tradition
GON	Government of Nepal
IQ	Intelligence Quotient
KUSOED	Kathmandu University School of Education
MEM	My Emotions Matter
NASC	National Administrative Staff College
NCED	National Center for Educational Development
NEP	New Education Plan
PAR	Participatory Action Research
Ph.D.	Doctor of Philosophy
Phil	Master of Philosophy
RNA	Royal Nepal Army
SEE	Secondary Education Examination
SEL	Social Emotional Learning
SLC	School Leaving Certificate

SSDP	School Sector Development Plan
SSRP	School Sector Reform Plan
TFALL	Teach For All
TFN	Teach For Nepal
TPD	Teacher's Professional Development
UK	United Kingdom

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PROLOGUE

“The cathexis between mother and daughter-essential, distorted, misused- is the great unwritten story” (Rich, 1976, p. 227). “She further adds that the relationship between them seems to be “minimized and trivialized in the annals of patriarchy” (Rich, 1976, p. 236). I, too have shared a peculiar tension in our energy between me and my mother as we have endured through mother/daughter passion and rupture in these thirty years. But somehow, I too, had missed expressing this bitter-sweet relationship that I had in my unconscious with my mother. In February 2020, I got admitted into my Ph.D at KUSOED. As a first-generation university student, I anticipated that my mother would shower me with appreciation and love for my accomplishment when I visited her the following October to celebrate *Dashain* (the ten days long festival of Hindus to worship the goddess Durga). To my surprise, my father and younger brother were excited about it and asked me several questions about my Ph.D. But the only question that my mother asked was, “*kahile sakincha tero Ph.D?*” (When is your Ph.D. going to end?). As I was going through my own confusion and problems as a new student with my research questions and readings, her question asked with a pinch of sadness on her face, triggered me. In anger, I asked why, for which she responded “*aba bachha paune bela bhayena*” (Don’t you think this is the time to have a baby now?). Until that moment, I hadn’t thought of having or not having kids. But her question hit me like a thunderbolt and shook me to my core. “No, I don’t want to be a mother” that was the answer ringing in my head. I couldn’t share this answer with my mother, but it kept me thinking about why I don’t want to be a mother making me reflect on the relationship with my mother and its implications and associations in my personal life and the work that I do. I realized a

deep sense of (dis)connection I had with motherhood in a social context. It also had an emotional context embedded in a political institution that needed further exploration. But what I wanted with this excavation was an important question to ponder before moving ahead with the journey. I could highly connect to Audre Lorde's (as cited in Kinna, 2017) poem

What do we want from each other
 after we have told our stories
 do we want
 to be healed do we want
 mossy quiet stealing over our scars
 do we want
 the all-powerful frightening sister
 who will make the pain go away
 mother's voice in the hallway
 you have done it right
 the first time darling
 you will never need to do it again.

Thunder grumbles on the horizon
 I buy time with another story
 a pale blister of air
 cadences of dead flesh
 obscure the vowels

The journey will tell if I will be healed or not. Maybe the final reflection will communicate if I feel connected or not. Maybe after my graduation certification, I might need to explore further and share another story. But at this point, I want to sit very close, physically and mentally, to the truth of life and feel a sense of belonging, the *Upanishad* (sitting close by), and peace within self.

“Om Purnamadah Purnamidam Purnat Purnamudachyate

Purnasya Purnamdaya Purnamevashisyate

Om santihi, santihi, santihi”

(That is full, this is full. From fullness does fullness come. If you remove the full from the full, the full alone remains. Om, let there be peace, peace, and peace)

The transference of knowledge is possible only when there is peace and harmony inside (The Art of Living, 2018). So even though my journey of exploration as I start this dissertation in 2021 seemed empty and hollow, I start with a strong willingness to know and learn, motivated by the immense trust in the *gurus* and the journey. As I bring this notion of *gurus*, it does reveal my connection with spirituality, as a need for a guide or preceptor is a distinguishing feature of spiritual life (Forsthofel & Humes, 2012). Yet, I have questions regarding the definition of *gurus* according to the eastern notion as I have been considered a *guru* and have been wished on every *Guru Purnima* for the last ten years. As per eastern philosophy, a *guru* is “an idealized teacher who symbolizes a state of perfection and a vantage point can offer counsel and model techniques for meditative acuity” (p. 15). But also as someone who believes in ‘trial and error’ learning and truly adheres to Sophocles’ quote from 400 B.C., “one must learn by doing the thing, for though you think you know it you have no certainty until you try” (as cited in Gentry, 1990, p.9), the idea of

perfection in *guru* is baffling. So, I question myself can there be any sort of perfection in my teaching? Can I be a *guru* of the topic that I am trying to help nurture among others? According to Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 2, Verse 55), Guru who is also known as *Acharya* or *Satguru* (a spiritual guide) is considered a diving agent who is thoroughly versed in the ‘*sastraic-lore*’ and is a ‘*srhitaprajja*’, someone who has reached the state of serenity. In modern day terms, I connotate that with someone who is an expert in the field and who is content in self. So the purpose to find the answer of this question if I can be a guru becomes both urgent as well as complex at the same time when there is a battle going on in my head and heart and when I am not in my the state of contentment and connection myself. It takes me on a mode of existential crisis as someone who is working on the field of EI in the current moment. Can I be a *guru* of it? This reminds me of the chant that my mother taught me early on and is so engraved in my mind.

“Gurur Brahmaa Gurur Vishnu

Gurur Devo Maheshwarah

Guru Saakshaat Parabrahma

Tasmai Shri Guruve Namah”

(Guru is verily the representative of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. He creates, sustains knowledge, and destroys the weeds of ignorance. I salute such a guru)



Figure 1 Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, the Tridevs

(Source: <https://www.ganeshaspeaks.com/predictions/astrology/know-about-brahma-vishnu-mahesh/>)

Talking about *gurus* again makes me relate to how mothers are considered your first *guru* and motherhood has even been seen as an opportunity for creative spiritual growth and transformation in women (Miller & Athen, 2007). This rings a bell again and fear lurks in as I remember the conversation with my mother about conceiving a child. Here, I recognize my inhibition is a lot based on the cultural backdrop in which I grew up. Being raised by my mom with a long-distance father at a time with no easy access to communication, it was hard for me to recognize my mother as a motivational or transformational character. I used to see her as someone who was highly dysfunctional and had a transactional relationship with *Bhagwan* (God). Her daily prayers bore me up, and her *bhakals* (offerings to God after accomplishments) made me think that my mother could not resolve even a bit of the crisis at hand and kept on waiting for my father for months just to make a simple

decision. How can she be a *guru*? How can she help shape me for my improvement? The questions like these were always there pushing me skeptical about the existence of *Bhagwan*. “I am an atheist” I filled up all the forms that asked about my religion and shared them on all the platforms wherever I got an opportunity to introduce myself. I never stepped into any temples as I started being conscious. I wanted to be the exact opposite of what my mother did or how my mother was. Yet, there were situations when I had caught myself unconsciously embodying the values that she had helped me nurture, and those were the values that I was also reflecting on in my teaching-learning process. As a primary-level school teacher, my mother’s bag was always full of small pencils, notes, and cards made by her students for her. Once I asked her with disappointment why her bag was full of those unnecessary materials. She then replied it as her value of being a woman who holds, “*Nari bhaneko dharti ho, sabai kura shoscha*” (Women are like the earth, they absorb everything). Without even knowing it, I had made ‘holding on’ one of my values. I wasn’t holding materials but I was holding my feelings associated with myself, my context, my teaching, and even my motherhood. Given how religious my mother was and how she used to take me to every religious recital, I had other values that I grew up with, had started reflecting on my leadership journey that needed deconstruction. Coward (1989) referred to this as the eastern Hindu thought that the “universe is believed to come into existence through the creation of pairs of opposites and is maintained by their interplay” (as cited in Athnan & Miller, 2016, p. 18). Because of the complexity of joy and pain that I started experiencing, needed a deeper understanding as the higher risk of disconnection had started lurking leading me to offer a new lens to this process of “becoming a *guru*” with the process of “becoming a mother”. As thrilling as it sounds, the idea of becoming a *guru*, had its own complexities, especially on the

topic that I wanted to explore in Nepal, EI. Studying and trying to nurture EI among educational leaders had already been quite a while. However, there had always been a point when someone from the group of educators would ask two contrasting questions; either the relevance of it asking why a western concept is being shared in the east, or bringing some reference of the sharing of Bhagavat Geeta that the components of EI are also the offerings of Geeta. Thus, authentic exploration of my own values and how they impacted my life as an educational leader was important. In the words of Whitehead (2018), the exploration of living values which many in the east consider spirituality.

In these circumstances, it was important for me to move ahead in the journey of exploration, where spiritualism meant turning the discomfort and disorienting dilemma into personal transformation rather than simply getting stuck into obsessive rumination (Mezirow, 2011). Thus, this Ph.D. is my most authentic, honest, and integrated agency where I have listened to my own stories and how confusion in my identity could not simply be looked at as a single story, and rather had to be in relation to society I grew up in. Relating to Gooptu's (2015) notion of new spirituality, for me, spirituality did not mean the ritual practice, faith, or religion that I followed rather, it was a concentrated psychological and physical well-being, my happiness, and the way of life I lived.

With this dissertation I take us (both the researcher and the readers) on the journey of listening, introspecting, sharing, trying, expressing, and nurturing critical self-reflection where I excavate the path in a rocky mountain of confusion associated with my emotions associated with my identity and my practice as an educational leader associated with emotional intelligence. The excavation though has been

divided into three phases with three chapters each. Though each phase and chapter seem linear, it has been a circular or more of an iterative one in which I moved back and forth throughout. Phase I is the preparatory phase which is divided into three chapters (Chapters 1, 2, and 3). Here, I have explored the research issue, made my question specific purpose, and explained my methodology. Phase II was the action phase and has chapters 4, 5, and 6. In these chapters, I have explored and analyzed my research journey, and my lived experiences that evolved through three action-reflection cycles of action research. Then, finally in phase III, the reflection phase, I discussed my reflective thoughts related to sustainability, my own values as my *dharma*, and my conclusion. The dissertation can be seen threaded with the implication of my relationship with my mother and its significance to my practice as an educational leader. Several stories unfolded about my mother as I unfolded this journey with her. Respecting her interest, I have only shared few of them, the ones she has consented for.

I have followed stream-of-consciousness style to share my exploration and my narratives. I have written my thoughts and reflections as they occur while I was revealing my own discovery process. So, I recognize that my style of writing can be difficult at times to follow, at times raw and contradictory between the chapters until I reach the conclusion chapter. So, to make reading this dissertation clearer and for unanimous understating, I include a list of key terms with my working definitions below.

Key Terms

- *Lived Experience*: I am fascinated by Dewey's (1949) notion how exploration and learning can simply be around the realm of ordinary life, the reality that

we access as human beings. More than the passive affairs, the experience for me is something that I can connect with my relationships or something that has a consequence or a continuity to my learning process. Here, since I use autoethnography as one of the methodologies, my personal experience of grappling with the context and the problems provided me with genuine learning experiences. This is what I have used as my lived experience.

- *Emotional Literacy*: I have used emotional literacy as the building block for EI. I relate to Steiner and Perry's (1979) understanding of emotional literacy which means to manage emotions in a way that improves our personal power and the quality of our life. So, to be emotionally literate means not only to name our emotions but also to understand them and manage them.
- *Gender*: I have not used gender as a binary category rather I see it in terms of operationalizing it which consists of several aspects. For this thesis, rather than focusing on the psychological/bodily aspects, I have focused on gender identity, and social gender aspects (Lindqvist et al., 2020). This has helped me create a space for me and the research participants to remain fluid throughout the research process over the changing context and time.
- *Living*: A frequently used term, here suggests an ongoing process which has become a part of my life. It is also a reflection on my real-life experience past and present based on my morals, authenticity, empathy, self-awareness. Also contrasting it with dead, 'living' means currently relevant that is life-affirming (Bigger, 2021).
- *Reflective Practice*: Reflective practice means turning experience into learning by acting and thinking deliberately, considering one's actions, thoughts, values, and behavior in every situation. For me, this happened through action-

reflection cycles where I keep on inquiring ‘How do I improve my practice?’ with more awareness (Parekh, 2020, p. 23).

- *Reflective Practitioner*: I consider myself a reflective practitioner who actively observes her behavior, listens attentively to her thoughts and feelings, notices her capabilities, and keeps on striving to improve her actions (Schon, 1983). As a reflective practitioner, it is important for me to be iterative. Improvisation is important than the “deliberate and planned intent to solve particular problems” (Bognar, 2013, p. 5)
- *Spirituality*: The definition of spirituality kept on changing from when I had started to draft this dissertation to when I concluded it, even for myself. But the one that I held on to throughout was the understanding how “my values based relational experiences guided my actions and my choices” (Campbell, 2018, p. xvi).
- *Vulnerability*: Vulnerability is my living value. Acknowledgement of my failures and finding courage to live an authentic life amid them, for me holds significance in both my personal and professional life. I resonate with Brown’s (2012) explanation that vulnerability is the heart of any meaningful experience. In this thesis, I have used this mostly in terms to understand the emotional exposures amid risk and uncertainty.

PHASE I: PREPARATORY PHASE

Phase I is the preparatory phase. I present this phase in chapters 1, 2, and 3 and discuss my research agenda, purpose, research question, and methodology of my research inquiry.

CHAPTER I

CONNECTING THE DOTS

In this chapter, I set the scene and deconstruct my research agenda, the disorientation created because of the dilemma between what I was facing in the real world as a Nepali woman and how I thought of myself to be in the ideal world. Here, I explain how I found my life's purpose amid the ongoing disconnection and chaos that I have had through my awareness of emotional literacy. I bring forth my lived experiences of my personal, professional, and academic journey as a daughter, student, journalist, teacher, and educational leader. In all these narrations, I find a common thread: the distortion of my identity where I lost connection with myself and also introduce my mother and my relationship with her.

This chapter also explains my dilemma between two distinct selves; the real self and the moral ideal self. The real self was chaotic, distorted, and disconnected from the inner and outer worlds. I could see myself struggling to feel safe, loved, and belonging both inside the classroom and outside of it. I found myself extremely powerless. Meanwhile, in the ideal moral world, I imagined a calm but curious self who is joyful and appreciative of the love and inclusion she has experienced. In this world, equality is at the core where I as an individual have my agency.

In this chapter, I also share the causes of my distortion, chaos, and feeling of powerlessness in five sections. They are (1) disconnection as a daughter 'self' (2) disconnection with colorful 'self' (3) disconnection with expressive 'self' (4) disconnection with critical self (5) disconnection with empowered self. Then I explain

how emotional literacy was a crucial factor that helped me understand those disconnections. I further discuss why understanding my emotions in relation to the socio-cultural underpinnings was significant to gaining my harmony and power. Realizing that the lack of critical self-reflection because of the importance given to Intelligence Quotient (IQ) over EI in the Nepali education system led me to my research agenda of exploring the promotion of EI among educational leaders of Nepal. I move ahead in iterating a model for critical self-reflection, LISTEN (श्रवण)- Listen, Introspect, Share, Try, Express, Nurture, a living model for nurturing EI in Nepal through emotional literacy.

Sanghar: The Threshold

I have shown you my strengths,

even revealed my fears

But, there are still some parts of me

yet to be showcased

chased away from my confidence and the fright

difficult to be understood by you

Sometimes I am clear,

Sometimes too confused

Amid the confusion and clarity,

*there is another me who,
always searches a way out to move on
yet to be followed by you*

*When there is still
some hidden from you,
still, some to be discovered by you,
it seems you still need time to understand me
and there are paths you still haven't followed*

The idea of self is often considered *rahasyamaya* (mystic) from a behavioristic point of view appearing similar to the concept of *aatma* (soul) which can neither be touched, seen, or succeeded but yet exists as a hypothetical construct (Epstein, 1973). Bhar (2018) argues mysticism as a human capacity to experience inner spiritual growth unexplainable in terms of IQ. For someone like me who is still exploring what happens when someone gets spiritual experience or what spiritualism itself is, Lakhani (2019) simplifies it by describing spiritual growth and experience as when one follows discipline, works hard through which they become concentrated in any field, and finds bliss in it. Although the term spiritual is closely linked with religion, I resonate with Everett et al. (2010) and see them differently as religion being associated with the belief and practice associated with tradition while spiritual being the feeling of connectedness and closeness to the sacred (see Chapter II). Thus,

borrowing the definition of Epstein (1973) for me, self means “‘I’ or the ‘me’, or both or as the individuals’ reactions myself” (p. 404).

How much I simplified my understanding of myself, I had always found myself torn between two selves and complicated; a disorienting dilemma between the moral ideal self and the real self. Mezirow (1978) argues that the transformative learning starts with a disorienting dilemma which can sometimes be subtle or seismic and might happen through some readings while other times it might be as deep and traumatic as a death of a loved one (as cited in DeAngelis, 2021). For me, the disorientation was subconscious and emotional as pointed out by Dirkx (2006) when I started feeling a deep disconnection between my multiple selves leading me to see myself as fragmented and start to seek a harmonious whole between the moral ideal self and the real self in several informal settings rather than a formal classroom setting but also affecting my academic endeavor. Russel (2004) explains the moral ideal self as the one I was preached about how and who I should be while the real self as the one how and who I actually was (as cited in Feldman Hall et al., 2012). This complication slowly turned out to be the disconnection with my own self. The ‘you’ in the poem metaphorically represents the same confusion in my understanding of who I was and who I wanted to be. My moral ideal self wanted to grow harmoniously while my real self was experiencing the struggle, powerlessness, and boundedness by the socio-cultural expectations as a traditional Nepali woman with multiple roles (Shrestha, 2021b). These confusions and complications related to who I was becoming and how I should actually become had slowly started to build a disconnection with my own self resulting in a frustrating conversation between both the selves who did not listen to each other. That started manifesting through my disappointments in my academic grades where I was focused more on the percentage

than in the process of learning, through my frustrations in the works I was doing, and through negative self-talk when I encountered challenges.

Disconnection as a Daughter Self

Who was I?

“A mere daughter who had to flutter,

not as per her wish

but as per the dreams my mother had,

and the concerns my father used to be mad.

I was seen but not felt

I was touched but not held.

I was lost.

I cursed for being born with a vagina.

I loathed being called “chhori” (daughter).

I wanted my father to call me “chhora” (son).

I was raised in a *nimnamadhyambargiya* (lower-middle-class) family and the dream of my parents was to send me to college. I would be the first one from my lineage if that had happened. Nepali middle class is best understood as cultural practices besides its objective indicators income, assets, and division of labor in a society where they “struggle to live with, negotiate and numerous riddles and contradictions created by the pastiche of local and global” (Basnet, 2021, para. 2). Besides the common dream of sending me to college, my parents had different aspirations for me as their daughter. My mother, a grade 10 graduate and pre-primary

grade teacher, wanted me to become a nurse. It was her unfulfilled dream and she wanted me to fulfill it for her. My father, a grade eight graduate, a factory worker, wanted me to be a teacher. For him, teaching was an easy job but a respectable job for me as a female as it did not have night duties. I was frustrated that I was never asked what I wanted to be. My moral ideal self wanted to fulfill their dreams without any question but my real self was struggling as I did not want to be both because I was still exploring who I was.

With my father away from my home for his job, I spent almost all my childhood with my mother and my brother who is four years younger than me. Langer et al. (2019) argue that young girls have been reported to exhibit relational aggression while young boys exhibit physical aggression in Nepal. Most of the early childhood incidents that I remember now consist of either me being scared of my mother or me being angry with myself for not being able to express myself better in front of her. My anger was especially because I had extreme hesitation in sharing how sad I felt as I was facing harassment and bullying. Some of my relatives always used to tease me asking me to show my genitals sharing that they were confused whether I was a son or a daughter because of my short hair. Several times, I had pulled my underwear down and had frustratingly shown them my vagina. My younger brother was never asked to show his penis which also affected me a lot slowly disassociating myself with the word *chhori*. I wanted to be known as a *chhora* and used to get angry when my father called me *chhori*.

There were also some days when I used to be proud of my mother for she was the only female in the neighborhood who had a job. This made me more confused because sometimes I wanted to be like my mother while the other times my biggest fear was that I would turn out just like her. While Freud (1933) considers this as

‘female Oedipus complex’ where the daughter in her pre-Oedipus stage thinks of getting affectionate to her mother and in the later Oedipus stage wants to get rid of her and take her place, the difference in my case was I never wanted her place in order to relate to Freud’s understanding (as cited in Bernstein, 2004). I wanted to be like her because I liked how she was not confined inside the four walls of our room unlike other women of my community. I did not want to be like her because she used to be seen as naïve and quiet when my father was around while she used to be seen as overly strict and angry when he was not around. Even though she was working, I used to find her completely dependent on my father when she had to make any decisions. Since I was studying in the same school where she was teaching, I used to find her powerless when it came about sharing her thoughts in front of the male teachers. Here, power connotes the personal development and self-respect one has for themselves. The socio-cultural setting is such that the girls are raised in such a way that they are branded as inferior even before they are born adversely affecting their holistic development (Luitel, 1970). My disconnection with my daughter self was especially concerning how my mother did not know how to deal with her personal needs and wanted me to do the same.

My real self was noticing my mother's struggle and did not want a life like her. But my ideal moral self wanted to be like her, the epitome of sacrifice. Emde (1983) borrowed the word ‘the female super ego’ from Freud (1933) who connected that with social and cultural significance and argued that infants between 18 and 36 months have already internalized and started to demonstrate prosocial behaviors from the society and the capacity to struggle with moral dilemmas. The gendered obligations and morality elucidated an unchecked expression of powerlessness within me drifting me away from my daughter self.

Disconnection with Colorful Self

“ Chiyako kitli bata euta surya udaucha,

(A sun rises from the kettle of tea)

sadhai raksiko ritto gilasma euta surya aastaucha

(There is always sunset on an empty glass of wine)

ghumirahekai chha baseko Prithvi- purbabrath

(The earth inhabited by me keeps on revolving as usual,)

fagat aparichit chhu

(Albeit, I am unfamiliar)

Wariparika pariwartanharu dekhi

(To the changes around)

drishyaharu dekhi,

(From the views,)

ramailo dekhi,

(From fun,)

pradarshaniko ghumne mecmathi kaarle baseko aandho jastai

(Just like the blind forced to be seated on the revolving chair

of the exhibition)

(Sherchan, 2013)

I was highly concerned and insecure about my social strata during my adolescent days especially because my mother kept on reminding me how difficult it was for me to even get an institutional (private) school education. She was forced to teach there even when she was being paid low just so that I could study in a private school. Each time we had our board exams, my mother used to remind me that I was getting the chance to study in that school just because she was a teacher there and if I did not secure good grades it would all go in vain. The family's socioeconomic status is considered an influential factor in adolescents' academic achievement, especially affecting parental involvement, which means having high expectations for children by exerting pressure on them (Long & Pang, 2016). I could relate to a Nepali poem by BhupiSherchan which I had in my Nepali textbook of grade ten. For many of my friends with whom I was growing up in my village, going to a private school was a boon, sunshine in my life but for me, I was always fearful and felt as if my color had been taken away from me. I felt so pressurized and powerless that I could not even understand the importance of attending school. Yet, I was going every day.

My weekdays used to spend being one among my classmates who used to talk about television series and movies or about their aspirations of going abroad, while my weekends used to spend accompanying my neighborhood sisters, listening to the chats about what fodder to bring for the domesticated animals or whose marriage is on the line. I lived an educational life in this “in-between” space stuck in between feeling optimistic about the future for the kind of friends I had in my school and pessimistic about the future for how my life would turn out to be as a part of the community where I was growing up. Duchesne and Ratelle (2010) argue that the performance goal orientation associated with the family situation in which the parents exert pressure on the children are found to have problems on self-regulation affecting their motivation to

exploration and learning. I was going through the same phase. I was not participating in any extracurricular activities other than studies nor thought of exploring my extreme desire for painting. The colors that I had in my life were the white words written on the blackboard of my school's wall.

Something that caught my attention was the female Maoist insurgents. They were part of the Maoist insurgency (1996-2006) or *jana yuddha* (people's war), a war was waged by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) against the monopolized power (Manchand, 2004). The Marxist ideology of the party had sought to bring about a change through the armed struggle against the long rule of Monarchy by opening the space for civilians. Including women to be a part of the protest had gathered significant attention in a context where there was significant absence and silence of women in a country with male oriented political structures. Those female insurgents were my ideal moral self, a confident woman who could publicly stand up for the pressure exerted against them. I was fascinated to see "the expression of emotion among women and men was fascinating to watch where women were seen externalizing their anger and men externalizing their fear" (Shrestha, 2021b, p. 5). Meanwhile, a tragic incident brought me into my real world when I was idealizing my self like those female Maoist insurgents. One of my classmate's brothers got killed in a bomb blast in his own house. He was declared a terrorist and called an alleged Maoist cadre. The red blood that had colored his house's newly painted white walls followed me for my lifetime. I was both anxious as well as angry. But I couldn't have the color red in my color palette even if I wanted to paint. I felt disconnected from my colorful self. Also, the way my friend was bullied for asking justice for her brother and the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) asking her to shut her mouth made me feel even more powerless. I had the realization that the confident self is impossible because morally an ideal woman should be quiet. This

confusion between the real self and the moral ideal self often with the rapid change in circumstances had made me question what the real truth was affecting my meaning-making (Mezirow, 2000). The contradictions generated by these frequent dramatic changes generated by the contradictions in the meaning-making in my formative learning of childhood especially the real self and the moral ideal self impacted how I defined power. Steiner and Perry (1999) highlighting the significance of emotional literacy to understanding interpersonal experience mentioned that “In modern society, power is generally thought of as control, mainly the ability to control people and/or money... but we rarely think of a woman when we think of a powerful person” (p.2). The context of Nepal is no different, with its patriarchal structure it undermines the dignity, self-respect, and confidence of a woman by excluding her socially, culturally, and regionally (Maharjan & Sah, 2012). I felt powerless, completely disconnected from the colorful self.

Disconnection from Expressive Self

Confused between the thin lines

Lingering on the thoughts of disguise

I question, “What to be” and “What not to be.”

Started a journey, a thousand miles long

I have stuck here on the crossroads and paused

My head forbids me to stop,

asks me to resume and walk nonstop.

Then, my heart starts thudding

requests me to take a turn

I can't be so mean and stubborn.

Brain punches my emotion

Feelings kick my rationale.

Then my wounded soul bellows.

"Poor me!"

I stand here shaken and trodden:

Trapped in between the junctions undecided.

There has been a much-noted divide between home and school for an adolescent's growth. Gregory and Weinstein (2004) argue that both the parents and the teachers need to recognize the sense of connection with the adolescent for their academic and psychological growth. However, apart from pressurizing to secure distinction (80% and above) on my School Leaving Certificate (SLC) exams, the school was not helping me navigate my confusion about the struggle between my real self and my ideal moral self. The objective of the modern education system in general on the one hand is to provide intellectual and practical skills that will develop employment advantage to meet the demands of a competitive corporate world with complex socio-cultural trends and emerging technologies (Hunter, 2004). On the other hand, given how the world has become more "fragmented, chaotic, and disordered than before", there is no clearly defined goal for the education of the individual and her competencies,

knowledge, and qualities (Hanaba, 2019). Uprety (2021) highlights similar concern for Nepali education system where the educational policies are made using “fairly stable environment and institutions” in mind while the actors have to work in a relatively “unstable institutions” and in the situation of crisis (p. 326). Just like the way I have expressed in the poem, I felt shaken and trodden juggling the complexities and chaos not being able to even think of what I want to be in life, and facing the problem of expressing my thoughts. Mathema (2007) calls this ‘pedagogical displacement’ where the school education does not have linkage with the realities of the community. I can relate to Wagle et al. (2019) when he emphasizes the importance of place pedagogy where the focus is primarily on contextualized curriculum over the curriculum imitated from the Indian education system developed by the British (Malla, 2015).

I was a part of the education system that had started with the rise of democracy in 1950. The schools had opened without planning highly supported and influenced by the American Aid to promote democracy and produce trained human resources by the Government of Nepal (GON) (Wood, 1965; Sharma 2003). Rappleye (2021) brings the untold story of Hugh Wood who had drafted the landmark 1955 *Report of the Nepal National Education Planning Commission* and shares how the document that influenced and shaped the modern education of Nepal had actually reduced the concerns of Nepali education commission members. The report which was an “ideal (western) vision of education system that had missed to address the “inequalities, external relations, applicability to local realities” that were the major concerns of Nepal (Rappleye, 2021, p. 80). Private schools evolved parituclary since the late 1980s when Nepal entered into a neo-liberal regime and multiparty democracy. With the adoption of Education Regulation 1981, with miminum physical facilities (adequate classrooms, separate toilets for boys and girls, play ground) guaranteed with some basic conditions

fulfilled, private schools could open. Then with the re-installation of multiparty democracy in 1991, foreign educational institutions affiliated schools were allowed to open leading to the mushrooming of private schools. When my parents were so proud of being able to send me to private school, I in hindsight felt like an object that did not know if it could feel or if it could not express. I was being disconnected from my expressive self.

As a young girl, I did not have a sense of fitting in and was continuously trying to run away from my community. The feeling of extensive limitation in the mobility and participation in the decision-making in the households made me crave the expansion of my knowledge and experience of the outer world (Maharjan & Sah, 2012). Because my physical mobility was restricted as an adolescent, mass media, especially, television became the source of gaining knowledge and experience of the outer world. The frequent use of the word ‘empowerment’, a concept widely used but seldom defined (Rahman, 2013) in the media fascinated me. Rahman (2013) argued that the concept of empowerment remained confusing because the root concept of empowerment, ‘power’ has remained confusing. The then Nepali media narrative supported Dahal (2013)’s explanation of empowerment as being expressive and vocal about their rights in both their personal and professional lives. They encourage the idea that there is the possibility of such empowerment for Nepalese women with the rise of gender equality (Pajapati, 2008). However, for me, it felt like a fascinating dream as in my real world I was not being able to find any contextual examples of gender equality. My real self craved for the equal distribution of power between my mother and my father (Shrestha, 2021) but my ideal moral self was so influenced by several Hindu mythological tales that my mother made me read that was all about giving up their desires for their husbands. One of the stories was of *Goma Brahmani* who had to get

married to a 70-year-old man and because of her huge devotion and serving to her husband later on was rewarded by God. My ideal moral self started getting frightened with the female journalists who were expressive and vocal and were not hesitant in asking critical questions to anyone. However, my real self wanted to be expressive like them.

With this confusion, I learned to repress my own emotions, as a female, especially my anger, taking care to see if I am hurting someone's feelings in the process of my expression. Sadness, guilt, and shame were the only emotions I thought women were allowed to feel, yet not allowed to express. The engraved perceived identity of women fulfilling the role of a caretaker of the family was so vivid that anything done for self-development triggered the feeling of either shame or guilt for my moral ideal self. The standard gender differences in emotions that women tend to internalize their emotions while men externalize in their real-life (Chaplin, 2014) are so high that I perceived the feelings like anger, aggression, frustration, and irritability was for men so much that my moral ideal self even used to question if the expression of my mother's anger is legitimate that she used to show around me in the absence of my father (Shrestha, 2021). The confusion heightened widening my disconnection to my expressive self.

Disconnection with Critical Self

When I was born,

My mother sighed with angst

As she noticed there was a vagina instead of a penis

Between my legs.

*my vagina had nothing done wrong, but,
it had the responsibility of maintaining my family's purity.*

*My mom kept on checking in
if it was just peeing or was there anything
mushy on the underwear I was wearing in.
Once it got mushy somewhere around my tweens,
my mom gave me a list of all the boundaries
my vagina had to fulfill.*

*The list was long, tired I summoned
The only thing my vagina was allowed was to pee,
that too behind the properly closed door,
conscious of the penises floating around in search of a hole.*

*My poor vagina keeps on protecting my family's prestige
till the day it gives life to a new penis.*

Oh no! There's one big responsibility

One vagina cannot give birth to another vagina

For the female ex-combatants of Maoist empowerment meant *sasaktikaran* meaning women empowerment or *mahila sasaktikarn* that meant them being able to

raise their voices, to represent women's voices and to understand women's grief (KC & Van Der Harr, 2018). This led a rise in the number of female journalists after the 'people's war' with the establishment of new media houses to mark freedom of speech also increased the number of female journalists (Orgeret & William, 2016). This arouse hope in me. The expressive nature of those journalists made me aspire to become one of them who was open, expressive, and empowered. I wanted to navigate my way through the route of social conflict and promote equitable relationships just like the ones on television (Shrestha, 2021b). My community also started its first television channel. I had just completed high school. I wanted to work there but my father was too worried about my safety as I had to work late nights if I got selected. A study by Demos (2014) has highlighted the fact that "journalism is the only category where women received more abuse than men, with female journalists receiving roughly three times as much abuse as their male counterparts" (as cited in Koirala, 2019, p. 48). I cried my heart out for days till he permitted me to apply.

I started working as a journalist and my role as a journalist was not just a means of income for me but also a means that I could use to spend most of the time away from my family and community with whom I had the feeling of disconnection. My job allowed me to travel to communities other than mine, which made me realize that I did not feel connected to those communities. It was not just my community that had the problem of gender discrimination but all the other communities were going through the same. I had to report the news on domestic violence, rape, the harassment every day. The perpetrators were usually the ones with whom the victims had close-knit relationships. From a multi-staged cluster sampling among the 12,862 women and 4063 men from 363 wards of Nepal, it was concluded that 26.3 % of ever-married women experienced different forms of violence from their intimate partner at some point in

their lives, while 13.7 % had experienced it the previous year of the survey date (Gautam & Jeong, 2019).

Three years into it, one day I encountered a situation when I had to report a case of an 8th grader, a teenage girl, raped by her own classmates inside her classroom. Especially at a time when her own mother was blaming her for the rape, and for the shame and guilt she was going through for what had happened with her, she was refusing to talk to anyone. I was not expecting her to open up so I just thought of being there for her and feeling what she was feeling rather than asking the factual details. She had gone numb. Steiner and Perry (1999) call these kinds of situations as psychological traumas where the minds freeze up emotionally by numbing and creating a psychological wall separating us from our deepest emotions. The consequences of these can pass through the generations if left unchecked. To my surprise, she confided in me and appreciated how warm she felt in my intentions to sit with her vulnerabilities. As I reflect now, I realize that she should have been angry for the culprits but she was taking the blame upon herself and was going through extreme shame and guilt for not being able to protect her family's prestige. Bhasin and Das (2019) argue that the patriarchal society places the dignity of the woman in her vagina. Thus, when she is raped rather than questioning the perpetrators, the victims are stigmatized. The whole family's self-respect is considered to be robbed of. Anbeshi (2013) argue that most of the report of sexual violence goes unreported because of the stigma, shame, and fear associated with losing purity after being raped (as cited in KCGC, 2018). Rather than seeing sexual violence as a crime, it is seen as the failure of women in protecting themselves. The poem represented the frustration and pain I had when I listened to the story of the victim. I could relate to her on multiple grounds. The continuous threats and warnings that my mother used to give me to protect my dignity every time I had to go outdoors

for work were all full on my ears. We both had a unique connection as we both were disconnected from our open expressive selves (Shrestha, 2021b). It had not just affected my expression but also my critical reasoning. Kaya et al. (2018) argue that emotions and critical thinking are inseparable because emotions form the basis of thoughts. Since advanced critical thinking abilities are also tied with high EI, my inability to express my true emotions highly impacted my critical self. EI incorporates the ability to recognize and manage feelings, critical self-reflection, understanding others' feelings, and continuing the relationships (Goleman, 2005). As I look back, I had a respectable IQ; the conscious intellectual capability of a person that helps them to observe, understand and analyze a logical problem (Gondal & Husain, 2013), however, I saw myself as someone who neither had critical awareness of her tacit assumptions and expectations nor had a basic understanding of her emotions. My moral ideal self wanted to be in a harmonious state feeling all the emotions, but my real self was struggling to feel other emotions apart from anger making me more disconnected from my critical self. Rationalizing my anger had become the ultimate way to feel empowered as it was my "conditioned affective reaction, a highly individualistic frame of reference I acquired through the social settings that gave me a sense of empowerment that I had never critically reflected" (Shrestha, 2021b, p. 8). I was too far from my critical self not being able to be at the moment during my work. I had started craving for a society that did not have any sort of violence against women. But I was angry that I was not in any way contributing to it. The extreme anger towards my real self made me quit my job without thinking critically.

Disconnection with Empowered Self

Student Life

Sometimes I think my life is a labor

I should listen to the stupid words from teachers, parents, and others.

They tell me I cannot get success in my life.

I cannot pass my exam.

Sometimes I think

a single teacher cannot teach all the subjects

then,

how can I pass in all my subjects?

My mind is smaller than theirs

There is work,

there is a personal problem,

there is a family problem

So many people give lectures to me,

but I cannot manage.

There is no one to care for me.

I am getting into trouble.

Someone had said,

student life is a gift but

I say it is only trouble.

I was born intelligent

but education bound me.

(One of my students from grade seven)

My angry self got attracted to the tagline “what if your first job was changing the nation?” shared by a teaching fellowship program ‘Teach for Nepal’ (TFN) in 2013. The program is a part of a global movement ‘Teach for All’ (TFALL) initiated to tackle the complex challenges faced by the children in disadvantaged communities that fostered the understanding of teaching as leadership. The fellowship helped me understand the complexities and challenges of the Nepali education system. From struggling daily hand-to-mouth problems to navigating the problem of transportation to go to school every day, the students also had to face tragic death being forced to work in factories just to go to school (Shrestha, 2021b). Apart from that they also had to face social stigma, gender discrimination, caste discrimination, and severe corporal punishments even at school. Some excerpts from my diary entry on 17-07-2014 which I had written after reading the news of a seventh-grader who her teacher severely beat as a punishment.

A few months back, one of the TFN fellows who is a Math teacher at one of the public schools of southern Lalitpur had a very serious issue to discuss with us in our learning session. His student had complained against him to the headteacher for not giving him any corporal punishment. When he had a conversation regarding that with the student he figured that the student was so

habituated to get corporal punishment that he was not able to concentrate on his studies without getting one.

The student had sustained a severe eye injury after being hit by her teacher with a stick that she lost her vision (KC, 2014). There were so many challenges to address as a teacher but I realized that they are not being considered important. Those teachers who were invested in closing the academic achievement gap, especially in the SLC exams by hook or by crook were considered the best teachers and were honored. Bimoli (2014) argued that the teachers themselves have cheated the way into the system that they are found to be permitting the students and even encouraging them to cheat on their board exams. Gradually, I associated my idea of empowerment with that of the definition of leadership by America and Farr (2010) which meant to set bigger goals for the students and strive continuously to close the achievement gap even amid the odds. For me, the closure seemed unachievable. The anger with which I started my teaching journey had suddenly turned into sadness and disappointment especially when it came to my teaching skills and leadership skills. That feeling heightened when one of my seventh graders shared his poem on student life with me that had not questioned the whole education system in a few verses but had also highlighted the problems that he was going through which I was not considering as his teacher.

I felt disconnected from my empowered self. The fear of failing as a teacher started looming in. I felt that I had failed as a daughter. I had failed as a student. I had failed as a journalist. Now, I was failing as a teacher. I was experiencing a verbal barrier where neither I was being able to label my emotions because of which I was not being able to respond with frequent emotional outbursts rightly. My moral ideal self wanted

to see me as a calm motivating teacher. However, in my real self, I was so distorted and disconnected from teaching that I was losing my sense of power over myself.

A Journey into Self through Emotional Intelligence

Journal writing was one of the mandatory tasks as a TFN fellow which helped me take a step to get connected with my chaotic and confused self. It became a helpful aid “to the ongoing effort to bring together the inner and outer parts of my lives” (Lukinsky, 1990, p. 213). Writing helped me recognize my habitual modes of going into the loop of thinking where I used to juggle between the ideal moral self and the real self by just taking a step back and understanding the context. Through the diary, I started creating a space for myself where I let the thoughts of my real self and the thoughts of my ideal moral self have healthy discourses (Shrestha, 2021). It slowly started to help me cross my verbal barrier. In one of the journal entries written on 10-12-2014, I had represented the turmoil through a poem where ‘you’ is the metaphor to my ideal moral self, and I refer to my real self.

Please,

don't appear on my mind

I can't welcome you.

Don't emerge on my thoughts

I can't acknowledge you.

For me,

you are like a ghoul

with whom I can't linger.

You are like an appraisal

which I can't consider.

But still,

you come ahead

breaking the norm of my chamber

You show up tormenting all my desires that I wish for.

Who are you?

I am forced to assume

Are you an aberrant?

I am obliged to guess.

Are you really true and existent?

Crossing the stage of the verbal barrier was significant for me to look at the context and understand the reasons for having that particular feeling and thoughts. Steiner and Perry (1999) call this the 'differentiation' stage which helped the experiencer to focus on their feelings and understand the underlying needs without judging them or trying to change them. Torre and Lieberman (2018) understand this as a form of implicit emotion regulation and explain the act of putting feelings into words as 'affect labeling'. Affect labeling was significant for understanding my vulnerabilities, especially associated with how I understood failures and related them

to my real self. Understanding vulnerabilities helped me further understand the presuppositions I had built around myself related to my formative experiences that I had left un-reflected.

Emotional literacy, which meant being aware of my emotions, recognizing them, and labeling them was an act of transformation that involved critical self-reflection. What seemed like an unfathomable adventure slowly appeared achievable if I could start accepting my real vulnerable self. Brown (2011) argues that those who can accept their failures and vulnerabilities dare to be imperfect, be empathic to themselves and to others, and be authentic. One of the journal entries that I made on 8-12-2016 revealed something similar:

“Isn’t it good just to be mindful; mindful of what I am feeling? Or what I am going through? Unexpectedly, I went a few days back when I was a little introspective and I was having conversations happily with my 99-year self. She was saying,

‘Thank you, as you

gave me the reasons to smile.

You waited as when you needed time

You kept your emotions sublime.

Time is what you have used so well,

as it didn’t always have jingle bells.

Thank you, as you kept quiet

when they were expecting you would burst out and fight.

Thank you once again, for the happiness

I feel young and beautiful even on this wrinkled face.”

This diary was the dialogic reflection with self where I am trying to empathize myself through an eye of a 99-year-old self. Through this writing which Steiner and Perry (1999) define as the stage of ‘emotional interactivity’ of emotional literacy, I am trying to empathize with myself by becoming aware of my emotions and accepting my authentic self. This stage is the stage of intelligent interaction of emotions where we find creative ways to lead our emotions to positive and productive interactions. The realization of the “improved connection through managed emotional life and honest expression of emotions inculcated the belief of power within me, which Veneklasen and Miller (2007) call ‘power to’ through my uplifted self-esteem” (Shrestha, 2021, p. 10).

To be human is to balance between multiples of extremes, especially the balance between reason and feelings where mind and body come together in perfect unity to make life deeper and complete (Ventegodt et al., 2003). Meanwhile, growing up in an educational system that valued cognition more than emotion, particularly when emotions were tagged to women and reasons were tagged to men (Chaplin & Aldao, 2013), I can now understand why I kept on being fearful to reflect on my experiences critically. Thus, even if I had the goal of contributing to society by embodying the value of empathy, I was not being able to actually live the value and was being a ‘living contradiction’ (Whitehead, 1989). However, realizing the benefits of understanding my emotions could lead to productive interactions developed an interest in me to explore more in this field. Only focusing on the production and transmission of technical

knowledge is dangerous and thus enhancing the capacity to develop the communicative action of the knowledge as an interpreter of the society's self-understanding should be emphasized (Habermas, 1971 as cited in Delanty, 2008). "EI, at the most general level, emphasizes on society's self-understanding and refers to the abilities to recognize and regulate emotions in ourselves and in others. Cherniss and Goleman (2005) suggest four major EI domains: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, and Relationship Management" and further affirms that a leader's ability to perceive, identify and manage emotions helps them to develop social and emotional competencies that are significant for success in the workplace (p. 160). In the context of Nepal, with an increasing number of research (Gnawali, 2016; Khadka, 2019; Rybak et al., 2013; Shrestha, 2018) shows the positive relationship between an individual's practice of EI and their academic and workplace success, EI has been gaining increased attention in the field of education (see chapter II). In order to assess and support the development of EI in students, educators must have a clear understanding, recognition, and manifestation of EI themselves, increasing the demand for it in the educational leadership practices (Rybak et al, 2013). In this pretext, I conducted my M.Phil. research to explore the perception of the students on the EI of the teachers and the research the teachers don't demonstrate the practices of EI. However, the students considered EI as the most important factor for them to feel connected with the teachers which they thought was significant for their achievement (Shrestha, 2018).

Reflecting the significance of emotional literacy and EI in my life and realizing the gap through my M.Phil. research, I founded the organization My Emotions Matter (MEM) in 2018, embodying the value of empathy to foster emotional literacy and EI for the flourishing of humanity. Through the organization, I develop resources, prepare session plans, and facilitate self-reflective learning spaces for the participants to

understand their feelings, talk about them and manage them. After working for two years, I understood the importance of contextualizing it and making it simpler to understand for the people of Nepal. Self-awareness and critical thinking had helped me connect with my creative, critical, thoughtful, and empathetic self, which had helped me in my professional life and personal life, especially the relationship with my mother. It has helped me identify my fear, insecurity, and my outgrown beliefs that had created blocks, and misunderstandings; acknowledge them, and express them responsibly. However, I have also understood how complex it was to help other educators understand and practice it who also had grown up in a similar context like mine or even more complex than mine. In 2014, I encountered an educator who was trying his best to help the adolescents develop their technical skills and was leading a campaign to ensure jobs in Nepal right after school. Upon my inquiry, I was able to see the hardship that he was going through as he was a drug addict himself in his high school and because of his past it was being extremely difficult for him to bring forth his genuine ideas as he was continuously being stigmatized and targeted. He shared how pained and ignored he used to feel and how he found a safe space to share that with me even in that brief conversation. That led me to be more interested in conversations with my fellow teachers and understanding their history and motive of being an educator. This also helped me realize the need for a contextual and simple framework to practice for everyone regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, or religion, and to promote EI as Nepal is a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic country. The need for a common framework for critical self-reflection was evident (see chapter II). William et al. (1972) suggest critical reflection helps address the limitation of reflection and challenges the learner to both recall from memory and verbally articulate reflective moments during the practice as an educator, particularly about a phenomenon (teaching) that are often operated at a

tacit level by continuously seeking for evidence of the embodied knowledge, the transformation of the embodied values as well as logic. Thus, I moved ahead in developing a model for critical self-reflection, श्रवण (LISTEN)- Listen, Introspect, Share, Try, Express, Nurture, a living model as an adaptation of a blend of the eastern Vedic and western modern philosophies that I have unconsciously made a part of my life which I figured while trying to explain my educational influences as a part of my action research to nurture EI among educational leaders in Nepal (see chapter II).

The idea of transforming new philosophical ideas into revolutionary activities has been the central idea of research in critical self-reflection. Kemmis and Smith (2008) bring the notion of praxis as a cycle of action-reflection-action to enable individuals to reiterate the process of consciousness, and critical reflection. Starting my journey of teaching as a TFN fellow, I relate more with Freire's (1986) idea of an activist pedagogy in which the teachers are activists who have the responsibility to guide the students to find their identities within their socio-cultural context and help them in the process of struggle against injustice. Thus, in contrast to the "banking model of education" in Freire's "problem-posing education", dialogue plays an important role in bringing reflective practices in the process of transferring information. Singh (2012) explores his personal and professional journey to understand his notion of praxis and comes to the understanding that the socio-cultural setting of Nepal where he grew up played an important role in it. The action research with special emphasis on the reflection and self-reflection of actions that he performed in his classroom helped him liberate himself in the process of producing practical knowledge in his and his students' everyday lives "to develop what Freire (1972) calls 'critical consciousness'" (as cited in Singh, 2012, p. 434). With this

critical consciousness, I realize how my biographical roots, as well as roots of my emotional literacy, have shaped my development as an individual.

As I begin to reflect on my sense of identity as an education leader, I feel it is extremely important to critically reflect on how I can improve what I am doing as an education leader working on EI in Nepal. Whitehead and McNiff (2006) argue that the best way to make others understand and practice something is to show how you do it yourself by conducting your own action inquiries. prompting me to move ahead for my Ph.D. study on the same; the study in which I would not only be improving professionally as an educator but also as a fellow human in my personal life.

Purpose of the Study

This research aims to develop a living model of critical self-reflection to promote and nurture EI among educational leaders working in various social contexts of Nepal.

Overarching Research Question

For the study's purpose, I came up with the guiding overarching research question –

How could I develop a living model of critical self-reflection to promote and nurture EI among educational leaders working in multiple social contexts in order to garnish my/our professional learning experiences?

I also reflected on the research questions that emerged throughout the process as supportive research questions.

1. How can I support educational leaders in enhancing their emotional literacy?
2. How can I support educational leaders in their critical self-reflection to foster EI in everyday practice?
3. How can I create a safe space for critical self-reflection amid unsafe times to promote and nurture EI among educational leaders?

In answering these supporting research questions, I also explored the relationship with my mother and how has it impacted my leadership journey as a part of my critical self-reflection given that it has been taking a considerable space on my mind unconsciously as an educator working on emotions.

Rationale of the Study

The rationale behind developing a living model for critical self-reflection for educational leaders stands on the premise of how the educational leaders can reflect on the dynamics that go beyond conscious awareness and bring the role of emotions into the discussions of learning and meaning-making process in transformative learning in their context (Dirkx, 2006). Here the living model for critical self-reflection means contextual, action-based, harmony enhancing, empathy-based, and value-based model (Lane & Roberts, 2022). It can be a sample model for both the novice as well as the experienced educational leaders. Culture plays an important role in understanding leadership practices. Emotional management as well as social management practices, which are crucial components of EI, are termed as embedded in the socialization process in an eastern culture where collective goals are prioritized over individual goals.

Eastern critics have found the discussion of emotional intelligence as western. Leung (2005) highlighted that the leaders from the eastern part of the globe are already expected to be moral, to display proper behaviors, and to work on the collective well-being due to which emphasizing it more has the potential of emphasizing emotional blackmailing (as cited in Long & Pang, 2016). Thus, the living model of critical self-reflection is the response to the existing discourse which associates EI with emotional blackmailing. The action-based model intends to highlight more personal growth through transformative learning of self that benefits social relationships in response to the arguments that the ability model that underlies relationship skill is only a part of it (Caruso et al., 2002). Critics of EI have also pointed out that leadership is more about long-term profitability for the organization than about the employee well-being and have connected that with the educational institutions and teacher-wellbeing as well (Locke, 2005). However, in Nepal, the socio-cultural underpinnings have conditioned the educational leaders in such a way that the students are found to have become the victims in most cases where the teachers lack the skill of emotional awareness and emotional management (Khanal, 2015). Thus, the introduction of the model can potentially contribute to address the contextual need of the educational leaders which intends to support the other models of EI to help the educational leaders grow personally and professionally. Apart from that, this study can inspire other researchers to explore their socio-cultural context, develop their contextual model for critical self-reflection, and foster EI.

Delimitation of the Study

The study is delimited to explore my participants' emotional literacy journey as an educational leader who voluntarily participated in the study that was carried out through three action-reflection cycles. Due to the pandemic, it is delimited to

conversations and reflections based on virtual platforms. It is also delimited to the learning associated with critical-self reflection and if the adapted model of critical self-reflection was applicable in their journey of leadership. Similarly, since I grew up in a traditional Hindu family, the study is delimited to connecting the notion of emotions with only eastern Hindu perspectives.

Structure of the Study Report

Chapter one is the introductory section of the whole thesis where I set the scene and unpack my research agenda. I present my purpose of study, research questions, and the delimitations of the chapter. I have used auto/ethnographic writing style in this chapter and connected how the disorientation created because of the dilemma between my ideal moral self and the real self had brought confusion in my life which I navigated through emotional literacy. Here, I also explain the relationship with my mother and set a base to explore my journey of educational leadership in relation to it. Then I explain the model for critical self-reflection that I have adapted from my readings श्रवण (LISTEN)- Listen, Introspect, Share, Try, Express, Nurture, a living model to nurture EI in Nepal through emotional literacy.

Chapter two includes my journey of emotional literacy as well as the literature review related to emotional literacy and critical reflective practice. I also share my theoretical perspectives and present the socio-cultural aspects of emotions according to eastern Vedic notions and Hindu philosophy and relate that with the western perspective of EI. Then I explain my conceptual framework based on the acknowledgment of failure and vulnerability, keeping in mind my journey and the context with which I was starting my Ph.D. study.

Chapter three is about the philosophical underpinnings that guided my research process. I move ahead with sharing my personal reflection process and

discuss the multiparadigmatic research design space that I created with the wellness paradigm of being by blending multiple paradigms. I also share my meaning-making process and introduce my research methods, research site, and research participants.

Chapter four explores the research question: *How can I support educational leaders to enhance our/their emotional literacy?* In this chapter, I discuss my practice of critical self-reflection and its importance of it in my personal life as well as my professional life. Then, I move ahead to explain my first action project and how it helped to enhance the emotional literacy of the educational leaders enhance their emotional literacy.

Chapter five explores the research question: *How can I support educational leaders in their critical self-reflection to foster EI in everyday practice?* Here, I have discussed how gender and society plays a role in forming our narratives. I unpack my life journey further and go deeper into my self-study process. I and the research participants explore our journal of emotional life as a part of our second action project and reflect on that.

Chapter six explores the research question: *How did I create a safe space for critical self-reflection amid the unsafe times to promote and nurture emotional intelligence among educational leaders?* In this chapter, I discuss the importance of the community of practice to continue with any model of critical self-reflection. I also explain how I along with my research participants developed a community of practice for the LISTEN model as the third action project. Here, I also unpack the idea of safe space and its importance in practicing critical self-reflection.

Chapter seven is about exploring the idea of the functionality and the sustainability of the critical self-reflection model and its practice. Here, I explore the

relationship of the unconscious values that I inculcated as a part of my relationship with my mother and connect that with the notion of *dharma* in Hinduism. I also explain how the community of practice and the idea of *dharma* in our context can help make the practice of critical self-reflection sustainable for the educational leaders.

Chapter eight is about the reflection of our year-long research experiences and how we have evolved in this process. I dig deeper in looking into my idea of motherhood and its connection with how I see it as an educational leader. I also discuss about our collaborative reflection process among the research participants and the critical friends of the research process. We reflect on if LISTEN as a model of critical self-reflection helped EI as an educational leader.

Chapter nine is the concluding chapter in which I make final reflections on my self-study action research journey. This chapter discusses how I gradually connected with myself and my mother and figured out its implications in my leadership journey. I also explain the challenges associated with the journey and the questions that are still left to answer in this journey of exploration. I reflect on my research question, respond to them, and discuss the methodological insights, implications of the study, and research limitations followed by my final reflections.

Chapter Summary

Chapter one highlights my journey so far. With references to the casual conversations I had with my mother and the emotions associated with my relationship with her, I bring the need for this Ph.D. study in my life; both in personal and professional space. The chapter also starts the conversation that Nepali society has unconsciously planted in our head that there is an ideal woman and ideal emotion to

feel as a woman, especially as a married woman in the society in the story of my mother. *Laj manne* (modesty or shyness) and repressing anger in the public setting can be seen as the best way to go around with emotions as a woman. Similarly, it also presents how our religion plays a crucial role in our journey of emotional literacy. This chapter introduces my study of exploring my identity construction as an educational leader by understanding my emotions and how the feeling of disconnection and isolation were a part of my growing process that society unconsciously planted in me. Chapter one is the introductory section of the whole thesis, as it provides the context of the study, the rationale of the study, the research questions, and the delimitations of the study. Written in an auto/ethnographic narration, the structure of the study presented in this chapter works as an outline of the thesis for the readers.

CHAPTER II

SITUATING MYSELF IN THE FIELD OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

In this chapter, I contextualize EI in the Nepali scenario intending to make sense of my own journey of emotional literacy and practice as an educator through literature review and critical reflective practice. In this chapter, I contextualize emotions where I bring the theoretical perspectives as well as the socio-cultural aspects of emotions from the eastern Vedic notion and also from the western modern perspectives, then move on to contextualizing emotions in the context of Nepal. Then, I bring the idea of EI in the context of Nepali culture, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) policies, and practices, and research in Emotional Literacy, and EI which helped me understand the significance of inculcating critical self-reflection among educational leaders to nurture EI. Then, I discuss the relevant theories in emotional literacy, SEL, and EI that helped me develop my conceptual framework that fostered the value of acceptance for failure and vulnerability.

Emotions: Foundational or Contextual?

“Human stupidity, the cause of this uncanny”, they say.

Is it?

Human- H...U...M...A...N...

Meaning - ‘relating to or characteristic of humankind.

Stupidity - S...T...U...P...I...D...I...T...Y...

Meaning - 'behavior that shows a lack of good sense or judgment.

Can a human be stupid?

Can anyone stupid, be human?

Is it irony or an oxymoron?

I wish I had an answer.

With everything going on,

I myself feel less of a human.

Darwin said, "Survival of the fittest."

Did he mean the intelligent ones or the adaptive ones?

This mess; like a maze.

The more I use my intellect,

the more stupid goes this human brain.

What makes me a human? That too an intelligent one? I agree with Jung (1970), who admitted honestly that the modern (hu)man is victimized by their grandiloquence and is suffering from feelings of inadequacy, insignificance, and hopelessness. Without the honest admission of how bankrupt modernity is if the (hu)man only highlights the higher level of consciousness without acknowledging the past they become 'pseudo-modern' in the eyes of Jung. I am fearful if I am a pseudo-intelligent too; someone who is lost in similar grandiloquence of leading myself to intolerable distortions and false conclusions who will simply focus on the mechanical

definitions of emotions. In the hindsight, who herself does not consider her as religious if associated with God, I struggled to connect to Jung's (1970) notion of emphasizing the superiority of God and its acknowledgment of it for their joyous existence. Being born and brought up in a highly religious family, for 16 years of my everyday life was planned in and around glorifying and praising the existence of God. I started my morning by worshipping Gods and then being mindful of not doing the deeds that Gods don't like and ended the day by worshipping the Gods. I remember my mother putting on a red *aabir tika* every morning which I hated as no one in my school used to do so. Even my *Brahmin* friends did not do so. However, I had to put it on for my mother. As soon as I completed my SLC, that was the first thing that I left doing to show my disassociation from my mother. But somehow I feel like even without that red tika, I carried the notion of obedience to the culture within me. Exline and Rose (2005) argue that questions about meaning of life can arise from both the religious contexts as well as the response to the suffering and struggle associated with the religion. If religion is looked at from the social perspective, there are different ways of being religious: intrinsic and extrinsic, and quest. When an intrinsically motivated person lives the religion, the extrinsically motivated person uses it and those who see religion as a quest to strive for growth and seeking (Donahue & Nielsen, 2005). With the multiple narratives surrounding me questioning the existence of God, I slowly started seeing religion as its implication with values rather than the grandiloquence associated with a figure with superpowers. Mezirow (1996) argues that we are trapped in our culturally unique frames of reference but through validated discourse, with critical self-reflection, a new synthesis can be developed. Thus, the struggle continued the more I started understanding the structures of power in the

society and the power that our culture has vested in Gods making me question the existence of Gods.

Grillo (2017) comes to the rescue as he brings critical realism and psychoanalysis together by overlapping Archer's (2000) view of emotions as "consciously appraised concerns" related to human interactions with orders of reality and Fromm's (2013) view of emotions as a part of character structures relating to assimilation and socialization. Archer (2000) and Fromm (2013) both have their thoughts against extreme constructionism and determinism and are rooted in Marxism where they both see "individual psychology as the lynchpin in the articulation of social structure, culture, and individual behavior" (Grillo, 2017, p. 1). I was particularly interested in Grillo's idea because him bringing Archer's and Fromm's notion of emotions meant bringing the idea of reality and morality (ethics) together. For Archer, humans act within the constraints of social structure, which I could relate to my real self. For Fromm, humans can track the specific social conditions and adapt in a way that serves humanistic ethics which I could relate to my moral ideal self. Taking into consideration both the realist social theory and moral authoritarian ethics, I could see emotions as an emergent phenomenon that arises based on the human interaction with the context.

With this understanding, I started exploring the model that captured emotions as the conjunction of social interactions and relationships where the emotional responses are tended to be functional within the specific socio-cultural context. Mesquita and Boiger's (2014) socio-dynamic model of emotions incorporates both. The socio-dynamic model does not "deny that emotions are biologically constrained yet it takes seriously that emotions are situated in specific contexts" (Mesquita &

Boiger, 2014, p. 298). With this, it was important for me to further explore the evolutionary perspective of emotions while at the same time critically examining how they are shaped by natural selection to adapt and adjust to respond to the threats and opportunities present in the environment or the context. Nesse (1990) argues that the evolutionary explanation of the formulation of emotions should be based on the description of the challenges of the contextual situations of the adaptively significant categories with the argument that each emotion has a function to fulfill in the course of our adaptation and evolution.

The central point is that to understand emotions, it is important to understand their functions along with how the emotions work. It takes us back to Darwin's (1872) explanation of emotions as a universally recognized non-verbal expression that is transmitted by Lamarckian inheritance without recognizing the multiple functions of various kinds of emotions. Lamarckian inheritance is the notion that an organism can pass on to their characteristics to their offsprings acquired through use or disuse. Ekman (2009) considered Darwin's contribution as the "first pioneering study of emotions" and in his view the book *The Expressions of Emotions in Man and Animals* as the "book that began the science of psychology" (p. 3449). Ekman and Friesen (1969), however, had questioned the distinction between the indicator and the communicative signal of the expressions while explaining Darwin's contribution to our understanding of emotional expressions of emotions relating them with the body movements and explaining the gestural slips. Later Tracy (2014) also brought the idea of how the same facial expression of emotions can have different meanings across cultures communicating a particular message in a particular context.

Going through Russell's (1991) categorization of emotions based on different languages and cultures not from what the outsiders observe but what the insiders see among themselves helped me understand the adaptive significance of emotions and how socio-cultural context plays a role in it. The ethnographic and cross-cultural studies on emotion lexicons, emotions inferred from facial expressions, and dimensions implicit in comparative judgments showed both the similarities and differences in how emotions are categorized in different cultures and languages. The similarities were derived from the argument from Darwin (1872) that stems from the thought that the communication of emotion, both the expression and its recognition is a part of our biological heritage. Fodor (1981) also argued that since most of our concepts are innate, there will be similarities associated with emotions even in different cultural contexts. On top of that, some emotions like fear and anger are categorized as an undefinable semantic primitive, making the idea of emotions universal (Boucher, 1979; Johnson-Laird & Oatley, 1989). I was particularly intrigued by the skepticism brought by linguist Wierzbicka (1986) who brought the reference of Polish language and questioned if disgust is one of the fundamental emotions, what if the psychologist working on the fundamental emotions is the native speaker of Polish, the language that does not have the corresponding Polish word for 'disgust' (as cited in Russell, 1991). Basic emotion theory proposes that human beings have a limited number of fundamental emotions. Plutchik (1962) proposed eight basic emotions; anger, fear, sadness, disgust, surprise, anticipation, trust, and joy. There are ten fundamental emotions according to Izard and Buechler (1980); interest, joy, surprise, sadness, anger, disgust, contempt, fear, shame/shyness, and guilt. Ekman (1992) brought the idea of combining the fundamental emotions to form complex or compound emotions and shared six basic emotions; fear, anger, joy, sadness, disgust,

and surprise. Therefore, the more I explored emotions, I could relate more to William James's (1880) lamentation in which James had written how he was overburdened by logics in scientific psychology in his classical work and needed change (as cited in Nesse, 1989)

Thus, realizing that the similarities in the concepts of emotions is just the tip of the iceberg and understanding the differences through cultural knowledge, folk theories, and folk models of mind, of self, and of society, I thought of starting the exploration afresh in the socio-cultural context of Nepal (Holland & Quinn, 1987). The socio-cultural exploration of emotions helped me excavate my reflective self that felt the need to explore and unravel my authentic self and figure out the answer of why for me the need to understand emotions is important when it comes to educational leadership. Kreber (2005) terms this realization as 'premise reflection' and understands this as an important aspect to gather meaningfulness in the teaching-learning process and for me, it was important to go deeper into the meaningfulness of my own name *Bhawana* (feelings) to understand who or how I was as an educational leader.

Understanding Fundamental Emotions in Nepali Context

सर्वशास्त्रसम्पन्नम्

सर्वशिल्पाप्रवर्तकम्

नाट्यक्यम्पंचमवेदम्

सेतिहासमकरोम्यहम्

Lord Brahma said: “I hereby describe Natya (drama) which is enriched by all sciences and sculptures which can be considered as the *Panchami Veda* (Fifth Veda) apart from the four Vedas (Bharata-Muni, 1996).

In grade five, I used to hear my seniors loathing about how they disliked reading Sanskrit. Next year I too, had to take Sanskrit classes, I was curious and anticipative. However, when I reached grade six in 2000, we were informed that the government had scrapped Sanskrit as a compulsory subject after Maoist insurgents started attacking the teachers who used to teach the Sanskrit language (Ghimire, 2020). Amid the controversy when the government has decided to include Sanskrit in the school level curriculum starting from grade one again, I am going back to the stage of curiosity acknowledging my ignorance on the same to go deeper into the



Figure 2 Hair braided with lachhadori
source:<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/100979216630588849/>

understanding of emotions in our context. Whatever I grasp is all through the readings of the translated versions. At this stage, I realize that my trying to understand the eastern notions of emotions is not in opposition to how the west understands emotions. Moving beyond this east-west dichotomy, I want to assimilate multiple perspectives braid them, and decorate them with *lachhadori* (Nepali hair accessory) like the way Nepali women braid their hair.

Braiding, for me, is embracing the multidimensional worldview of multiple interconnected realities in order to create a global civilization of intercultural coexistence and cooperation (Taylor et al., 2012). The *lachhadori* is the image of the

understanding of self by acknowledging the complex interconnectedness of multiple cultures and perspectives, resulting in transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991). Acknowledging the interconnectedness and braiding for me also meant the weaving of languages. Hidasi (2017) argues that “human interconnectedness would not work without three significant attributes of our human nature: culture, language, and communication” (p. 62). With 44.6% of the population speaking the Nepali language, the national language of Nepal (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2013), I felt the need to go back to its roots and understand how the emotions are viewed in our language. The Nepali language is developed from Sanskrit which, the cultured language, is a branch of the Indo-European family, and has been handed down from generation to generation (Bandhu, 1989). For this, I referred to *Natyashastra*, compiled in India, by Bharata Muni dating back from the 1st to 2nd century A.D. which is probably considered “the oldest surviving treatise on the performing arts in the worlds and details a theory of emotion that can be compared with Western theories” (Hejmadi et al., 2000, p. 183). To understand emotion from the eastern perspective, arguments are there that we need to understand how Buddhism views it (Ekman et al., 2005; Goleman, 2004). However, because of my complete unrelatedness to Buddhism in my upbringing and the limited timeframe of my study, I felt that I will not be able to dive deeper into it. Thus, I am limiting my exploration to the Hindu Vedic texts only with which I have been acquainted since my childhood from the perspective of spirituality rather than religion. Nepal has a complex spiritual tradition where religion and spirituality are usually seen together, however, there is also a growing interest in spirituality, and its impact on people’s lives and identity irrespective of religion (Aryal, 2018).

Spirituality does have its expressions on religion but the major difference between them is that the focus of religion is on culture-based organized belief, rituals, and practice, spirituality focuses on personal experience and how one makes sense of the world and their personal meaning associated with it. Every institutionalized religion can have the elements of spirituality within it but not all spiritual beliefs can be kept under the paradigm of religion. Marshall (1998) argues that more than the formal institutionalized tradition Vedic texts address the mind and aim to connect practice with the knowledge as well as the transformation of the individual and their feelings through experience rather than their beliefs and thus considered as an important area of study for adult educators. Mushtaq Wani (2020) argues Hinduism has two aspects within its paradigm; Ritualistic Hinduism and Spiritualistic Hinduism. Ritualistic Hinduism is based on organized religion with its rituals, dogmas, and priesthood through Shastras and Puranas while Spiritualistic Hinduism is the mystical outlook towards life with the amalgamation of philosophy and mysticism through Upanishads and Yoga Sutras to reach into the state of equanimity and bliss. More than the ritualistic, I bring the evidence from spiritualistic Hinduism.

Bharata Muni is acknowledged to be the one who popularized *Natyaveda*, the fifth Veda created by Brahm, on the earth by collecting all the resources created by other *Acharyas* (ancient teachers) and making it coherent as per the requirements of time and space. It is a classical manual on the theory and practice of eastern aesthetics like theatre, dance, music, poems, gestures, and other forms of art. Dasgupta (2016) argues *Natyashastra*, also known as ‘Rasa (*Bhava*) Theory’ as the foundation of the theories that deal with emotions that not only categorize emotions into different types but also explain how those types are interconnected. *Rasas* (the juice or elixir of life), the aesthetic sentiments is the core of *Natyashastra* and categorizes *rasas* into eight

primary types; शृङ्गार (*Shringara*/erotic love), वीरं (*Vira*/heroism), कारुण्यं (*Karuna*/Pathos), हास्यं (*hasya*/laughter), बीभत्सं (*bibhatsa*/disgust), भयानकं (*bhayanaka*/fear), रौद्रं (*raudra*/wrath), अद्भुतं (*adbhuta*/wonder). Later on, Abhinavagupta elaborated it and also explained the ninth rasa शान्तम् (*santam*/peace/tranquility) arguing it to be like the string of a jeweled necklace allowing the jewels of other eight *rasas* to be relished. To an everlasting question in the study of emotion whether the appraisal of emotions, its experiences, the psychological components, and the facial components are universal across cultures, *Natyashastra* also explains the experiences of emotions in terms of *mudras* (facial expressions), movements, and transitions. Schechner (1988) compares Ekman's (1983) description of emotional expression with how *Natyashastra* instructs its actors to express their emotions through the photographs.

Later on, the research on emotion also included *lajya* with the nearest translations as embarrassment, shame, shyness as an emotion (positive) in the east-Asian context which was considered negative in the west (Hijmandi et al., 2000). At this stage of exploration, inspired by the non-dichotomous way of thinking (Kaplan, 1988) that considers the importance of the relational process of thinking where one acts not from the context of isolation but from the context of relatedness, I began my journey of conceptualizing and understanding emotions through the perspective of relatedness. I found this being portrayed by the image of *Nataraja*, a depiction of Hindu deity Shiva.

Here, I thought that use of god's image is not a religious one but my way of meaning-making through art, thus, a spiritual one. However, a strong realization of how religion has become my unconscious meaning-making in terms of my thoughts, feelings, and actions surfaced in my reflection later (see chapter IX). According to Vygotsky's (1986) developmental framework, meaning-making is not the private collage of concepts residing in one's head but is a complex synthesis of independent processes (as cited in Connery et al., 2010). Creativity that includes art, imagination, play, and fantasy is a transformative activity that synthesizes emotions, meaning, and cognitive symbols. Thus, the image of *Nataraj* helps me create a dialectical relationship between myself and the perspectives. For me 'self' is a relational being that has developed the sense of 'we-ness' rather than 'I-ness' (Kaplan, 1988). The 'we-ness' is between; my real self and the ideal moral self, between the western perspectives and the eastern perspectives, my meaning-making through pictures and poetry, my agnostic self, and the self that was conditioned to pray Hindu deities without any question. Narayanan (1986) argues that "though the concept of a non-dualistic, all-inclusive reality is at odds with the western worldview, scientific exploration has made it possible even for western scientists to appreciate the symbolism of Shiva's dance" (p. 208). Thus, the image of *Nataraja* aptly represents how I perceive my journey of exploration of emotions in blending both the eastern and the western concepts. *Figure 4* is an



Figure 3 Nataraja, the dancing Shiva Source: <https://depositphotos.com/stock-photos/nataraja.html>

example of how I made meaning of Plutchik's wheel of emotions with that of Bharatmuni's *Navarasa*.

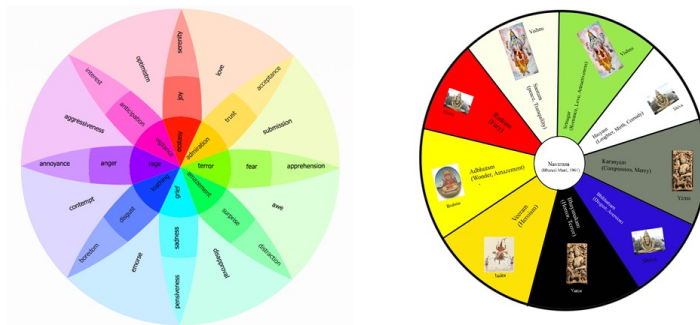


Figure 4 Trying to understand Bharatmuni's Navarasa in relation to Plutchik's wheel of emotions

In the *Nataraja* image Shiva is shown as a four-armed dancing figure within an arch of fire placing his left foot firmly on the prostrate of dwarf (symbolically represents the demon of forgetfulness)

and his two upper hands holding a sacred symbol while his two lower hands making a sacred symbol. The particular dance is known as a paradoxical dance named *Ananda Tandava* (Dance of Bliss) in Sanskrit where *tandava* means fierce dance and *ananda* means bliss (Stromer, 2010).

Similarly, O'Flaherty (1973) observes Nataraja's dance as having the dual

quality *Kama* (the erotic love) and *tapas* (severe asceticism/ *tapasya*). I grew up using



Figure 5 Nataraj pencil box, the one I used to have in my school days (Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/403987029056610093/>)

Nataraja pencils to write; my only reason for using them was the picture of *Nataraja* in the pencil box like the one shown in *Figure 5*. I was intrigued by how the deity could dance bending different parts of their body. I also wanted to dance like *Nataraja* and had enrolled myself in a dancing class but because I had to stay till late evening if I joined the class, my mother asked me not to be a part of it. Here, my mother came as a restrictive figure who was coming in between my joyfulness. I had started building resentment towards my mother. In this regard, I feel the image also signifies my curious self that had to die because of my societal context. Also, for a long time, I thought *Nataraja* was a female because dancing was associated with females but later realized it was actually a male deity Shiva. Thus, it also makes me accept that I am a socio-cultural construct who has conditioned biases that needs critical reflection and questioning.

Along with the social constructivist viewpoint, I also use the hermeneutic-phenomenology representation of expression based on the theories of Van Manen, Raquel Ayala, and Miguel Martinez (Fuster, 2019). Phenomenology is considered a human science (Van Manen, 2016) that allows us to internalize the important anecdotes of human beings through observations and in-depth conversations and then understand and explain how we are in our daily lives. Emotions have been mostly studied in terms of physiological responses, cognitive as well as environmental aspects but often the experiential component of it has been neglected (Ramaprasad, 2013). The hermeneutic-phenomenological representation will help understand the experiential component of emotions. Since hermeneutic phenomenology aims to deepen our understanding of the meaning associated with our subjective experiences, it focuses directly on existential phenomena like emotions (Willig & Billin, 2012). Dahal (2008) argues that Nepal is seeking a structural shift from reason-based

knowledge to affect-based knowledge discovery which incorporates the subjective experiential aspects that binds the ethical, moral, and social aspects of the general public. *Alankarashastra*, one of the other Sanskrit literary traditions that explain the aesthetic experience in our context has also analyzed emotions. According to *Alankarashastra*, emotions are an important aspect if anyone wants to attain *Brahman* which is the combination of *gyan* (knowledge) and *sukha* (bliss), simply arguing that for anyone to be intelligent, they need to be aware of their emotions (McDaniel, 2007). The idea is similar to Gita which explains the prevalence of *atman* (soul) deep inside everyone that cannot be extinguished by death or decay and call it a part of universal consciousness called *Brahman* (Chow Hoi Hee & Gurd, 2010). Once an individual understands the atman-brahman link, they are 'aware of being aware' and are able to find clarity and composure helping them get rid of the *dukha* (suffering). This knowledge can be obtained through *nishmaka karma* (selfless action) in the state of *tat tsamasi* (you are that) which means being able to find one's voice and connecting that voice with one's action (Sharama, 2008). The experiential aspects strongly emphasize the *sukha* (pleasure) and *dukha* (pain) as the two opposites and the emotions are seen to be arising from desires as per our ancient texts *Upanisad* and *Bhagbhad Gita*. Rosenberg (2015) brings a similar perspective as he connects emotions with universal needs. When the needs are fulfilled, one experiences pleasant emotions (anticipation, joy, surprise, trust) and when they are not fulfilled, they experience unpleasant emotions (anger, disgust, fear, sadness).

Understanding and Managing One's Emotions: Emotional Intelligence

Going through what emotions are led me further to enquire more about how does one understand their emotions. The achievement of modern literature of psychology and emotions have been ascribed from eastern philosophies, especially

through the realms of Vedic literature (Mehta, 2015). Sivakumar and Rao (2009) argue that the Vedic philosophy explains emotions as an outcome of the individual's desires for spiritualistic and materialistic pleasures. This led me to (re)explore EI in the Nepali context through the prescriptions of Srimad Bhagavad Gita as it has emerged to be one of the highly cited Vedic literature (Gangopadhyay & Mandal, 2008). Bhagavad and Gita in Sanskrit mean 'God' and 'Song' in English, thus Srimad Bhagavad Gita translates as 'The Song of Lord Krishna', one of the incarnations of Hindu deity Vishnu. The song presents the emotional conflict as the source of *dukha* (suffering) and highlights the importance of listening to emotions through the conversation between Krishna and *Pandava* prince Arjuna where Krishna signifies the morals and values and Arjuna signifies any other confused human beings like us. The conversation occurs in the 6th chapter of the epic Mahabharata written by Sage Vyasa in around 4 B.C.E and has over 700 verses.

Generally, EI is explained in three major ways: first, as the cognitive-ability model that proposes that there is variation among individuals to process information of an emotional nature and in their ability to relate to emotional processing to their wider cognition (Salovey & Mayer, 1990); second as a trait model that argues the significance of individual's self-perceptions of their emotional abilities (Petrides & Furnham, 2003); and, third as mixed model introduced by Daniel Goleman that proposed EI as a wide array of skill sets and competencies that are needed for leadership performances (Bar-on, 2000). Srimad Bhagavad Gita explains EI from the perspective of *Saankhyayoga*, the concept explained by Sage Kapila even before these three schools of thought were developed (Reddy, 2011). Saankhyayoga emphasizes the intelligence of emotions and explains the causes, the effects, and the management of emotions on *Prakriti-Purusha* (nature-human) interaction and provides the

prescriptions for maintaining ‘*sthithaprajana*’ (Balodhi & Keshavan, 2011). The idea of *Sthithaprajana* is to blend the abilities to sense the righteous and unrighteous feeling enabling the human to be ethical in deeds (Sivakumar & Rao, 2009). The interaction of nature and humans leads to the “evolution of *indriya* (senses), *buddhi* (intelligence), and *manas* (mind) in human and the ability to use *indriya*, *buddhi*, and *manas* wisely liberate *purusa* from the bondage of *prakriti* enabling the control of emotions that make *purusha* intelligent” (Mehta, 2015, p. 43).

Reaching here, I can understand that the dilemma that I had between my real self and the ideal moral self is a socio-cultural construct where the society that I grew up in valued ethics as the highest mode of intelligence and blended righteousness with happiness and pleasant emotions. I could relate my dilemma with Lord Krishna’s empathetic listening on the sufferings and moral dilemma of prince Arjuna (Gayathri & Meenakshi, 2012). Here, I could relate to the researchers (Bhatia et al., 2013; Satpathy, 2010) who drew parallels between Arjuna’s inability to make righteous decisions and managing self which included his emotional vulnerability, anxiety, as well as despondency with that of the present-day human beings. I considered this as my real self where the ideal moral self was the prescriptions of Lord Krishna where he focused on dealing with physiological, psychological, and moral issues through empathetic listening (Bhatia et al., 2013). Vedic wisdom emphasizes the aversion of the negative emotions and nurturing positive emotions can alleviate *dukha* (pain/suffering), emotions that are often tied with social values like morality, respect, benevolence, and concern. Since the Vedic philosophies present the emotions like peace, love, kindness, endurance, tolerance in the positive light, and the emotions like anger, greed, lust, hostility in the negative light in terms of amicability (Bhatia et al., 2013; Gayathri & Meenakshi, 2012), in the Nepali context EI comprises of the social

sensitivity where the component of social awareness and relationship management is culturally in-built and is prioritized. Therefore, EI, being a sociocultural construct even when associated with educational leadership should be culturally sensitive.

Emotional Intelligence and Educational Leadership

A deeper look into the modern studies of EI in the Nepali context of leadership reveals that the concept of emotions, EI, and leadership are connected with ancient texts and are mostly studied and practiced from the *Bhakti* (Worship/Devotion) sense. It highlights the importance of EI in terms of showing devotion to God rather than practicing it in daily life. In Gita, it is considered as the fourth path of *Yoga*, the *Bhakti* path where the emphasis is on the loving devotion towards a higher power or principle (Keshavan, 2020). The researchers have shown that the messages of these ancient texts like Bhagavad Gita carry a universal message on leadership without any religious affiliation (Harshavardhana & Srinivas, 2021; Roka, 2018; Chatterjee, 2006). Besides *Bhakti*, there are three other tenets of *Yoga*; *Jnana yoga*, *Karma yoga*, *Raja yoga* that is relevant to the modern approaches to EI and leadership. Dr. Kedar Rayamajhi who is known to have introduced the term EI in the leadership context of Nepal emphasized the same. Though Nepali had been using religion, culture, and traditions to learn and practice EI, individual differences remained in the learning process and thus had to be addressed (Rybak et al., 2013). Dr. Rayamajhi himself got introduced to the term EI during his master's studies in the United Kingdom (UK) and was able to connect the missing dots of how Nepali learn EI via cultural and religious celebrations but do not practice in their leadership roles. That prompted him to include a few chapters on EI in the training syllabus for Nepal Administrative Staff College (NASC) (K. Rayamajhi, personal communication, June 10, 2021).

Tracing back the history of EI specifically in the context of Nepali leadership context, no published research has addressed the history of its inception and development. But historical investigation was crucial if I wanted a contextual framework to nurture EI. Thus, through the snowball sampling method, a non-probability method, I tried to dig deeper into how the discussion of EI was introduced into Nepali leadership practices. Also known as chain referral sampling, snowball sampling is used to locate difficult-to-find populations (Johnson, 2014). I used the referrals from my Ph.D. supervisors and the academic scholars who were a part of my research presentations at different conferences. From the seed respondents, my socially connected ties who were working in the field of education and educational leadership for a long time, I gathered that courses on EI were first found to be developed around 2002 at NASC, a national-level autonomous institution that provides the necessary training for employees of the Government of Nepal and public enterprises with the facilitation of Dr. Kedar Bahadur Rayamajhi. Thus, I got connected with him and explored further who also brought the reference of Gita in our conversation and shared how EI was embedded in his socialization process.

Leadership according to Gita is self-management, where one needs to be attuned with one's inherent calling, the internal compass which has to be discovered, and a guru (educational leader), is the one who (re)discovers oneself and also guides the journey of self-discovery to others (Chatterjee, 2006). The three key aspects according to Gita are: first, *svadharma* (purpose in life), the individual state of readiness for self-discovery where they have the courage to accept and adapt; second, is the individual state of turbulence where every moment is an expression of the state of interaction between three *gunas* (strands)- *sattva* (light/goodness/knowledge), *tamas* (inertia/delusion/ignorance), and *rajas* (motion/passion/greed); and the third

aspect is the individual state of reflection in consciousness, also known as *yog* which also has four modes- *jnana* (knowledge) yoga is about being aware of the self by understanding and accepting both the body and the mind through the senses and finding peace, *Karma* (action) yoga is about outward performance with inward bliss, *Raja* (royal) Yoga is about self-reflection and *bhakti* (devotion) yoga is to devote to the divine (Krishna) everything one can to achieve *sukha* and remove *dukha* from life (Chow Hoi Hee & Gerd, 2010).

Sharma (1999) uses the terms “bloom, gloom, and boom” (p.111) to describe the dynamics of three *gunas* in which *sattva* describes synergy so when it is dominant a person is compassionate and benevolent, *tamas* describes negative energy when it is dominant a person is lazy, and *rajas* describe the energy and when it is dominant, the person is dynamic and energetic. Together they make a personality profile, however, when they are functioning individually, they express the state of individual composure. Similarly, for Gita, the leaders are not the ones who control the outcomes but the individual efforts, especially what is said, thought, and done and for this, the combination of the three yogas would help the individuals find the courage within the station in life to help manage their emotions, thoughts, and actions. Present-day researchers of EI define the same as EI and argue the components of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management as the crucial components of educational leadership (Goleman, 2006; Brackett, 2019).

Jnana Yoga, EI, and Educational Leadership (The path of Knowledge)

राजविद्याराजगुहंपवित्रमिदमुत्तमम् ।

प्रत्यक्षावगमंधर्म्यसुसुखंकर्तुमव्ययम् ॥

“This knowledge is the king of education. It gives direct perception of the self by realization.”

(Chapter 9, Bhagavad Gita)

Jnana Yoga or knowledge is the awareness of one’s self as a part of the larger, universal self for Hindu philosophers for whom the goal is to liberate oneself from the limited worldview of the individual ego (Keshavan, 2020). Satpathy and Memon (2016) bring the reference of Cavell (2002) who argues knowledge as the capacity to acknowledge in human beings or fundamentally the knowledge of self. “Who am I” is the fundamental question of *Jnana* Yoga that seeks the answer that goes beyond the physical, mental, and social attributes that we create for ourselves on the basis of socialization and thus is the deeper quest for self. According to Gita, with this exploration of self, an individual is able to see oneself in others and others in oneself which is related to the notion of empathy. It further elucidates that the education or knowledge that limits or does not consider self-awareness and empathy as *avidya/Aparavidya* (ignorance) while the one that helps us become conscious about ourselves and our ego is considered the *ParaVidya* (higher/real knowledge) (Satpathy & Memon, 2016). Here, I made sense of *aparavidya* and related it with the knowledge I had gained at school and university. Rather than being focused on understanding and exploring myself, it was more focused on preparing me for the job market. *Para Vidhya* was the stage when I started being emotionally literate.

Malla (2015) uses the analogy of Frankenstein’s “mechanical monster” for the modern education system of Nepal (p. 83). The physical monstrosity of Frankenstein is seen as “having no depth and coherence to preserve it as a foundation for anything,” and its master even lost control over it and was therefore no longer able to tell it what

to do next like a machine (Cottom, 1980, p. 61). In the words of Russell (1966) machine is the modern form of Satan and its worship is the modern version of diabolism, thus the education that imparts values should not be the mechanical one.

Luitel (2009, p. 274) understands this as “mono-cultural text” and writes:

“Mono-culture

A machine, speaks heartless

A subject, bows compliance

A dissident is expelled, tyranny

No question is raised, hegemony”

The purpose of *Para Vidya* is to achieve liberation, the freedom from desires and attachments through self-awareness, understanding of emotions, empathy, and actions (Satpathy & Memon, 2016). Some of the qualities that we develop through *Jnana yoga* are; *Sthithapragya* (equanimity of the mind), *asangatva* (detachment), *Viraga* (Impassion), *Tyaga* (Sacrifice), *Sanyasa* (Renunciation), *Samyama* (Self-control), *Bhakti* (Devotion). Sharma and Gamlath (2018) introduce the concept of the Rishi Route introduced by Swami Rangnathananda in 1980 that includes jnana that offers the consciousness of self-discovery or *atmanam Vidhi* showing the connection between *Jnana yoga* and the modern-day leadership challenges. Reaching here, I understood the importance of my own soul searching before I proceed into further exploration of the relationship between EI and educational leadership. I went back to the painting that I had painted in September 2020 that had expressed shame, guilt, and disgust that was inside of me for being born as a woman. It helped me become conscious of the vulnerability that guided me towards action in service as a leader with courage.

But at the mean time, I also started questioning if this shame of being born as a woman has transpired into my disinterest in giving birth to a child.

Karma Yoga, EI, and Educational Leadership (The path of Action)

"कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्तेमाफलेषुकदाचन।

माकर्मफलहेतुर्भूमतिसङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि॥

Karmanyevadhikaraste ma phalesukadacana

Ma karmaphalaheturbhumartesanagostvakarmani

“You have a right to perform your prescribed duties, but you are not entitled to the fruits of your actions. Never consider yourself to be the cause of the results of your activities, nor be attached to inaction” (Mukundananda, 2014)



Figure 6 Representation of shame and disgust as a woman

Bhagavad Gita offers deep insight into the spirit of work in the form of Karma yoga as the science of work and provides four instructions; not to perform work with expectations, not to expect the fruits of actions for pleasure, not to work with pride,

and not to be attached with inaction (Datta & Jones, 2019). This concept according to Mulla and Krishnan (2007) is the technique for performing actions with intelligence with a positive state of mind that has the quality of absorption and service consciousness. Chatterjee (2006) argues that Karma yogi can develop emotional and mental balance for the benefit of self and for the wider benefit of humankind by not being affected by the dualities of success and failure, gain and loss, pain and pleasure, joy and sorrow. Lord Krishna's teaching to Arjuna in Bhagavad Gita explained Karma yoga as *niskarma yoga* which meant the action should be without the desire or need for the consequences but for the need of the action in itself where it is important that individuals should act with the understanding of the truth and mindfulness. The fruit of *niskarma yoga* however is the cleansing of self and purification of the *chitta* (mind/thoughts/emotions) leading altruism, a selfless concern for the wellbeing of others (Datta & Jones, 2019).

The key constructs garnered from *Karma yoga* form the heptagon of life with seven crucial elements: work, duty orientation, service consciousness, purpose, giving, focus on the present, and acceptance. Karma yoga takes the egalitarian approach to work and embraces a mindset that values the spirit of the work and the intellectual inquiry to self over the nature of the work. The key element duty orientation meant the duties that are owed to the self, family, planet which is bound up with the life-enhancing sense of service. The purpose of karma yoga is to achieve *dharma* (living righteously), *artha* (individual prosperity), *kama* (emotional fulfilment), and *mokshya* (enlightenment and liberation) collectively called *purusartha*, and should be done without having any sense of doership by being mindful of the present moment only focusing on action and not on the consequences.

Facing adversity with courage by accepting human frailty is another aspect of *Karma* yoga.



Figure 7 Purpose of Karma yoga (Datta & Jones, 2019)

Hafer and Begue (2005) argue Karma yoga is the equivalence of the belief in an equitable world that states that the individuals receive what they deserve that has been accounted for cumulatively from the previous lives. With this, it reaffirms the notion of rebirth while supporting the argument that each individual is responsible for his or her well-being and suffering (Radhakrishnan, 1926). I found it skeptical.

My skepticism is not an array of a simple doubt

On spiritualism or,

On philosophy or,

On God or,

On rebirth,

But it is a distortion, critical distortion that

Mezirow considers as the first step towards transformation. I wanted to explore further.

Going through Mulla and Krishnan (2008) further, I was able to understand how Karma-Yoga constructs are connected with Rokeach's (1968) three distinct domains of human personality and thus can be connected with EI and educational leadership. Human personality consists of observable behaviors, the affective domain consisting of emotions, feelings, and attitudes, and the cognitive domain consisting of reasons and evaluations. Keeping aside the idea of rebirth, Mulla and Krishnan (2008) were more interested in values and moral values, and focused especially on the affective domain, namely empathy. Thus concluded Karma-yogi as someone who is self-aware and has a high sense of emotional management but at the meantime is also empathic.

However, just like me, Rastogi and Pati (2015) had expressed their inhibitions and skepticism towards the lack of clarity on the dimensional structures of karma yoga in the domain of leadership and EI and had explored further by reviewing four texts authored by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Swami Vivekananda, Swami Sivananda Saraswati and Swami Paramhansa Yogananda that discussed the concept of Karma yoga extensively and concluded absorption, service consciousness, and equanimity as the major construct of Karma yoga that can be relevant to the academicians and practitioners. Mulla and Krishnan (2009) also brought the reference of Burn's (1968) moral aspect of transformational leadership and connected Karma yoga with transformational leadership in the Indian context. They concluded that transformational leadership makes the followers duty-oriented who will go beyond their selfish interests, leading to the followers' moral development, given that the relationship between the leader and followers is long. Similarly, Satpathy (2008) also validated the relationship between transformational leadership and Karma yoga by linking in the four factors of Bass's (1998) transformational leadership - idealized

influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration with the four dimensions of Karma yoga identified by Menon and Krishnan (2004) - the significance of work, successful work, detachment from work and setting an example. With this quantitative study with 116 respondents in India, it was concluded that leaders practicing karma-yoga also practice transformational leadership and vice versa.

The further development of EI in the Nepali educational leadership context seems to be influenced by the same principle of Karma yoga. Because of the Maoist insurgency during those times, educational leaders were under extreme stress of uncertainty and fear, and emotional vulnerability, the need for emotional management, was considered highly important (Pherali, 2012). Thus, the component of EI was brought into the training modules of the National Centre for Educational Development (NCED) by Dr. Lava Dev Awasthi and his team after they learned about EI being provided at NASC for the undersecretary staff of the Nepal government (L.Awasthi, personal communication, May 30, 2021). Dr. Mahesh Nath Parajuli, the former dean of KUSOED also emphasized the same as he reminisced about his days as a government official during the panchayat (village council) system. He shared how he found himself being highly aware of his emotions and managing them for better relationships with his colleagues and supervisors in a very strict working environment during the 1980s, but he became acquainted with the term EI only when one of the students did research at KUSOED in around 2016 (M. Parajuli, personal communication, June 4, 2021). The panchayat system was a unique system of government introduced by the then-king Mahendra in December 1960 by leveling allegations against and then dissolving the first elected government of Nepal that was experimenting with constitutional democracy. Also known as the royal takeover that

lasted until 1990, it was “basically an attempt to idealize the concept of a Hindu monarch by combining it with certain features of other political systems” (Khadka, 1986, p. 432). So, the discourse around EI in the field of educational leadership in the context of Nepal is a subjective one, and the leaders seem to have their own personal journeys of understanding their emotions, becoming emotionally literate, and practicing EI - journeys that mostly started when they found themselves in situations of confusion, crisis, or conflict and connected with the need of the present.

Raja Yoga, EI, and Educational Leadership

The third major concept in the Bhagavad Gita is the *Raja Yoga* royal path, the path of self-reflection and mindfulness through meditation (Keshavan, 2020). It is traditionally referred to as *Ashtanga* (eight-limbed) yoga as they have eight-fold paths to attend - *Yama* (code of conduct, self-restraint), *Niyama* (commitments to practice), *Asana* (physical activity for the integration of mind and body), *Pranayama* (regulation of breath for the integration of mind and body), *Pratyahara* (abstraction of the senses), *Dharana* (concentration), *Dhyana* (a quiet activity that leads to *samadhi*), and *Samadhi* (the quiet state of blissful awareness). Kriplani and Shukla (2015) argue that *raja* yoga is the ennobling experience that elevates the mind, molds bad habits, and enables the yogi with a deep sense of peace and relaxation. In their research with fifteen *Brahma kumaris* who had been practicing Raja yoga meditation for five years with those of 15 non-meditation practitioners, though there were not much significant differences in their emotional intelligence, they have concluded that the effectiveness of meditation cannot be denied.

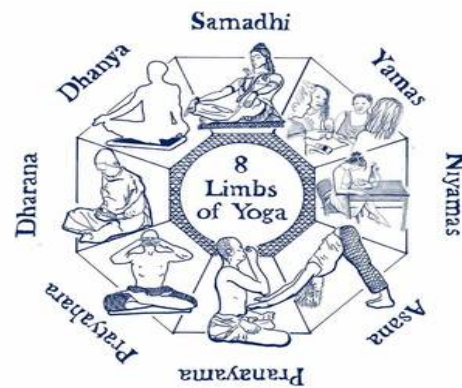


Figure 8 Representation of shame and disgust as a woman

(Source:<https://www.ashtangayogaphoenix.com/blog/the-8-limbs-yama>)

Kumari et al. (2016) connected the relationship of mediation with Bass's (1990) theory of transformational leadership. The essence of which is that the leaders elevate the desire of the followers for self-development and highlight the significance of *Sankalpa Shakti* (will-power) of the leaders. To develop which, they consider yogic meditation as an important factor. For someone like me who finds difficulty in closing her eyes and just focusing on breathing, I was wondering if I in anyways could ever reach that state of *samadhi* and does meditation only has to be that. Murty (2020) helped me make sense of that by connecting *dhyana* with *kala* (creativity) as he defines meditation as the "measurement of mind" where we measure all the elements, thoughts, impressions, opinions, and influences and can be done through introspection which can be creative (p. 2). Answering the question of how can we change ourselves for the better, something that is the key in Dhammapada by Buddha is similar to Bhagavad Gita and Upanishad's *atma vidya* (self-knowledge) through Raja yoga. Whitehead (1999) asks similar questions how can I improve what I am doing. Here, Murty (2020) connects introspection with making good use of time by giving time to reflect for the day, allocating time for some form of physical activity, eating healthy food, learning new talents, and creatively transforming our bad habits.

Taking the two major definitions of yoga, the first Bhagavad Gita, “*Samatvam yoga ucyate*” meaning “yoga is equanimity”, the second “*yoga karmasukausalam*” meaning “yoga is efficiency in action”, I could make the meaning that meditation also means finding the balance between calmness and efficiency. This also helped me understand the importance of bringing in my paintings and poetry in the meaning-making process and also in my dissertation. Reaching here, I was more convinced about my choice for representing the meaning-making process in the figure of *Nataraj*. Researchers have recommended art-based meaning-making as the mindfulness-based approaches that the educators should engage in and develop apart from the self-knowledge, and skills related to classroom and relationship management for effective teaching as well as leadership (Brunsting et al., 2014; Emerson et al., 2017), Skinner & Beers, 2016). Garista et al. (2018) argue the art-based meaning-making process as a ‘salutogenic’ or well-being generating process in which the researchers place value aesthetic understanding, reflective drawing as the center of inquiry. Art not just helps the researchers and the research participants comprehend their entire situation but also develops the capacity to respond to the adverse situation through empowering meaning-making of the situation, in short, referred to as conscientization (Freire, 1996).

Reaching here, I could notice the longstanding confusion of Nepal that is striving to embrace globalization on one hand while on the other hand, also struggling to maintain the unique, cultural identity (Luitel, 2013). Globalization is usually defined as the process of integrating local characteristics with that of the global phenomenon through the means of new communication and information technology. Globalization in education, especially has been seen as an increasing emphasis on internationalization of the courses and creation of new opportunities in research and

teaching across the countries (Twiggs & Oblinger, 1996 as cited in Abdelhadi & Ahmend, 2015). Singh (1989) argues the process of explaining this struggle as a lengthy process of accounting for both the positive and negative components that are based on the assumption that truth is coated with so many layers of untruths and has to be peeled off one by one. When kept peeling something that remains is *neti, neti*, a word of Sanskrit origin (not this, not that) where the central question is not how I feel? Or do I exist? Or what comes first? But to see it as a circular process that looks at the reality beyond cause and effect and looks at it from the multi-model lens and in a circular way. With this lens as I move ahead beyond the limitations of the origin of emotions and emotional intelligence in Nepal and stand strong on how it is being practiced and if it is considered significant to practice, a question arises - *How have Nepali educational leadership policies and practices incorporated emotional intelligence?*

Emotional Intelligence Policies and Practices in Educational Leadership

School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) for July 2016 to July 2023 by the Ministry of education, Government of Nepal has the goal to ensure equitable access to quality education for all. It has the vision to “contribute to the development of self-sustainable, competitive, innovative, and value-oriented citizens for the socio-economic transformation of the nation” (SSDP, 2016, p. V). Equity, quality, efficiency, governance and management, and resilience are the key dimensions of SSDP’s theory of change. Though resilience seems to be the only component that incorporates the goal of EI directly, the other components also signify its importance indirectly. According to the Nepal government, basic education is the wholistic development of all 4- to 12-year-old children and prepares them for the secondary

level education by promoting life skills and value-based education acknowledging their socio-cultural diversity.

Similarly, the objective of secondary education is to focus on developing skilled human resource who is technically and ethically equipped. For the achievement of these objectives, strengthening educational leadership through the planning, delivery, and monitoring of educational services and products has also been considered another significant objective. Here, the important point that must be noticed is the independent review of the School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) developed for 2009-2016. Despite the gain like the increase in the awareness of the importance of education, increase in some form of access and equity in terms of addressing the disparities linked to caste, ethnicity, religion, and geography, and introducing a set of minimum enabling conditions (MECs), the objectives related to quality, learning outcomes, and efficiency was not fully met. Even though the early learning development standards for the students include the physical, cognitive, cultural, linguistic, social, and emotional status has been identified, the teachers' development programs only ask the teachers to foster creative thinking by enabling their core skills and does not actually mention how.

The Constitution of Nepal (2015) demands a strong structural and functional reformation of the policy and the regulatory frameworks in the education system to ensure the fundamental right to education and lay down the general principles of the federal state. Nepal also being one of the member countries of the Incheon Declaration for Education 2030, it is significant that we set out a new vision for education for the next fifteen years in order to develop a strong foundation for creative and critical thinking, collaborative skills, and building courage and resilience (UNESCO, 2016).

Similarly, the Eighth Amendment of the 1971 Education Act (GoN, 2016) also ensures compatibility between and among educational institutions to move ahead with the reformation of those new programs. However, the key challenges remain as there is no concrete plan to develop the teachers' leadership capacity to help them achieve these objectives. Similarly, the Comprehensive School Safety Implementation Guidelines (GoN, 2019) prepared by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology categorize the essential school safety activities on three pillars of Comprehensive School Safety (CSS) produced by United Nations for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience; (i) safe learning facilities, (ii) school disaster management, (iii) risk reduction and resilience education. Though the guideline has specific objectives to be fulfilled by the school and how the headteachers are to be empowered for that, not much has been shared about how the activities shall be done and what major activities are to be done. Also, the word resilience denotes the resilience associated with the physical risk of the disaster rather than emotional resilience. Going through these policies and guidelines, I could infer that the existing policies highlight the significance of transformative action, however, they do not emphasize the implementation part and are also not sure of what the action looks like. With the upsurge of Covid-19, both the discourse and the action demanded a new perspective.

I also explored the teacher competency framework prepared by the National Centre for Educational Development (NCED) which focused on eight different components that the teachers must have in order to be competent: (i) content knowledge, (ii) pedagogical knowledge, (iii) knowledge about children and learners, (iv) learning environment and classroom management, (v) communication and collaboration, (vi) continuous learning and professional development, (vii) legal bases

and professional conduct, and (viii) information and communication technology (NCED, 2016). Here, the sixth component describes, in brief, the importance of reflection for the development of educators, which is one of the EI competencies and has emphasized its continuous need. Yet, there are not any resource materials that have described how can it be done in detail. They have prepared a handbook for continuous learning and development and have emphasized the significance of practitioner research, case study, and project-based learning as the necessity for the professional development of educational leaders. Through the handbook, NCED has given ideas and activities on how to perform these researches, they still miss mentioning the proper need of it and also how the educators can actually reflect on themselves, especially in terms of their emotional management. Even the headteacher training module that has been made to enhance their leadership completely misses this competency. For NCED, leadership development means instructional, interpersonal, informational, decisional, and technical development, financial management is another important skill in which the theoretical analysis of the finances along with the knowledge or relevant resources for educational institutions are considered important. It also emphasizes the educational management that focuses on resource management, both in-person and a virtual teaching-learning process. Governance, research, as well as management of training for teachers, are given spaces in the leadership training modules. These objectives are to reach the goal of school development, fostering quality of education, advancing access, equity, and inclusion, and internship in the first phase. While for the second phase with these leadership training, the leaders are expected to achieve curriculum development, build a child-friendly learning environment, and relationship management with the students. It was concerning that the component of EI was not even placed in any of these areas.

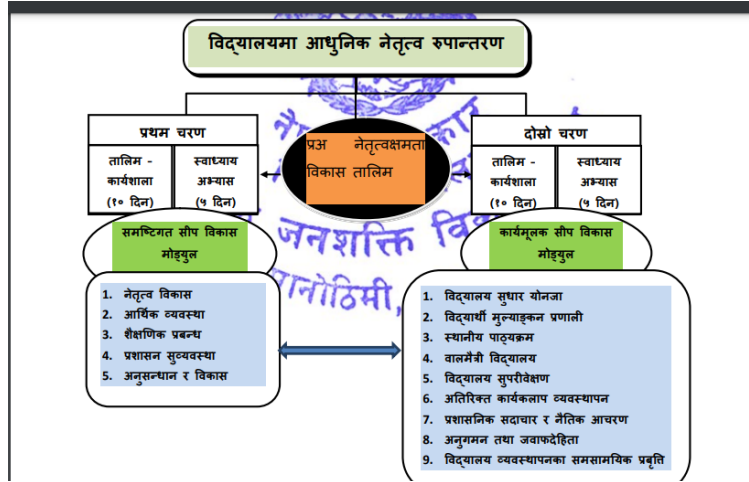


Figure 9 Conceptual framework of transformative leadership training for headteachers (NCED, 2017)

Even the quality standard of the teacher license program does not have any rubric that includes the emotional quotient. It highly focuses on content-based knowledge, classroom management skills, and some education policy-related questions (TSC, 2021).

Here, am I complaining that the teachers should not be content-focused?

Oh! Of course not.

However, I sort of felt disconnected from my students

When I had mastered the content,

I was the topper of my batch

The one who felt disappointed when the students wrote 'd' in place of 'b'

'b' in place of 'd'.

I felt furious when they wrote 'an' in place of 'a' and 'a' in place of 'the'.

My students were not learning,

more than that they were not expressing;

the turmoil they were going through.

I definitely passed all the tests that would call me a teacher,

But did that actually make me a teacher, a leader that my students were in
need of?

The exploration continued and I had a query if the government is more focused on content, how about the educational institutions themselves? What do they look for in their educational leaders? The research figured out the gap between the focus on relationship building and self-management, and how the self-awareness component had been missing.

A comprehensive, longitudinal three-year study of nine schools from Morang, Dhankuta, Kapilvastu, Chitwan, and Illam concluded that the leadership effort is generally focused on four areas; (i) primary education program, (ii) access, (iii) educational quality, (iv) management and capacity building. The report also highlighted a few remarkable characteristics of leaders like dedication to their duties, transparency, management of their time and obligations, and maintaining relationships (Amatya et al., 2004). Danai's (2021) research concludes similar findings with his research among five headteachers of Dhading district's public schools. Though educational leadership is expected to bring outstanding performances and academic achievement by building positive school culture, the focus is not exactly on how. Also, amid all this, the head teacher's personal growth and their reflection have not been seen as something to be pondered on even when they are expected to bring the transformation.

Another qualitative study that examined the leadership practices of three award-winning high schools of Nepal revealed that the transformation was because of the high level of interest, collaboration, relationship with parents, working on recruitments, designing innovative programs, and not indulging in any political activities (Khanal et al., 2019). Six community schools and six private schools across the country are annually awarded by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology as a part of National Education Day and two of the schools that participated in the research had received the award twice. Apart from what the leadership traits are concluded for the transformation something that I could again see was the standard of choosing the best school was again based on the average GPA obtained by the students in their SEE exams and the total number of students registered in grade nine. Similar research with three government-rewarded community schools in Devdaha Municipality, Rupandehi district also shows the importance of transformative leadership and points out similar traits of the educational leaders (Dhungana, 2020). Even though the definition of transformational leadership has embedded emotions as its component, the research does not focus on it. Northouse (2016) argues that “transformational leadership is concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals. It includes assessing followers’ motives, satisfying their needs, and treating them as full human beings” (as cited in Dhungana, 2020, p. 635).

This led me to further explore what other private initiatives are being taken by the institutional schools or the training centers to bring in the components of EI in their training programs. I found a handful of organizations working on them, however, the ideas they were sharing were very vague and also how each and every problem was connected with lack of emotional intelligence as a marketing gimmick.

Wonderful Skills (pseudonym), had called for the training for the leaders in their advertisement simply by asking a few generalized questions if they feel they are constantly performing poorly, if they criticize others every day, or if they are constantly angry. First of all, these questions are very generic, and importantly until and unless an individual is critically reflective, it is not easy for anyone to answer these questions positively to enroll in the sessions.

The other challenge to include EI in any training module was the heavy fees the international training institutions were charging. The Intellectual Mind (pseudonym) is a UK-based training organization that had self-paced certification training for leadership development. Though the course content provided in the syllabus was specific compared to Wonderful Skill, the price it mentioned for its 90-day course was similar to what an average Nepali pays for a two-year degree program. Here, I noticed that the outlines provided were not relevant to the Nepali context that we are living and working in every day. I sensed similar problems in the few other foreign-based institutions that I could get access to.

Unlike them, Ankur Counseling Center (ACC), a non-governmental organization that has been operating since 2009 seemed to provide ethical and effective training sessions on EI contextually. However, the training was focused on the children rather than the educators themselves. The founders of ACC also believe Nepali “educators are not often able to give their attention to children’s emotional intelligence” as they are unaware of it (Rybak et al., 2013). Similarly, World Without Anger (WWA) is another non-governmental organization and also the sister organization of Life Without Anger (LWA), USA has been working in Nepal since 2007 with its program emotional literacy. The goal of the organization and the

program is to foster EI to contribute to Nepal's peace process. In association with Lumbini Bauddha University (LBU) had introduced its first two-day emotional literacy training for 40 teachers and five drop-in centers with the goal to nurture 800 school students and 250 drop-in centers through them and had also declared Nepal as the first country to introduce this training on the national level. By 2019 it had reached 30 schools in and around Kathmandu with 1200 7th and 8th-grade students learning their curriculum 'Life Without Anger' and 34 new teachers teaching them. The emotional literacy program and the book aim to transform the preaching of Buddha to engage in a peaceful lifestyle, especially focusing on the emotion of anger and how the efficient management of it can transform into peace (Sewa Nepal, 2012). The founder of the World Emotional Literacy League and the founding patron of World Without Anger in Nepal himself wrote that the reason Nepal was chosen for the revolutionary concept was that Nepal has a unique history of being able to resolve conflict in a peaceful manner and Nepali citizens requested the project themselves (Leuven, 2010). I was eager to learn more about the program and its reach at the current stage but with the death of Leuven in 2019 the email that he had been handling for WWA had been inactive and the other website resources have not been updated much. However, I could infer that the programs were also mostly for students' development, and even the teachers who had been provided the training were basically to teach the book written by Leuven for the student's development rather than the leadership development of the educators directly.

Reaching this point, I had the question of what qualities of EI do the teacher education programs enhance in higher education. For someone like me who had never sat down for a teacher license program or had ever been in a formal classroom of teacher education course during my higher education and University days before my

Ph.D., there might arise bits of skepticism as to does it even matter me trying to understand what the teacher education program has. And I had been asked this question upfront as well. I remember my interview with the research committee of KUSOED for the enrollment of my Ph.D. after my research proposal presentation where the associate dean had asked if I am too young to even decide that I want to research on educational leadership that too in association with EI is what I want to move ahead with my Master's degree in English Literature and my M.phil degree also in English. I would like to repeat the same answer with confidence which I had answered then with a little bit of nervousness.

I find my alignment with postmodern educators' argument that what we tend to believe about ourselves, actions, problems, and even solutions are not only the representation of our neutral skills but are in fact subjective and is dependent on our emotional experiences (Schutz, 2000). The careful consideration of this socially constructed taken-for-granted information is not only through rational and scientific methodology but can be partial, fragmented, and incomplete (Baber & Murray, 2004). The reflections of my emotions like nostalgia, sorrow, enjoyment, anger have been the same, and multiple times have been through the expression of art while the other times it has been through conversations with colleagues and students. Arts-based narrative inquiry forms like stories, poems, narratives, and visuals are the ways through which I have garnered my skills and these techniques were something that my University degree in English Literature helped me develop as an educator. Apart from that my hands-on experience as a TFN fellow, a rigorous teaching program where I worked as a full-time teacher helped me grow more as a playful, non-conventional, self-conscious, self-referential, politically sensitive, and ethical postmodern educator (Diamond & Mullen, 1999). Thus, going through the contents that were designed for

the education leaders in different Universities and having some informal conversations with the students who are enrolled in the program I came to infer that there were no specific courses on EI. Whatever the students have learned is if the teachers have used the term during their lectures. Some students who were enrolled in Psychology courses even in Management degrees had a separate chapter on EI though.

The higher education research has focused on teachers in leadership positions, especially from the perspective of whether the teacher leaders were inclusive and when they were explaining the need for teachers to be ready to incorporate inclusive education. Sharma et al. (2013) while exploring the teacher education of the Asia-Pacific region through the lens of inclusive education highlighted those values play an important role in fostering inclusive learning which is one of the components of self-awareness in EI. The university degrees in education are mostly content specific while a lot of teachers' development responsibility is taken by NCED. Teacher Education Program (TEP) started its journey in Nepal in 1948 with its Basic Teacher Training Center which developed a Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) in 1997 that designed the curriculum, textbooks, and different instructional materials. This also later on, on behalf of MoE in 2007 got developed for professional development of teachers which also administered Teacher Education Project from 2002 to 2008. The components of EI which falls under life skill-based education were kept as an integrated portion in some subjects of health courses in the teacher preparing curriculum. However, the incorporation was generic (Munsi & Guha, 2014). This is what I found ironic as the objective of the TEP program is "to help the teachers do self-reflection, access knowledge and skill required for the liveliness of classroom activities, developing the habit of self-study and reading culture" (Pokhrel and

Behera, 2016). They further argue that the gap between the teachers' expectations from the TPD program and what they are receiving from them is huge.

This made me go back to the same question if I am a better fit to answer the question on education and educational leadership in Nepal and here, I gain my confidence that I was inducted well before going as a teacher in a community school as a TFN fellow which from where I began my teaching career. I imagined that was a general approach but I found it opposite after diving deeper into reflective research articles of educators. Khadka (2021) expresses her discomfort of not getting any kind of orientation when she first started her teaching career in an institutional school where she was left to struggle. Upon her conversation with her friends who started their teaching career in the public school, they figured out that some of them had received a five-day orientation while the others did not get any like her. Also, those who received did not have anything specific as the program was not managed well.

As I arrived here, I could see how the responsibilities that are to be asked from an educational leader are huge in our context while the resources provided to them are not many. Also, there are so many points from the beginning of the teaching journey where they are seen as educational leaders transforming the classroom to transforming the society where they themselves have to critically question, reflect, get feedback, and act but because of the lack of better learning channel and framework, they are struggling more. In our context, the components of EI are either learned culturally, which are not embedded in the teaching-learning process and just taken for the religious purpose or through experience when they finally grow some grey hairs. So, what if we develop a tool that embeds both, the culture and the experience and then also fits the diverse context that they are working in. This understanding and curiosity

led me to metaphorically represent educational leaders as diyobattis (oil lamp) that signify the journey of enlightenment according to Vedic philosophy. Here the oil symbolizes the negative traits that we have nurtured as humans while the cotton in the *diyo* symbolizes the self. Thus, the burning of the oil for the lightness signifies the need for critical self-reflection for one to be enlightened to connect with the self. Here I use the burning of the oil as the metaphor of continuous critical reflection of educational leaders where the leaders reflect on their socio-cultural contexts, values they have embodied, and their emotional experiences.



Figure 10 Representation of educational leaders with the diyo-battis

I resonate with Mezirow (1991) that individual experience means both my prior experiences as well as the stimulated and created experiences through practices as an educator; together, they help me reflect on my learning of new ideas about myself and my world. Critical reflection is being able to question the integrity of my deeply held beliefs and assumptions that were promoted in response to the awareness of my conflicting thoughts, feelings, and actions (Mezirow, 1991). How critically reflective I was when the society that I grew up in and the education that I was

nurtured with was similar did not bring this to the forefront. In short, I was not and most importantly I even did not know the importance of it and the need for looking at it from a socio-cultural perspective. For a very long time, I as a teacher found my role limited just what my teachers had thought for themselves when I was a student. In one of my TFN's demo training sessions, I remember asking a question to a student (a fellow teacher). When the student was going to answer the question, I asked the student to first stand up and then answer the question. I had done what I was asked to do as a student in my fifteen years of formal education. However, after my session, the head of the training asked me the reason for making the student stand up before answering the question. I did not have the proper answer then but it made me realize how a lot of my practices were engraved in me unconsciously and I never asked myself why do I do what I am doing. Gradually the engagement in dialogue with the self and others in these kinds of incidents helped me foster critical reflection. In this process, I have also come to understand the importance of emphasizing making the dialogues relational and trustful, most of the time, making it "highly personal and self-disclosing" rather than analytical (Carter, 2002, p. 82). This helped me understand that the interdependent relationship between experience, critical reflection, and dialogue potentially leads to a new perspective. So, I had a query *what type of research would help the educational leaders improve the critical self-reflection to nurture their EI?*

Research in Critical Self-Reflection

Although critical self-reflection has been seen as a part of educational research (Desautel, 2009; Gun, 2010; Lew & Schmidt, 2011), I could not find any significant research that specifically looks into this through the lens of emotional intelligence. They are either seen separately or as a part of research methodology but not as a

crucial factor to nurture EI among educational leaders. Meanwhile, the debate between who is a true educator in our context has been in the educational sphere for a long time.

Who is a true 'guru' then?

Are they born?

Or, are they made?

Guru Dronacharya, Confucius, Socrates, or Rousseau

The history and the mythology say true teachers are born.

“It's the most damaging myth” argues researchers like Darling-Hammond

(2006)

If someone says, “good teachers are born and not made” (as cited in Singh, 2012, p.

428)

I found the research by Gautam and Luitel (2013) in the research traditions itself a part of critical self-reflection that I can relate to with Freire's (1986) notion of critical consciousness. They have taken the metaphor of *Mokhya*, meaning receptive and perceptive for liberation in Eastern epistemic view and here the research practitioners are meant to be aware of the colonial practices in the Western Modern Worldview (WMW) that may not explore the social complexities. Through the metaphor of *Mokhsya*, the researchers are able to envision a third space in the research methodology itself where they realize the importance of both east and the west and draw the best practices by being aware of the hegemony of the WMW and seeing beyond it. Similarly, Dhungana (2021) brings the notion of Eastern Wisdom Tradition (EWT) and proposes a satvic framework for critical self-reflection to promote *satva*(goodness) among educators and terms this as a significant educational responsibility. She highlights the significance of participatory action research design,

and dialogue to make it a context-responsive approach that not only helps in building a culture of inquiry but also enhances joyfulness in the teaching-learning process.

Going through these research, I could see a huge scope to better understand and develop critical self-reflection as the competencies of EI in the education system and transform the educational leadership practice in the context of Nepal. Nepal is one of the countries in its quest for rapid development, among many low and middle income countries that have emphasized expanding their educational systems (World Bank, 2022). The New Education Plan (NEP) that was developed in Nepal recognized the quality of education that students were receiving, particularly at the primary and secondary levels, were not satisfactory and attempted to deal with them in late 1971 (Mohsin & Kasaju, 1974). The evaluation of the NEP was found to be caught between two non-complementary forces; the need for a sound approach to meet educational and manpower requirements, and Nepal's requirement for political modernization (Hayes, 1981). According to the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2000), Nepal initiated a number of education reform policies during the 1990s in line with various reports of education reform commission and committees and donors' recommendations. But the 7th amendment of the Education Act has been a major breakthrough in education reforms in Nepal with a huge amount of money being spent on education. However, the progress reports of the programs that were launched observed far less achievement than expected in comparison to the number of resources being spent (MoE, 2003). The main reason behind the failure was attributed to the top-down management approach to education reforms and the problems in the adaptation and institutionalization of education reform measures (Ghimire, 2005). Learning from its experiences, Nepal Government adopted a new School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) in 2009 with three broad objectives: (i) improving school access, equity, and

inclusiveness; (ii) enhancing the quality of education; and (iii) strengthening institutions and governance. It had an intention to restructure a well-articulated 12-year system. In an evaluation of the SSRP done by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) (Poyck et al., 2016), it was concluded that though the programs were relevant, sustainable, and efficient, they were less effective in meeting their objectives. They further recommended that these school intervention programs should be made participatory right from the design phase, and should be made more result-oriented than policy-oriented. Without leaders who understand, accept, and work with the emotions associated with school reform, the intellectual, collaborative, and social capacities of students and teachers never reach their full capacities. For that critical-self reflection is highly important thus developing a framework for critical self-reflection for educational leaders is a priority in leadership programs in leading transformative operations and interventions in education, especially in the context of Nepal.

In the context of educational institutions, research has confirmed that effective leadership by educational leaders help to increase the achievement of students and give a clear sense of direction to their institutions (e.g. Hessel & Holloway, 2006; Jacobson, 2011; Melton et al., 2013; Gohlmann et al., 2018). However, this 21st century is an era full of uncertainty, complexities, and chaos, thus making the leadership journey of educators cumbersome (Reimers, 2006). On the one hand, worldwide integration of the education system with the huge mobility of students, educators, and the emerging trend of the market for academicians and researchers in the international arena has forced the educational leaders to adopt a global educational curriculum to cater to the needs of the present. While on the other hand, with most of the under-developed and developing countries on its list, Nepalese educational leaders

face the challenge of working on all-around development of the student as well as the education arena (Bhattarai, 2009). For educational leaders, trying to find a balance between understanding their own values and principles, and also understanding the cultures, values, and perspectives of all students and their families seem a daunting task (Luqman et al., 2012). For this reason, EI, especially critical self-reflection has been considered one of the most important descriptors of effective leaders because it supports the educational leaders in confronting such emotions, especially during the time of school reform initiatives (Goleman, 1998).

Emotions, if managed, can bring trust, commitment, and loyalty, which are crucial to derive the greatest outcomes when it comes to innovations, accomplishments, and gains of the educational leaders (Cooper, 1997). Critical self-reflection in EI is about being able to influence without manipulating or abusing authority by perceiving, learning, relating, innovating, prioritizing, and acting in ways that take into account and legitimize emotions, rather than relying on logic or intellect or technical analysis alone (Ryback, 1998). Education institutions will be prone to sensitive issues like bullying and harassment if the educational leadership practices ignore emotional intelligence (McCarra & Forrester, 2013). Bond & Shohet (2005), in their autoethnographic account highlighting the significance of non-violent communication in education bring the collective belief that human beings are to be controlled and punished to create the educational system and thus, share the need for the strong willingness of educators to listen, empathize, and be vulnerable. Therefore, the need for developing EI is extremely important for the educational leaders as it encompasses sensitivity to the needs of the individual; the ability to observe and intervene in group processes, and competence to resolve conflict in a non-threatening and non-defensive way as it helps managers deal with the emotional needs of others

empathically, rather than through the use of coercive or bullying behaviors (McCarthy et al., 1996).

In the meantime, Nepal is also prone to natural hazards, civil strife, political instability which has been hampering children's learning environment. As Nepal moves towards the path of academic advancement, the role of emotional intelligence has become critical for the leaders, most importantly academic leaders as the emotional intelligence of leaders matters twice as much as cognitive abilities (Singh & Jha, 2012). Undoubtedly, educational leadership will be one of the most heavily tested skills throughout and even beyond the coronavirus pandemic (Rogers, 2020). However, as the competencies of EI and more significantly critical self-reflection are generally overlooked when skill-development programs are designed, the development of EI skills is very important to foster right away for the educational leaders themselves. With the growing conversations related to neoliberalism, the conversations related to EI has also grown connecting it with self-reliance (Harvey, 2005). Rojek (2010) argues self-reliance also means self-help, risks, and self-improvement and EI does play a role in nurturing them.

The history of Nepali education reform is a great concern of everyone in the present context (Pradhan, 2018; Ham, 2020). Several reformation efforts have already been made from structuring the classroom size to developing contextual curriculums. Similarly, strict enrollment in teachers' positions was another significant intervention in Nepali education. However, the 21st century demands some other educational reforms in Nepal, just as in all countries around this globe. With the rapid development of information and communication systems, new content is being created every next minute where the challenge is not to master the content rather to

learn from it and implement it into our actions. Therefore, knowing information and effective utilization of it are now much more important than the information itself. This change in the dynamics of information demands an intervention on teaching and learning in the Nepalese education system in Nepal in the present context where students need to be at the center as a matter of social equity rather than just be loaded with the information.

The debate is not only about content versus skills. However, it's also about being able to cope with the added pressure that is being generated every day in society with the increasing challenge. What will it take to ensure that the idea of "21st-century skills"—or more precisely, the effort to ensure that all students can adjust in this new Nepalese society, similarly what does a teacher need to add in his skills to make his/her students' ability to face this growing challenges? A cross-sectional study of psychosocial problems was done by a group of Nepalese psychologists among 787 adolescent students from 13 schools of Hetauda municipality in the central region of Nepal in 2015. The research found that one-fifth (17.03%) of adolescent students suffered psychosocial dysfunction. Male students (9.50%) were more affected, compared to female students (7.80%). The proportion of psychosocial dysfunction rose with the rise in age group and grade (Bista et al., 2016). This research highlights that besides the textbooks and content, the students' emotions should also be emphasized.

Research with 200 high school students of Lagankhel and Kalimati, Nepal to explore the relationship between emotional intelligence and hope by Katwal (2016) revealed that those students who are high in EQ are very optimistic in their life. Using the convenient sampling method, a quantitative survey found that there is a significant

relationship between emotional intelligence and the hope of college-going adolescents. It figured out that EI helps adolescents to enhance their hope level (Katwal,2016). There are other studies (Khadka, 2019) that, in one way or other, have touched the major components of Emotional Intelligence in Nepali educational practices and have concluded its positive relationship with leadership.

This led me to become more curious to understand if the students want their teachers to be emotionally intelligent, and thus for my M.phil studies, I conducted a quantitative study. With 200 high school and college students participating in the survey, I was able to conclude that every student wants every teacher to be emotionally intelligent. They want every teacher to be resilient and calm when it comes to handling their stress and to calmly listen to them by knowing their own expectations first and then that of their students (Shrestha, 2018). However, the sad part was that those students too mentioned that though the Nepali teachers have high social management skills, they lack self-awareness leading me to explore further why is that so. I found an ongoing Ph.D. research by Khadka (2019) which too had the central question to investigate the effect of the principals' EI on the academic performance of Nepali institutional schools using quantitative methodology.

This led me to the conclusion that research and publications have been done on how emotional intelligence can be helpful in the teaching-learning process and if EI has any significant relationship in leadership practices. However, less has been known about its practical implication (Gnawali, 2016; Khadka, 2019, Shrestha, 2018), especially the action-reflection part where the educational leaders could nurture critical self-reflection to nurture their EI. Similarly, the research so far has been based on WMW citing western literature and using a western conceptual framework to

investigate the relationship using quantitative measures. Thus, I started envisioning to create an interdisciplinary critical self-reflective model to nurture EI for the educational leaders working in diverse socio-cultural environments by exploring my own critical self-reflective self through self-study and also bringing in the action research design.

The Need for Action-based Research Approach for Emotional Intelligence

“There’s a constant fight,

Between me and you,

And you and me,

I worry.

Who is to blame?

You, me or the misery.”

Asked answer to anxiety.

Anxiety answered.

“None of us, sadness is the cause.”

Both went on a meeting.

Called sadness in

“Hey! Why do you always make us rattle?”

Pooping out its head like a turtle's neck

Sadness said, "Have you seen within?"

Where has your inner peace been?

The poem was written after an intense meeting with education leaders while planning for an international conference in April 2020 amid the recent outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic. The conference's overall theme was embracing the chaos and moving ahead with the time-relevant educational methodologies that could help everyone navigate the uncertainties. However, I could see a range of emotions floating around the meeting room in those small square boxes of the zoom. More than seeing, I was listening to those emotions that were surfacing in the form of conversations between them.

Faculty member 1 (male): "A lot of people are struggling on how to move ahead with the classes, we need to share what we already know about teaching-learning pedagogies."

Faculty member 2 (male): "Yes, it is but are we equipped ourselves. I am already frustrated about how I can't see the students anymore. I sense that the students are bored in online classes."

Faculty member 3 (male) : "In that case, this is the right time that we move ahead with the conference as we will learn a lot from it if we can bring the international scholars. Learning new things have been helping me to cope the stress."

Faculty member 1 (male): “Yes, I second that. But will all of us be able to contribute? What are your thoughts, Sabita (psydonym) ma’am?”

Faculty member 4 (female): “I don’t think I will be able to contribute much in the planning phase as my roles have increased after we have started our work from home. My baby doesn’t let me work”

I could sense the importance of questions and feel the need of one asking the other just a simple question, how they were feeling and if they could manage the stress? The answer from the participants of the meeting was vague but an hour of dialogue within the group helped us connect and accept our vulnerabilities. Here, I was not just having a dialogue with myself but was listening to others and responding to them as well and that was both reflective as well as liberating. This conversation also helped me understand the significance of dialogue and listening in action through a reflective lens as argued in *Bhagavad Gita*.

The challenging context of leading schools has been growing more complex day by day due to societal changes and increasing mandates. The demands of meeting these challenges often manifest emotionally in the educational leaders in the form of stress, anger, frustration, turmoil, disappointment, and several other emotions (Blankstein, 2004; Moore, 2009). In this context, it becomes crucial that the educational leaders have the skill to recognize the different emotions and the needs of stakeholders and respond in a manner suitable to the given situation (Nelson & Low, 2011). Moore (2009) argues that emotions can be “intense, disruptive, de-motivating, motivating, exhilarating, positive, and negative” and they play a crucial role in challenging the leadership abilities of any person (p.21). In this regard, the day-to-day practices of educational leaders in the frequently changing context of Nepal are of

critical importance. In a co-relation analysis done with two hundred teachers working in the higher educational institutions of Nepal under Tribhuvan University, Purbanchal University, and higher secondary education board in Nepal, it was shown that there is a significant positive relationship between EI and conflict management, a crucial social skill associated with leadership (Gnawali, 2016).

International research also supported the interdependence between EI and conflict/stress management. Research done by the Yale Center of Emotional Intelligence (Brackett, 2020) showed that students were less disruptive, more focused, and performed better in the presence of emotionally intelligent teachers. Similarly, there were less stressed and more satisfied teachers under the leadership of emotionally intelligent principals. However, seeing these kinds of changes requires transformative leadership; “leadership that is willing to realign structures and relationships to achieve genuine and sustainable change” (Elias et al., 2006, p.10). However, the main question again was how can we actually do that?

Unfortunately, current knowledge about emotional aspects among leaders of educational organizations is still limited. In the comprehensive narrative review of empirical studies conducted in the past 21 years from 1990 to 2012 from all over the world on educational leaders and emotions in peer-reviewed educational administration and educational psychology journals, it was concluded that educational organizations are increasingly being advised to select leaders who have high emotional abilities and to develop leadership behaviors that have positive emotional effects on the followers in order to enhance the desired educational outcomes (Berkovich&Eyal, 2015). Issah (2018) argued the EI and educational leadership are connected as the self-awareness displayed by the principals helped them to understand

their learners as well. It helped them demonstrate their own willingness to adapt, change, and innovate as a change catalyst. Similarly, a growing ‘culture of evidence’ supports the inclusion of emotional intelligence into the curriculum to foster transformative learning (Nelson & Low, 2011). Such understandings and research findings, however, are just the foundations, which may not carry higher significance unless they are acted upon (Kenea, 2014). Despite these meaning-makings, still, the components of EI, especially critical self-reflection are hardly made a part of the teaching and learning process practically (and scientifically) in our classrooms. Lack of inclusion of these components in the syllabus as well as problems in connecting the idea that there is poor linkage between the components of EI and other subjects has adversely affected the participation of related stakeholders in the advancement of it in our schools which eventually produces the leaders with low Emotional Quotient (EQ). The gap between these prior research findings advocating the importance of EI in leadership on the one hand, and no consideration of these skills in the schools on the other, needs to be addressed through effective action-oriented research endeavor, which calls for action-based research where the educational leaders, as well as I, could also nurture critical self-reflection for EI to enable and empower themselves.

I started exploring action research and figured that though the perspectives and methodologies for action research vary the underlying inquiry that the educators undertake with action research is to understand and improve their own practice (McCutcheon & Jung, 2009). Going through this notion, I found limited research done on how educators can improve their practices on EI (Brackett, 2018; Chen & Guo, 2018; Issah, 2018). In participatory action research (PAR), Scott-Ladd, and Chan (2004) explored the effectiveness of organizational learning if enacted by emotionally intelligent employees offered by participation in decision-making in Australia. They

not only highlighted the importance of the participative process in this but also asserted that the clarity about their role in the process, in relation to why, how, when, and to what degree they can participate will foster greater commitment and ownership of the solutions. I also explored that action research has been used as a methodology to promote the teacher's learning and to initiate cooperative learning in the classroom. Another study stressed the role of action research in breaking the dominant practices and facilitating teachers' ability to work beyond them (Johnson et al., 2019). Similarly, through a conscious effort to raise awareness about the democratic and social implications associated with collective action-based research, it enables the stakeholders to move towards reconsidering the role of academics and the role of academic institutions within community practice that can transform the pathway of future of education (Moore, 2004). In the context of Nepal, though there was multiple action research done to improve the professional development of teachers, they were mostly with school teachers working in the same context that is in a specific community school and they were mostly focused on inquiring about the needs of that context and then moving ahead with the intervention (Regmi, 2019; Rajbanshi et al., 2021). However, I could see nothing specific has been done using action research in nurturing the practices of emotional intelligence.

Year-long action-based research that I had done myself for an identified need of an institutional school located at Kathmandu in 2019 made me realize the significance of fostering EI among educational leaders (Shrestha & Poddar, 2021). More than that I realized the importance of critical self-reflection among them to understand the importance of EI. Even though a separate curriculum to foster EI among students through design thinking method was developed and executed, the problem we as facilitators faced was the lack of importance in these courses felt by

the teachers and the administrators. The classes used to get either postponed or canceled most of the times bringing forth the issue of a strike or how the students have their regular school curriculum to be prioritized for their upcoming board exams. Lack of strong collaboration between the school administration and the teachers affecting the self-directed behavior among the educators as well as the students which came as the barriers for the effective outcomes from the identified intervention programs that had launched in the school. The students were found reporting their teachers not allowing to take the sessions sharing that they are not going to be helpful for the academic development. Harre and Secord (1973) argue “self-directed behavior as self-reflected behavior that lies in the identification of ‘generative mechanisms’ which derives behavior via a self-direction according to the meaning ascribed to the situation” (as cited in Peters, 1990, p. 314). This helped me further identify the need of action research. McCutcheon and Jung (2009) argue that the significance of action research is that it characterizes systematic inquiry that is “collective, collaborative, self-reflective, critical, and undertaken by the participants of the inquiry” guided by the philosophy of improvement (p. 148). I understood action research was the way forward but I felt challenged and limited given the context of Covid-19 when the educational institutions along with the educators were severely impacted by the virus and were struggling to operate online. I knew the nurturing of EI was important more than ever but I as a researcher myself was in a completely unique position, I also understood that my own growth is also extremely important. Thus, I felt the need to seek an answer: *Which form of action research does not separate me as a researcher and includes me by helping me improve myself as a practitioner-researcher?*

An Inner Calling to Develop a Blended and Multi-Contextual Model for Critical Self-Reflection

Reaching here, I posed a supportive research question, not just as a Ph.D. student but also as the founder of an educational initiative working on EI “How can I improve my practice as the founder and educator of an education initiative to foster emotional intelligence for the transformation in self and others?” Having already started to work on EI since 2018, I had come to identify that in my experiences as an individual, continuous critical reflection and dialogues have played an immense role in enabling transformative experiences as an educator (Taylor, 1998). I also concur with the argument that, “... a greater life experience provides a deeper well from which to draw on and react as individuals engage in dialogue and reflection” (Mezirow & Taylor, 2010, p. 6). However, an incident in 2020 with the rise of the pandemic shattered me.

A live video of a 23-year-old girl’s suicide on Facebook, live in Nepal, went viral (Khabarhub, 2020). During the time of pandemic, the way it got sensationalized not only triggered anxiety in me but also made me question my own part as a citizen as argued by Robertson (2018). The young girl was in the average age group of the students I teach. Since the coronavirus pandemic, every day in one way or another, I could see someone being bullied or trolled on social media for how little they had achieved. Some were being body-shamed while others were being trolled for an opinion they had shared on some platforms. With no other options for young people during the pandemic to receive an education and learn from it, other than being online, as all the educational institutions were closed from April 2020, I started to see the adverse effects on them more than ever. The emotional and psychological

breakdown that some people were going through was huge. Meanwhile, another viral video of a 55-year-old teacher being bullied and crying in his zoom class in India for not being able to take the class properly broke my heart (The News Now, 2020). The video impacted me a lot because my mother who is of the similar age was also struggling with the sudden shift in the online platform and was crying in a phone conversation we had recently. I searched for the public platforms that showed the human side, especially in virtual media, but didn't find many that gave the right information, tools, and actions that are related to social-emotional learning (SEL) and EI. Thus, felt the need for bringing together the educational leaders from different contexts working in different educational institutions in different positions where they could not only understand their emotions and manage them during the difficult times but also feel safe. I was hopeful in developing a multi-contextual model adapting the action research approach because Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) argued that “action research aims to build communities of people committed to enlightening themselves about the relationship between circumstance, action, and the consequences of their own situation, and emancipating themselves from the institutional and personal constraints which limit their power to live their own legitimate values” (as cited in Dickens & Watkins, 2014, p. 127).

Developed as a commitment to improvement during the time of great social challenges brought about by World War II, in the mid-1940s, action research has gone beyond what Kurt Lewin had developed that consisted of analysis, fact-finding, conceptualization, planning, execution, evaluation, and the repetition of these activities (Cunningham, 1993). Cunningham (1993) further argues that action researchers may differ their methodology and even on what they choose to emphasize

in each action research cycle. While some might emphasize experimentation, others may emphasize planning or feedback.

With this understanding and embracing my value of blending both the eastern and the western notion which I had represented through *Nataraj*, I moved ahead to explore if there is any action research that blends both. My exploration led me to the understanding of the existential approach to action research. Chaudhuri (1962) argues that the “emphasis upon the need for an orientation toward pure existence or being has always been the dominant characteristic of the wisdom of the East” (p. 3). Vedanta stresses the need for human integration with Brahman (being) or with the central core of their own atman (existence) leading them to fulfillment and transformation. Feldman (2002) argues that the existential approach in action research is “focused on the need to come to a better understanding of what it means to be a teacher and to teach if we are going to be able to effect significant changes in the practice of teachers” (p. 233). Furthermore, I see myself in Feldman (2002) when he poses the question as to why there has not been much success in encouraging teachers as reflective practitioners with little changes in the way they teach even if there has been several efforts for around two decades. Even though the educators are reflecting their practices, they are not critically reflecting on their own reflection as their reflection is situated in the status quo and restricting their transformation (Denton, 1971; Feldman, 2014). As I understood existential action research further from Rearick and Feldman (1999) I could see the importance of focusing on being is equally important to focus on practice, without which the educators can feel disconnected with their own practice and form ‘we-they’ relationship and see the practice as other. But with the existential approach to action research the educator must question who they are in order for the

action research to be happening by inquiring about their own being and making them critically self-reflective.

Critical self-reflection seemed incomplete without the blend of hermeneutics, a philosophical discipline that enables interpretation and understanding of what it means to be human. Rather than making the action research methodological in orientation, focusing on the planning and execution of the action cycles, interpreting and understanding the experience throughout the meaning-making process is equally important. Especially at the time of the pandemic, I could already foresee the reluctance in the participation of the educators in the action cycle when the meaninglessness of existence was already surging in making me see “action research as a living practice” where *aporias* of hermeneutics and the theoretical/methodological practices of action research blend together (Smits, 1997, p. 285). In philosophical terms, *aporia* means a doubtful matter which compels deep thinking and difficult conversation which can also be considered as “pedagogical entry points” (Mezirow & Taylor, 2010, p. 6) that offer the chance to engage the learners in their personal dilemma for a potential “perspective transformation” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 13). With the understanding of research as a living practice, I could see that learning about research is similar to learning about my own self and with the blend of hermeneutics and action research one can find a free space to feel safe and create new solidarity that enables understanding and meaning (Risser & Gadamer, 1979).

Reaching here, I realized that a living theory action research approach provides immense ground as well as respect for the educational researcher as an agent of educational improvement and change while at the same time helping understand

and find meaning by reflecting on their being (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009). Living theory action research has been explained as the value laden explanation of the educational influences of the individuals in their learning through action-reflection cycles through which they find possibilities to imagine and modify their action plans to improve their practices (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2010)

The living theory action research could provide me the scope of conducting the action-reflection cycles where I could think of the solution for the existing challenges and develop my own living theory of practice (McNiff et al., 2009). Apart from that, it also provided a space for me to feel vulnerable that I already was by embracing the notion of ‘living contradiction’ where I could notice any misalignment in the values that I live by. Since the need to produce concrete evidence to demonstrate my living practice as an educational leader was immensely important the blend for hermeneutics in and through language both written and spoken would also be met (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009). Here emerged a supportive question-*how could I create a safe space for critical self-reflection amid the unsafe times?* To answer that I went on to explore the necessary theoretical perspectives.

Which Theoretical Glass Should I Wear?

Sipping her cup of tea

That her husband made in the evening,

She thinks how long can one have patience;

Till the time he took to prepare the tea that evening

Or the time he learned to make one?

Does patience mean the number of years that he took to realize the need to learn?

Just the basics; it's so easy, right?

Half a cup of water, half a cup o milk,

one tablespoon sugar, two tablespoons of tea.

Oh no! That's the recipe for father!

Mom has a different taste.

She does need sugar, a pinch more!

In that case, does patience mean the wait, till the date he realized its fine, to not just

dine

But to get his hands dirty

With bins and cutlery.

As she finally places the cup empty,

She reassures herself without feeling guilty.

It was never about when, where, and how he learned,

It was always about her decision that-

\it was time to finally break her patience.

It was never about what is

but always about which glass she chooses to wear to see.

I was already working on my affective self-understanding, which helps an individual understand their emotions to heighten their self-awareness and reflective practice (Mortari, 2015). However, the need for exploring the emotions and going deeper into them arose further with the sudden increase in the anxiety attacks that I started getting, which also affected my physical health during the lockdown. Although I used to have anxiety attacks before, the frequency suddenly started rising with the increase in the death tolls in the country during the lockdown. Gupta, et al. (2020) emphasizes that more than one-fourth of the Nepalese participants were found to have experienced predominant anxiety with 7 % of them experiencing depression during the time of lockdown. It felt as if I was losing my calmness and was struggling to be patient. I started getting triggered and irritated even over a cup of tea that I used to make every evening for my husband after our work out of love. I realized I did not enjoy doing that anymore and fought with him one day asking him to make tea for me. I could easily figure out I was anxious, irritated, exhausted. What had happened? Why was I acting differently, not only my husband but I was asking this question to myself.

After around a week, I had a conversation with one of my supervisors, Gael Robertson where she asked me how I was feeling and if I felt pressured to do my Ph.D. and work during the pandemic. Since we both identify ourselves as females, I felt more connected to her which led to a highly personal and self-disclosing dialogue with her. That dialogue was the medium for critical reflection for me where I reflected on my assumptions as well as questioned my beliefs as if I was engaging in a different kind of knowing and seeing through a completely different lens (Mezirow & Taylor,

2009). I realized I was seeing myself from the gendered lens which was complex in the beginning and to navigate that complexity, I started employing a critical paradigm. Through this, I could not only seek to understand or share an account of behaviors but also seek for the change in behaviors in myself (Mack, 2010). Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning was the lens that fit in properly. It loosely had two orientations; one emphasizing the personal growth and transformation through the attention provided to the context and social change, the other emphasizing the inherent link between personal transformation and social transformation. The change in behaviors then meant relating the knowledge construction with the difficult times of pandemic and adapting to cope with the complexities, and challenges that are hindering my growth as an educator. I realized that as a faculty who was working in an institution that was exploring online teaching and learning opportunities and was not leaving any stones unturned in trying to pave the way to rethinking the prevalent education system during the difficult times, the added workloads both as a teacher and a student, and the household chores that I had to do because of the work from home due to lockdown were not serving well for me making me feel even more anxious.

As I observed the increasing helplessness and vulnerability as an educator, I felt an extreme need to overcome it both for my personal and professional growth. This was a phase of 'reflective learning' (Dewey, 1933) as it encompassed two interrelated ideas: a state of doubt and mental difficulty, and an act of exploration to get rid of that hesitation. It was an uncomfortable feeling to just be in a state of on hold with anxiety unsure about what lies ahead signifying the importance of looking within for the exploration. Standing on the ontological assumption that the persons of the society define the social reality, my epistemological assumption is that knowledge is a social construction made through media, institutions, and society (Cohen et al.,

2007). Therefore, I consider using the socio-cultural approach in understanding my emotions influenced by Vygotsky's (2012) works. Though Vygotsky did not develop a theory of emotions and identity, his emphasis on the idea that emotions as socio-cultural constructions especially concerning the verbal expression of thoughts are significant which he emphasizes are similar to the non-verbal expression of emotion. Tsai et al. (2004) argue that understanding the values related to emotions in their socio-cultural settings provides guidelines for desirable emotions to facilitate emotional regulation norms and interpersonal relationships. Because one of the major functions of culture is to maintain social norms, Matsumoto et al. (2008) claim that since emotions serve as primary motivators of social behaviors, culture has created guidelines and norms about the regulation of emotions. This is further supported by Hoy (2013) with the argument that for the maintenance of social relationships, individuals are compelled to display certain emotions only. The display of externalizing and internalizing emotions are related to the socialization contexts like family, schools, classmates. Gender is considered one of the important factors in the socialization process and in setting the guidelines for the expressions of emotions (Olson et al., 2019). Gendered expectations might differ according to the culture, however, the influence of gender on emotional understanding during the process of critical reflection is unavoidable (See Chapter V).

Similarly, understanding the role of reflection and reflexivity is equally important because of my direct involvement in the process and the product of the research in developing a model for critical self-reflection. These days reflection has been found to be associated with reflexivity, however, the definition of reflection has been left vague (Alexander, 2017). Lay and McGuire (2010) argue that though "reflection by definition, is not critical", it does lay the groundwork for reflexive

practice (p. 542). Reflection can be broadly categorized into three interrelated stages; awareness, critical analysis, and change (Hay et al., 2004). Reflexivity should not be only considered as “the achievement of ‘introspection’ as an isolated mind in private contemplation, as the traditional concepts of insight and self-analysis may have implied; rather, self-reflexivity always involves an affective engagement, a meeting of minds” (Lewis, 2000, p.685). In the present times, reflexivity is considered an essential element for adults in every aspect of their lives (Debska, 2021). Mezirow’s model of transformative learning in adults describes a continuum for transformative adult learning from the simplest actions – from routine actions that do not require any special intellectual effort to thoughtful actions and introspection to actions that requires reflection. Through reflection, the person can make use of their experiences, adapt to the existing reality and develop their learning process (Debska, 2021). It starts with the awareness of a particular experience stimulated by either some uncomfortable or some positive feelings leading to the stage of critical analysis of the contextual knowledge and brainstorming of the alternatives to finally moving ahead with a new perspective (Mezirow (1991) calls perspective transformation.

Using the broader view of epistemological reflexivity, I have derived my understanding as a researcher through my involvement in the reciprocal processes of interpretation related to my being in this world (Stella et al., 2020). I have both influenced and been influenced by the experience of my engagement in the research taking into consideration how I act on the world and the world acts on me is in a loop (see Chapter VI). Therefore, I also use the hermeneutic-phenomenology representation of expression based on the theories of Van Manen (1990) through which the critical reflection of my personal position, self, and identity has been

acknowledged and seen through the subjective experience of me and my research participants in an interpretive process (Kafle, 2013).

With the increasing educational research showing the significance of emotions on human agency, learning, and decision making (Archer, 2000; Brackett, 2020; Goleman, 2005; Mortari, 2015), the emotional side of life cannot be avoided when it comes to critical reflection. Reflective analysis of one's own action and interaction, which can be developed both formally and informally, is a complex teaching-learning process among the participants involved in educational leadership (Bubnys, 2019). Zembylas (2003) highlights the significance of reflection on emotions and claims two ideas. The first one is that the construction of a teacher's identity is affective and is dependent upon power and agency, while the other is that the introspection of those components helps them gain a richer understanding of themselves as a teacher. This is something I have been able to expand on chapter V. Thus, throughout this research, I have kept 'I' at the center of my research and involved in a critical reflection that included the interrogation of my own paradigm where I am in an active exploration of ways of thinking and acting beyond my own boundaries. Sullivan et al. (2017) have focused on action research for self-study and living educational theories in their research on learning communities in educational partnerships, with a focus on action research as a transformative process (as cited in Whitehead, 2019). Action research involves an educational activity that is informed, committed, and intentional. Therefore, I will be embracing a metacognitive form of thinking focusing on the notion of teachers as researchers using the stimulated recalling and self-reporting method of thinking (Duffy et al., 2009). For stimulated recalling, I will be going through the videotape of my sessions and workshops along with my observers where I use viewing as the stimulus to recall my thinking during my practice. For self-

reporting, I will use my diaries and blogs that I write after the sessions describing my learning and thinking. This is to help myself not only to be conscious and aware of what I am doing but also to understand the significance of my practice and its effects, both positive and negative on others to enable a process of transformative learning in them.

Reflective Praxis has been used to communicate a notion of theory and practice held together and formed by a moral imperative. I use it to point clearly to a ‘moral imperative’ generated by the intention of the practitioner/s to research my practice to live my life-affirming and life-enhancing values as fully as possible and contribute to the flourishing of humanity. The praxis highlights the fundamental importance of educators creating, values-based explanations of their educational influences on learning (Whitehead, 1989), as they research to develop praxis within living boundaries. When I use the term “educational influence in learning” I am focusing attention on the idea that what is educational necessarily involves learning, but that learning, to be educational, must include values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity. As a practitioner-researcher, I have sometimes experienced myself as a ‘living contradiction’ since my values of self-awareness, authenticity, and empathy, have been denied in my practice (Griffin & DeLong, 2021). As reflective praxis is another crucial aspect to help me get the answer to my research question, I want to bind it with a strong reflective practice concept that is the theory of reflective practices (Schon, 1983). It has been classified into three types of reflection; (i) reflection-on-action (thinking about action), (ii) reflecting-in-action (reflection during the action), (iii) reflection-for-action (thought then action follows). My reflective practice began with examining the aspects of my life history, the values those stories represent, and how they affect my standards of practice.

The drive to improve my practice as an educational leader motivated me to explore my assumptions rigorously in an organized manner through regular reflective writing and having a dialogue with critical friends. Garbett and Ovens (2012) illustrate that self-study shifts the researcher from being an ‘outsider’ who looks in on practice to analyzing and improving their own practice. Drawing on a self-study research approach, I aimed to make my process of critical reflection ongoing and iterative through careful critical questioning of the written journal entries (Loughran, 2007). The writing in the journal was unstructured and an honest depiction of the circumstances and the reflections. As a researcher, I engaged in the critical reflection of my written reflections and tried to deconstruct the underlying emotions and explore the tacit knowledge that Mezirow (1991) calls ‘taken-for-granted’ frames of reference. I did this using the disposition domain framework and deconstructed my taken-for-granted frames of reference from three different domains; intellectual dispositions, cultural dispositions, and moral dispositions (Schussler & Bercaw, 2021). Intellectual dispositions are about the awareness in relation to content and pedagogy, cultural dispositions are the awareness of my own culture and my participants’ culture, and moral dispositions are the awareness of my own values as a teacher. Global pandemic COVID-19 in the backdrop helped me relate to Cooper (2013) as she brings the metaphor of series spinning plates in the air and illustrates the significance of reflective journaling for the meaning-making process by helping an individual organize those spinning plates and helping them grapple with their own sense of belonging. With the continuous exploration, I realized my living values as the acceptance of failures and vulnerability which helped me become more self-aware and empathetic. Reaching here, I understood the importance of affective understanding in a socio-cultural context through the reflection of our own goals and

values can be a good starting point for critical self-reflection to foster emotional intelligence. This made me confident to move ahead with my conceptual framework.

Hexagon of Critical Self-Reflection: A Socio-Cultural Conceptual Framework

Reviewing the formative experiences of my life from the outlook of the present, I noticed the role of emotions in my life and how difficult it was for me to understand them (see chapter I). Within all my roles, from being a teacher to being the founder of my organization, and now as a Ph.D. student, I often ask others to make careful observations about their emotional behavior, examine the tensions in their practice, and become aware of their “non-conscious cognitive processing of past experiences” (Taylor, 2001, p. 219); I also focus on improving myself as an educator to create a meaningful and transformative experience for myself. Thus, I seek my doctoral journey as a critical exploration of who I have become and a meaningful look at who I am becoming in the process by being emotionally literate myself while helping others nurture EI in them. On a side note, I also explore the relationship with motherhood based on how the emotions related to motherhood has been growing in my life. Oakley and Halligan (2017, p. 1) claim that “many of the contents of consciousness are formed backstage by fast, efficient non-conscious systems,” which are to be carefully deconstructed through critical self-reflection. However, I have also come to understand the need for a socio-cultural framework on critical self-reflection that addresses our subjectivities. My subjectivities as a child who was brought up in the plains of Nepal during civil strife, a teenager who had an identity crisis leading to disconnection with self and others, a teacher who struggled to reduce academic gaps, and a developing educational leader and researcher have continued to pave my learning journey. I have come to understand that there is a relationship between my assumptions and my experiences and thus my informed choice of choosing my “self”

and my “actions” as the data even for my doctoral studies is important. Bringing forth my journey of emotional awareness and deconstructing it through a critical lens in my educational setting, I hope to strengthen the capacities of individuals to learn by opening up a space for them to explore their emotions further and make a difference in the education system of Nepal. Exploring emotions as a blend of eastern and western perspectives inspired me to adopt both of them to develop my conceptual framework that addressed the socio-cultural gap regarding the fostering of EI in Nepal. Exploring multiple texts and theories (Brackett, 2018; Dewey, 1933; Feldman, 2002; Mezirow & Taylor, 2010; Tsai et al., 2004; Schon, 1983; Zembylas, 2003), I reached a conclusion that listening is important from both perspectives, however, listening should be active and must address the socio-cultural queries during the process. Moreover, listening to our emotions through this process is a daunting task as it will lead the individual to encounter their vulnerabilities demanding immense courage to embrace those vulnerabilities finally leading empathy one of the crucial components to nurture EI.

Dewey (1933) considered reflection as the careful consideration when confronted with the problematic aspects in practice and introduced five aspects of it; (i) intuition of solutions, (ii) rationalization of difficult experience into a problem, (iii) experimentation and observation of solutions, (iv) mental elaboration of the supposition of an idea, and (v) testing the hypothesis by imaginative action. Addressing the emotive and dialogic aspect of reflection that it lacked, Boud et al. (2013) simplified it into three aspects: (i) recalling in detail salient events; (ii) attending to feelings associated with these events; and (iii) evaluating and re-examining experience in the light of one's prior knowledge with that of the acquired new knowledge. Later on other frameworks of reflective practice were developed

widely influenced by Schon's work that also included the social aspects. Schon (1984) argued that reflection is both the conscious and the unconscious mental activity and divides them as reflection-in-action (spontaneous thought) and reflection-on-action (a retrospective activity that requires verbalization and symbolization). The above perspectives help us draw the importance of cognition, emotion, and dialogue for critical self-reflection which has been again criticized for the lack of clarity in how they are to be transferred or facilitated especially in consideration of the multiple realities (Chiu 2006). Chiu (2006) argues for the importance of going beyond the conventional western epistemology by extending our epistemology and engaging self, person, and communities by taking the account of first-person, second-person, as well as third-person perspectives.

Mezirow (1978) considered critical reflection as a part of the adult transformative learning process and elaborated the process of facilitation by defining reflection as the critical assessment of the content (description of the problem), process (problem-solving strategies), and premise (questioning the underlying assumptions related to the problem). Extensive research on Mezirow's critical-reflection framework by Lundgren and Poell (2016) recommended the four important aspects to look into when establishing a conceptual framework for critical reflection which are (i) traditions of critical reflection (ii) multiple data collection pathways for reflection (iii) important themes to consider for the data collection, and (iv) being conscious about affective understanding. Considering these aspects, I was curious to look into the eastern notion and explored the idea of *Brahmanubhava* that regards sensory perception as the beginning of the culmination of reason which is developed through *anumana* (assumptions) which then passes through *shravana* (active listening), *manana* (introspection), and *nididhyasana* (meditation/mindfulness) to

Brahmanubhava (an experience of self/ self-actualization) (Gupta, 2017). I could see them as both the aspects of critical reflection and also the model for critical reflection which can be seen as the hexagon of critical self-reflection. The hexagon has been used not only as a powerful geometric shape that creates open areas minimizing the boundaries but it also is seen as a symbol of harmony, structure, and balance in eastern philosophy (“Hexagon symbolism: What you should know”, 2020).



Figure 11 Hexagon of Critical Self-Reflection: A Socio-Cultural Conceptual Framework

Hexagon of critical self-reflection consists (i) Listening (listening to the emotions, labeling it), (ii) Introspection (deep meaningful evaluation), (iii) Share (Use dialogue to critique the presuppositions), (iv) Try (Plan for the revised action), (v) Express (A retrospective activity enhanced through verbalization and symbolization, and (vi) Nurture (emancipatory learning). The step does not end here rather goes on to the process of listening and labeling the emotions again thus making the overall journey of critical reflection tedious where an individual experiences their vulnerable

sides as well. Thus, to reach the state of transformation, one has to find the courage, and when they are able to do that, they will also be able to understand others' emotions as well fostering empathy.

Steiner and Perry (1999) state that “emotional literacy is the key to personal power because emotions are powerful. If you can make them work for you rather than against you, they will empower you” (p.3). Being able to label my emotions meant being able to understand that there are different emotions, and each emotion was telling something about me and my identity. This process revealed not only that how I felt varied even in similar situations when the context was varied but also how my emotions were all connected to childhood experiences that I had not reflected on. The awareness of my emotions provided me with many insights into the nature of my emotional life, which led me to understand my vulnerabilities in relation to the meaning that I had created concerning failures. It involved critiquing the presuppositions that I had built around failures and that had made me interpret myself as a powerless person. This became a form of emancipatory learning for me, “entailing the processes of critical reflection and self-reflection and involving a transformation of meaning perspectives” (Hart, 1990, p. 48). Slowly, what seemed like a definite failure and was thought to be rooted in powerlessness that could not be uprooted started to be seen as something I could dig out and thus regain my power with the intense desire to change by accepting my failures and vulnerabilities. For me, the meaning of success now slowly started to shift from academic success to developing the ability to endure various challenges and to deal effectively with emotional turmoil (see chapter III and IV). It also meant that the difficult process of becoming emotionally literate by slowly reflecting on my own learning process helped me develop empathy that helped me accept the vulnerability that lies in me and

others. The improved connection through managed emotional life and honest expression of emotions inculcated the belief of power within me, which VeneKlasen et al. (2007) call “power to,” through my uplifted self-esteem. VeneKlasen et al. (2007, p. 39) define “power to” as one of the types of power that refers to the “unique potential of every person to shape his or her life and world. When based on mutual support, it opens up the possibilities of joint action, or power with, meaning finding a common ground.” The increased awareness led me to the next stage of emotional literacy, “emotional interactivity” (Steiner & Perry, 1999, p. 40). It refers to the intelligent interaction that enables the registration of the emotions within and around us and to find creative ways to lead those emotions into positive and productive interactions. Then the question arises- *How could I nurture EI among educational leaders through critical self-reflection?*

Chapter Summary

Chapter two has the literature review on how emotions have been understood both in the eastern and the western perspective, how EI has been connected with educational leadership, and in what ways EWT brings the competencies of EI in its Vedic philosophies. Similarly, the educational policies of Nepal has also been discussed and how and why EI was brought into the picture of educational leadership is also explained in this chapter. The theoretical intent, the research gap, and the need to foster critical self-reflection in order to foster EI have been established. Similarly, my mother has been placed as a representational figure to explain my socio-cultural context. Then I have discussed phenomenology, theory of transformation, gender, living theory action research, and reflective praxis as my theoretical underpinnings by providing my reasons for choosing them and then provided my conceptual framework for the dissertation.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: EMBRACING THE LIMITATIONS

In this chapter, I share the philosophical underpinnings that guided my research process. Here, I discuss my multi-paradigmatic research space, using the wellness paradigm to blend multiple paradigms that helped me embrace my limitations during my research journey. Then I share my methodology of developing a living theory using multiple inquiry approaches, multiple methods, and logics/genres of data generation and meaning-making. Finally, I share the struggle to find my research site and participants, introduce them, and discuss the quality assurance and ethical considerations I adapted throughout my research.

Guiding Philosophical Underpinnings

Today I was thinking of my research paradigm

and suddenly the light went out.

I went back to my childhood when I was told,

you can behold; a life full of brightness.

But what does that brightness mean?

Noone bothered to interpret it for me.

Apart from the load-shedding that made me do my homework in the candlelight,

I thought life was always bright.

What a fool I had been, not to think

society was shaping how I think.

A few years down the line, I was a woman with depression

who did not want to survive?

Why did no one tell me my education did not mean survival as brightness?

I had to look within- through the- beyond the, and the other side of the glass to notice,

life is a wonderland only if we do not just use the positivistic lens.

It has been five years exploring emotional literacy. The last three years were the most rigorous as I started exploring it through my Ph.D. journey. In these years I become more curious about my existence as a human being. My journey of deep diving into emotional literacy involved the recognition of emotional literacy at the beginning which I then associated with my context and started reflecting on critically. Critical reflection helped me gain new perspectives which I validated with different evidence. I started taking actions based on the new perspective but then I soon realized that I was being anxious. I then started working on that as well. Now I am in the phase of taking reflective action on this validated belief through my Ph.D. Mezirow (2005 as cited in Dirkx, 2006) explains this as the process of the adult learning journey (see chapter IV).

As human beings, we live a rich inner life and are aware of how our inner lives help us monitor our responses to the external situations in which we find ourselves and modify some of these situations to which we willingly expose ourselves for our natural, practical, or social reasons (Archer, 2000). As a human, I interact with

three different orders of reality; the natural, the practical, and the discursive as I develop my human emotionality. The emergence of emotions is due to the natural order concerning physical well-being, then to practical order concerning my performative achievement, and then to the social engagement that is for the discursive order. According to Archer (2000) for anyone to be a human, they have to confront these orders. My research journey helped me move towards social engagement in relation to my emotions as a part of being human which Steiner and Perry (1999) also call ‘emotional interactivity’.

The guiding question that motivated me to begin my Ph.D. research first hand was simply in relation to my need to better understand my practices for my improvement as the founder of an educational initiative concerned with EI (Allwright, 2015). I had posed a research question “How can I improve my practice as the founder and educator of an education initiative to foster EI for the transformation in self and others?” But in these five years, I have transitioned from a founder to a founder and research student and faculty member along with my personal identity as a daughter and wife. I started my organization MEM in 2018 with the purpose of contributing to fostering EI in Nepal, especially in educational leadership. As the work started growing and I started meeting more educational leaders, I also started understanding the need to understand, research, and reflect, motivating me to move ahead with my Ph.D. studies. Meanwhile, I also got promoted at my work at the college that I was teaching into the leadership position. From only teaching the course, I was now managing other teachers and also developing curriculums and programs. While these professional works were there, I got married in 2019 and could quickly realize the shift in my roles as a wife and a daughter. I can relate to Khadka (2020) when she highlights the need for Nepali female educators to “tell, evaluate,

connect, and critically reflect on themselves on their hidden stories of pain and pleasure” (p. 101) for their professional development as they are caught between a wide range of responsibilities both in the household and in the professional, formal and informal settings. Here, as I was thinking about multiple responsibilities I had to fulfill stepping in multiple shoes, I also realized my mother might have gone through the same which never occurred in my mind. Bennett (2002) argues resentment is the primary motivation for women in most the context as they are seen as servants and daughters-in-law and mostly treated as outsiders when it is about decision making. They are the ones who labor the hardest yet have the least say in the family resources spent. The aggression that got projected in me as her daughter was a deep sense of resentment she had built over the years. When I had shared that I do not want to be a mother once in our casual conversation, she had abruptly shouted, “*sabaile bajhi bhanchan ani taha pauchas!*” (once everyone will call you barren and then you will know) in a harsh voice. It was struggling to understand her but reflecting on the gender norms of our society and how patriarchal culture has shaped us, the fear that my mother had in terms of not being an ideal mother definitely had lurked in. I remember my aunt being called ‘barren’ and being discriminated for not having child even after a decade of marriage. As I thought through the reasons how my mother would be impacted by my decision to have or not have a child, I figured it meant a lot. Rich (1976) argues that even though women are seen in leadership position, being a woman does not mean someone with a wide social or political power unless associated with motherhood. It occurred to me what does that means to me and how it has affected my everyday practice as an educational leader. “Deceptively simple” is what Brown (2018) calls her research methodology as and I want to borrow the same to describe my own methodology as it surely has simple research methods, but it did

take a mysterious and challenging turn as I started going deeper into it (p. 3). As I was coming closer to finalizing my overarching research question based on critical reflection, I was also gradually becoming aware of my own deeply held beliefs and assumptions that had to be questioned in terms of how I identified myself and resented towards my mother. For someone who was advocating empathy, I stood there as an example of living contradiction for not being able to understand and empathize with my mother. My mother must have felt responsible for my actions and behaviors for how society implies the pressure of continuous nurturance in the shoulder of mothers. The interdependent relationship between my experiences, both personal and professional, with critical reflection and dialogue led me to glance at my own vulnerabilities and my failure to acknowledge them. Calleja (2014) argues that the transformative learning experience is such that the “deep structured shift experienced by the individuals allows them to learn from their own experience” while at the same time it can be anxiety-inducing as it is “much more complex and multifaceted”.

My values of self-awareness and empathy got tested with times throughout my life and even in my research. My goal in an educative relationship is fulfilled when I, myself, and the other person improve the quality of our lives and learning, feel optimistic, and have greater trust in the world and future by being mindful of our emotions. But I found myself as a living contradiction (Whitehead, 1969) multiple times. As a researcher, I needed to recognize what I am experiencing in my life with what values if I wanted transformation within me and in others which Mezirow and Taylor (2010) consider as “pedagogical entry points” (p. 6) that offer the chance to engage the learners in their personal dilemma for a potential “perspective transformation” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 13). According to Mezirow (1991), perspective

transformation is a process of becoming critically aware of our presuppositions and their limitations on how we perceive, understand, and feel the world so that we can reformulate to allow ourselves to make decisions on our new understandings. The research journey helped me explain and question my own value of self-awareness and empathy and my personal dilemma associated with it. That too demanded continuous critical reflection and my engagement in a reflective dialogue with myself and with others. However, I was soon to realize not every time I was able to do so leading, I felt more vulnerable. For me, vulnerability is the condition of being affected rather than weakness (Pritzker, 2020). Also, the time that I ventured into my research journey was a time of crisis for the whole world. Covid-19 had threatened the lives of everyone and that made me understand the significance of mindfulness in challenging times. So, bringing forth the capacity to listen and introspect with utmost mindfulness was extremely important. Thus, the wellness paradigm of being became the guiding research paradigm inspired by the Vedic philosophy (Ramaprasad, 2007).

The wellness paradigm of being sees life as *anubhavadhara* (stream of experiences) leading to self-realization or self-awareness. Mohanty (2007) argues that Eurocentric dominance has led to the classification of Vedic philosophy as religious and counters this interpretation as a process of practice (*sadhana*) which is a blend of hermeneutics, philosophy, and meditation. In the process of *Sadhana*, “*shravana* is hermeneutical, *manana* is philosophical, *nididhyasana* is meditative” and the goal of the practice is “the discovery of the identity between the innermost truth of one’s ‘psyche’ and the innermost being of the world: of psychology and physics.” (Mohanty, 2007, p. 457). Ramaprasad (2007) argues that the wellness paradigm focuses on the strength of life where “emotions are seen as detrimental if

they are confined to and concentrated on oneself and are beneficial and positive if they are directed universally” (p.4).

Being an educational leader, “educational influence in learning means focusing attention on the idea that for any learning to be educational, it must include the values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity” (Whitehead, 2019, p. 98). Considering self-understanding and self-improvement at the heart of it the wellness paradigm aims for transformation through multiple cognitive methods like reflection, introspection, dialogue, studying, meditation, etc. (Rangaswami, 1996). Critical self-reflection on our own experiences is crucial to achieving transformation according to the wellness paradigm. Therefore, respecting my embodied personal knowledge in my everyday practices, I try to reflect and analyze my assumptions and beliefs critically and believe that the nature of reality (ontology) is subjective. I echo with Kierkegaard that subjective reflection is important even though it is tough and sometimes traumatic at times given how ‘truth’ is a subjective construct (as cited in Schacht, 1973). Kierkegaard (as cited in Schacht, 1973) asserts that “every man is a spiritual being, for whom the truth consists in nothing else than the self-activity of personal appropriation” (p.300). As I set my journey of inquiry on this tough path, I am eager to understand the world from my point of view with utmost authenticity, determined to explore my own educational development (Whitehead, 2010). Therefore, the result of this inquiry is not a search for ‘truth’, but a shared understanding as to what it means to be an emotionally intelligent educational leader. In this inquiry process, I synthesize the Vedic philosophy with criticalism, postmodernism, and interpretivism.

I understand epistemology is that knowledge exists in different forms. Rather than regarding the delivery of information as acceptable knowledge, I consider

knowledge as the creation from the evaluation and reflection of our actions that allows us to imagine our future actions where we enact our values and draw insights from others' knowledge and values (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). I, as a researcher, embody my ontological values which later transform as my epistemological standards of judgment through continuous critical self-reflection, which will lead me to realize the need for the effective use of language and help me turn my research into an educational theory. *Shravana, Manana, and Nidhdhyasana* has helped me in this process of transformation. Ilyenkov (1977) argues that “understanding falls into a state of logical contradiction (antinomy) here not only because, and even not so much because, experience is always unfinished, and not because a generalization justified for experience as a whole has been drawn based on partial experience” (as cited in Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2016, p. 34). Given that the profession of education requires a professional knowledge base, I consider that I and my research participants should also receive immense ground and respect to share our knowledge and experience as we are the agent of educational improvement and change (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009).

Dewey (1938) argued the importance of explaining life experiences in the disciplines of education is important for the improvement of the educators since understanding the experiential continuum of life leads to change and growth, reinforcing the individuals to develop the habitual ways of thinking to address new and different situations (as cited by Altan & Lane, 2018). Whitehead (2008) stated that the process of inquiring about his own learning specifically in relation to his values led him to clarify the meanings of his values through practice. Foucault (2013) uses the term ‘archaeology of knowledge’ to suggest this process as the enunciative function that operates within the general excavation of consciousness and designates

questions beyond what is already said. Thus, Foucault (2013) focuses on the importance of new measurements, guidelines, and rigor. Thus, my research inquiry is value laden as I view the nature of value (axiology) is emergent and is an integral part of my life and research process. Gearty and Marshall (2020) argue that the freedom to incorporate values among the researchers will help them find a common ground to negotiate between their desire to improve themselves and those of others who wish to do the same. Polanyi and Sen (2009) explore this as the nature and implication of ‘tacit knowledge’ and explain it as the valid knowledge of the problem, the researcher's ability to sense and pursue the solution, and the valid anticipation of the implication of the solution after the inquiry. Here, I do not just believe that the values of both the researcher and the research participants values are significant. Polanyi (1998) argues that everyone has a vast store of tacit knowledge within themselves, thus having faith in their capacity to come to know the truth as their life-affirming energy through which they derive meaning and purpose to their lives.

I have nurtured critical self-reflection, one of the skills of an emotionally intelligent educational leader (Goleman, 2006), by using a variety of means to enhance my ability to engage in mindful self-monitoring and reflection. So far, I have come to reflect that my thinking has been based on inductive reasoning that is by drawing general inferences from particular experiences or observations. But there are times, in my personal and professional life, I have thought as a constructivist but acted as a positivist. Here, I can relate to Schon's (1975) argument that when someone reflects-in-action, they are not necessarily practising the established theory or technique rather are practising in relation to the context. Though I had an aspirational thought, my common everyday practice had not necessarily accepted that thought. Theory, in any case, has an ‘if...then...’ ‘form’. I remember my days as a

secondary school teacher when I used to advocate for the need for contextual education where students can give their own meaning to their success and their failures. However, as I look back, I never used alternative modes of grading where the students could do so. Rather I used to see their grades on the basis of the standard numerical grading system that the government had prepared and kept on marking them 'pass' and 'fail'. This led me to an exceedingly difficult journey of confusion, dilemma, and chaos in my life. Archer (2000) called this feeling of discomfort caused by confusion in situations the "natural order" and argued that "all persons have to confront the natural world and that their embodiment ineluctably confers on them concerns about their physical well-being as they encounter the hard knocks, pleasures, and dangers of their environment (p.198). Therefore, for me, this research inquiry also is an aspiration to explore my epistemology further. Through this, I aspire to improve my practices and also my wellbeing and "bring to consciousness the tacit personal knowledge and deeply held values, use peripheral vision and subsidiary awareness to become aware of new information and perspectives, and adopt curiosity in both ordinary and novel situations" (Epstein, 1999, p.833). Thus, my philosophical underpinnings build a space for multi-pradigmatic research design.

Multiple Paradigms

The wellness paradigm of being has self-management and experience of transcendental states leading to the realization of the *Atman* (the self) at its core. To attain that Ramaprasad (2007) argues the need to "developing emotional control (regulation and not suppression), overcoming unintelligent manifestation of emotions and cultivating positive emotions (positive psychology and EQ) that are not centered on self in addition to involving in self-less positive actions and thoughts" (p. 4) as the prerequisites. This paradigm has been developed by Upanishad being highly

influenced by the tradition of Vedas and has been built on multiple paradigms of knowledge (Ramani, 2018). The ancient tradition of Vedas explains three ways of gaining knowledge: *shravana* (listening), *manana* (introspection), and *nididhyasana* (meditation or realization). Here, I am aware that neo-liberalism does have its impact on the overall process of inquiry. Oza (2018) explain the three processes through which neo-liberalism has been integrated into the education sector helping emerge educational institutions as “factories to supply skilled manpower to the in-satiating needs of the growing market” (p. 43): (i) through the opening of profit-based education management; (ii) reducing the educational cost through downsizing, and (iii) by creating curriculum standards and accountability. Thus, to inquire about affective dimension of leadership and learning in a competitive setting is itself a contradictory space but it also is a space to engage in the transformative learning process where I can embrace epistemological pluralism that embraces interpretivism, criticism, and postmodernism along with the vedic philosophy (Taylor et al., 2011).

With the wellness paradigm of being, I bring the eastern notion of epistemologies in the research process (*shravana, manana, nididhyasna*). This has helped me find my decolonial voice drawing from the Quijano’s concept of “coloniality of power” which argues that colonial epistemologies have normalized colonized relations of power from multiple aspects like race, class as well as gender (Lugones, 2010). With this I have found to be increasingly significant to understand myself better while at the same time also embrace the knowledge that I have been made to accumulate over these years by the education system that was the product of western texts. In research inquiry like this, Mack and Na’puti (2019) warn the chance of “failure of vision” through the narrow examination of the contents if grounded solely in the perceptions of oppressive structures if generalized. Here, I understand

my weaknesses for how my lack of literacy in Sanskrit would affect the meaning-making as so much gets lost in the process of translation. Therefore, these epistemologies will help me address not only that but also the flaws of the postpositivist research paradigm that is considered as restrictive because of its propositional, deductive, and analytical nature (Taylor et al., 2011). *Shravana* helps me enrich my everyday realities and thus motivates me not to be propositional with anything for the transformative learning. *Manana* and *Nididishayana* is an inductive approach in itself that embraces the subjective realities of the learner thus helping them become conscious about the narrowly conceived analytical logic and helps me to reduce the dualistic or antagonistic thinking. This helped me create a transformative educational experience for my research participants who belonged from multiple cultures, contexts, and had different experiences.

The blend of *shravana*, *manana*, and *nididishyana* is also the blend of criticalism, interpretivism, and postmodernism. Arthur (2006) argues that there is the increasing recognition of what we see is actually determined by our presuppositions. Thus, the need to draw attention to what does not fall into the line with the paradigm is significant to see how we view our world according to our “socially sanctioned paradigms” and what are its limitations (p. 105). For me, just like Arthur (2006) the image of *Nataraja* helped me make sense of it as it depicts how the image that has religious significance can be seen from a different angle of what is really there if we do not leap into conclusions based on our *a priori* making me be critical about my prejudice. Also considered as the great art of human life, the image of *Nataraja* has its symbolic meaning associated with how one interprets it when confronted with from a different religious and cultural background. Thus, interpretivism and postmodernism’s co-existence into this vedic philosophy not only helps bring harmony in the meaning

making but also helps us acknowledge our shortcomings in the way we see and work on it. *Shravana*, *Manana*, and *Nididhyana* have been claimed both as the epistemology and the paradigm by the Samkara's Upanisad (Hirst, 1996) and here I have tried to see them in relation to the contemporary paradigms in education.

Shravana Paradigm

The *shravana* paradigm can be related to critical paradigm as it shares the qualities of listening, questioning, self-reflection through the questioning of our preconceptions. Asghar (2013) asserts that critical paradigm goes beyond recording observations and aims for the systemic change which needs comprehensive literature review and discourse. Ramani (2018) argues that according to Advaita Vedanta, "*shravana* or listening can be further divided into six types: (i) *upakarma* (a formal ceremony performed before the study of Veda, (ii) *abhyas*, (recitation of the texts), (iii) *apurvata* (a ready grasp of the meaning), (iv) *palau* (a comprehension of the outcome), (v) *arthavada* (the reading elucidatory books and (vi) appetite, attainment of the final conclusion" (p. 96).

Educators have long been discussing about the importance of listening in the learning process and have argued that the effective listening covers a broad spectrum. For me *Shravana* or listening does not only mean the effective hearing of the oral words but "listening as a methodology" (Ratnam, 2019, p. 19). Ratman (2019) argues that listening does not only mean verbal dialogue but also the attentive non-verbal cues about our emotions, how we feel in our bodies, about the experiences, the places of enquiry. It also means understanding the context where we question our preconceived notions in our respective educational contexts. This is similar to what Asghar (2013) refers critical paradigm as experiential, referential, expressive, and

metaphorical. Though been criticized for considering *Shravana* as a separate discipline, Rambachan's interpretation of *Shravana* in Sankara does hold significance as it has been regarded as a process that is enough to reach the state of realization as through *Sruti* one realizes the problem within the system (as cited in Sharma, 1993).

Observation, reading, and hearing (both the verbal and the non-verbal) helped me get started with the research inquiry. I was not only trying to understand who I was as a researcher but I was also being critical and trying to figure out how did my gender identity affect the answer. How did the context where I was doing my research and the one I grew up affect how I viewed, felt, and interpreted as a researcher? What has it got to do with my research topic and my research participants? I looked into the work I was doing and figured I also needed to strive more, be more observant and critical if I wanted improvement in what I was doing. I listened to my colleagues, other educators, my students. I started with a broad query in mind *how do I improve what I am doing for the growth of the educational leaders as a founder of the organization working in the field of emotional intelligence? How can I make it contextual for the educators working in different context? Can I make them a part of the process? How can I make the research question specific? How do I keep an account of my own emotions of the journey throughout? All in all, how do I practice listening to what is inside as well as outside of me?* When you are ready to listen, in this century the “information floods” thus to be able to choose and to highlight the information that can play the role in the transformation of human lives was a daunting task (Simjith, 2017). Here, I have tried to become meticulous with the information while at the same time I have also tried to reinvent the whenever I felt the need. Yadav (2013) places the role of the teacher higher in *Shravana*, and for me my supervisors were my ‘guru’ who guided me throughout the process and helped me

come out of the confusion that I had throughout the process. Their critical questioning helped me enhance my consciousness and be mindful to my feelings and my context. As I proceeded my research in a difficult time of pandemic, I felt helpless and vulnerable several times. From learning a new (virtual) space to learning to use new tools, to creating multiple ways to express myself, I found myself in a difficult position to be in as a researcher but then again listening to myself by asking questions like how can I acknowledge my failure and vulnerabilities to foster EI? How can I empathize with myself as well as my research participants? - helped me be in the moment. It continued growing the appetite for exploration, one of the important steps for *Shravanah* helping me become more adaptive and see beyond the difficult context and helping me explore another paradigm *Manana* which is akin to interpretive paradigm.

Manana Paradigm

The *manana* paradigm can be related to the interpretive paradigm in which the researchers and the participants introspect on the experiences, and resources. It also means the discussion between the *guru* and the students in relation to the truths of opinion where questions related to the experiences are raised and asked to introspect and answer (Yadav, 2018). Swami Alokana (2010) argues the importance of *manana* is to remove the confusion associated with the identity of the individual. This characteristic is similar to that of the interpretive paradigm. Photongsunan (2010) believes that the “interpretive researchers do not regard the social world as ‘out there’ but believe that it is constructed by human beings” and thus they “seek to investigate how humans perceive and make sense of this world” (p. 1). The meaning-making is not a true objective positive but a part of interaction with other meaning-makers or with the interaction within the self-based on their values.

The *manana* paradigm shares another feature of interpretive paradigm: the use of open-ended research questions for the meaning-making process. Vygotsky (as cited in Mezirow, 1996) argues that the meaning-making process is social and cannot be removed from the socio-cultural underpinnings. In the interpretive paradigm ‘hermeneutics’ involves the study of ancient text along with the interpretation of qualitative data which is similar to what *manana* paradigm does, it involves the interpretation of the text and sharing done through *shravana* and then making meaning through the interpretation of the discussion made through discourse or through the monologues. Chakravarty (2018) argues that *manana* is the process undertaken by the yogi of setting the human life by linking it with the universal consciousness through the Vedic mantra.

The *Manana* paradigm can also be connected to the interpretive paradigm regarding the multiplicity of meanings. Mezirow (1996) argues that subjectivity, intentionality, and learning as the forms of life and context and the systems of language are the elements of a “linguistically disclosed world in which the local character of truth, discourse, and validity is asserted” where the language for many is a social interchange which involves specific time and space (p. 161). For example, ‘mind’ in general is used quite freely in the phrases “being mindful” or “don’t mind” where we understand mind does not mean the ‘brain’ or even thinking. However, the mind in the superset also means the cognitive faculties associated with imagination, memory, language, thinking while in Vedic philosophy mind means the *manas* associated with (wo)man's inner world (Chopra et al., 2019).

Nididhyasana Paradigm

The *Nididhyasana* paradigm is connected to the postmodern paradigm. Wilson (1997) argues that the postmodern paradigm rejects the idealized view of the truth and replaces that with a changing truth by celebrating the dynamic diversity of life. This can be related to how Smjith and Vasudevan (2017) describe *Nidhidhyasnaas* the way in which the researcher or the learner meditate and focus to realize the learning by relating it with one's own experience. The study of emotions also needs to be understood beyond the three basic assumptions of modernity i.e. progress, universality, and regularity (Brigham & Polsgrove, 1998). Society keeps on evolving, thus the cultural, ethnic, and racial perspective needs to be recognized which contends the universality of the theories of emotions and emotional intelligence. The post-modern paradigm with its irregular and chaotic nature helps to address the individual differences in how we feel what we feel and study multiple explanations of EI. *Nididhyasana* also has a similar quality as it means to contemplate not only on the content but also on the context (Hirst, 1996). The discussion on how the socio-cultural context affects the explanation of emotions in chapter II is an example of it.

The focus of the postmodern paradigm is its sensitivity to difference. Hargreaves (1994) argues that more voices are being heard with the focus on diversities. The use of zoom as a medium for my facilitation of the workshops and interviews has helped me bring research participants together in a unique way, helping me debunk the singularity of knowledge transmission that can only be done in physical space. In *Nididhyasana*, the self is to be “ realized, heard, reflected, and meditated on” (Hirst, 1996, p.67). With the postmodern perspective, the dilemmas

related to self can be resolved by reflecting on the researcher's own practice without distinguishing between better or worse but by dealing them with clarifying thoughts.

The change in my own perspective of how I used to see myself as an educator when I started back in 2013 to now has made me see the importance of how particular time and place shapes how we see ourselves or act in a way we act (see chapter IV and V). Waller (1932) argues that as much as the students are being transformed in the educational institutions, the teachers and even the principals go through the same process over the course of teaching making it important for the teachers to understand their own truth through deep contemplation (as cited in Hargreaves, 1994). This is similar to what post-modern paradigm calls for the self-managing schools and professional development networks for the educators to help them understand the changing contexts, their roles and boundaries. Post-modern theorists like Derrida, Foucault, and Lyotard investigate the relationships from the perspective of discourse, power, and identity. In my research, I have also contemplated my values, the works I do and the conversations with my participants on the basis of the same. To provide an example, my position as an educator during the times of covid had been looked from the perspective of gender as well as power. Mumby and Putnam (1992) describe the importance of experience of emotion and the expression of emotion as vitally important components to organization and leadership where the expression can be through interviews, focus groups, textual/discourse analysis (as cited in Bochantin & Cowan, 2016). For me the conversations, poems, pictures, and my short notes on my Instagram helped me do the both. I have used (un) rhymed English/Nepali verses and prose form throughout the chapters to express my and participants' emotions, context, and the truth. The flexible way of expression of emotion was provided for the research participants too. Some expressed their emotions through paintings while

others felt comfortable doing it in a video. Veda acknowledges these multiple forms of sharing as the types of knowledge as Vedas are composed of rhymed verses called Sama and in unrhymed verses called *Richa* or *Rita* and also in the written prose called *Yajush*. The combination of these turn into *Sooktas* meaning fine expression (Ramani, 2018).

Understanding that we all have our own truths helped us share our context wholeheartedly that helped us see each other as being who have their own strengths and weaknesses. *Nididhyasana* helped me reflect on my own experiences and acknowledge others experiences too. For example, I could come up with my concrete research question only after my diagnostic action cycle where I had some in-depth conversation (see chapter IV) with some of the educators and students and then had a supportive question: *In what ways have I/we been able to accept our failures and vulnerabilities to foster empathy to improve what we have been doing?*

Wellness Paradigm of Being as a Multi-methodological Space

Education in neo-liberal world aims bring continuous interaction by forming a practical worldview of an individual in relation to their professional activities and see that in comparison to the general worldview (Ulianova et al., 2022). *Shravana*, *Manana*, *Nididhyasana* combined as a paradigm in wellness paradigm in being is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon of human culture that has helped put our knowledge into practice through strong critical reflection by helping me develop a living model in the process. “*sunne, gunne, ani garney*” (To listen, to introspect, and to practice) is the essence of *Shravana*, *Manana*, *Nidihyasna* that helps see the eastern and the western notion not as a dichotomous one but as an integrated whole that complements each other” (B. Koirala, personal communication February 16, 2022).

This dialogic and the meditative nature of these paradigms helped me look into my inner as well as the outer self through authentic self-study where I could see if I am a living contradiction (Ramani, 2018).

To foster EI, I engaged in critical listening (*shravana* approach), deep introspection by embracing my vulnerabilities (*manana* approach), and thoughtful expression of my emotions in relation to the context (*nididhyasana* approach) throughout my doctoral studies and also in this dissertation. The wellness paradigm of being not only helped me gain knowledge but also helped me focus on my physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing to strengthen my self-awareness and critical self-reflection for my professional growth. However, the journey was not a linear one that transpired through *shravana*, *manana*, and *nididhyasana* one after another all the time rather it was a cyclical process where I was listening to my thoughts and emotions while was in the phase of *nidhyasana* sometimes and the other times I was introspecting as well as listening at the same time. My interaction with my research participants was also similar as I was being conscious of the self while at the same time helping them become conscious of themselves through the same multi-paradigmatic approach throughout the process. This helped us see ourselves as an interconnected and interdependent whole even in the chaotic stage of Covid. Just as Yomantas (2021) argues, the collective heartbeat is heavy with the critical consciousness related to hardships and complexities associated with teaching during the challenging time but living without hopes and dreams is also discomfoting. Thus, reclaiming our dreams by remaining education and working with perseverance and joy for the transformation of ourselves and others is crucial for which one method might not be always sufficient. In the following section, I have discussed how I blended action research (Mcniff& Whitehead, 2006), narrative methodology

(Connelly et al., 2008), and self-study methodology (Craig, 2009) and developed my research as multi-methodological space and looked it as a living theory methodology.

Action Research

Emotional learning is different from cognitive learning as it involves fitting new data and insights into existing ones but also involves the change in habits, and thus should include the ways of thinking and acting. To become emotionally literate, the participants should be in a long, difficult practice where they are both thinking, acting, and reflecting on their actions. Cherniss and Goleman (1998) argue that the typical approach of training and programs do not work for the improvement of emotional intelligence as it is different from cognitive and technical learning. They bring the significance of learning and practicing in four different phases: (i) preparation phase (ii) training phase (iii) transfer and maintenance phase, and (iv) evaluation phase for the optimal development of EI as shown in Figure 12.

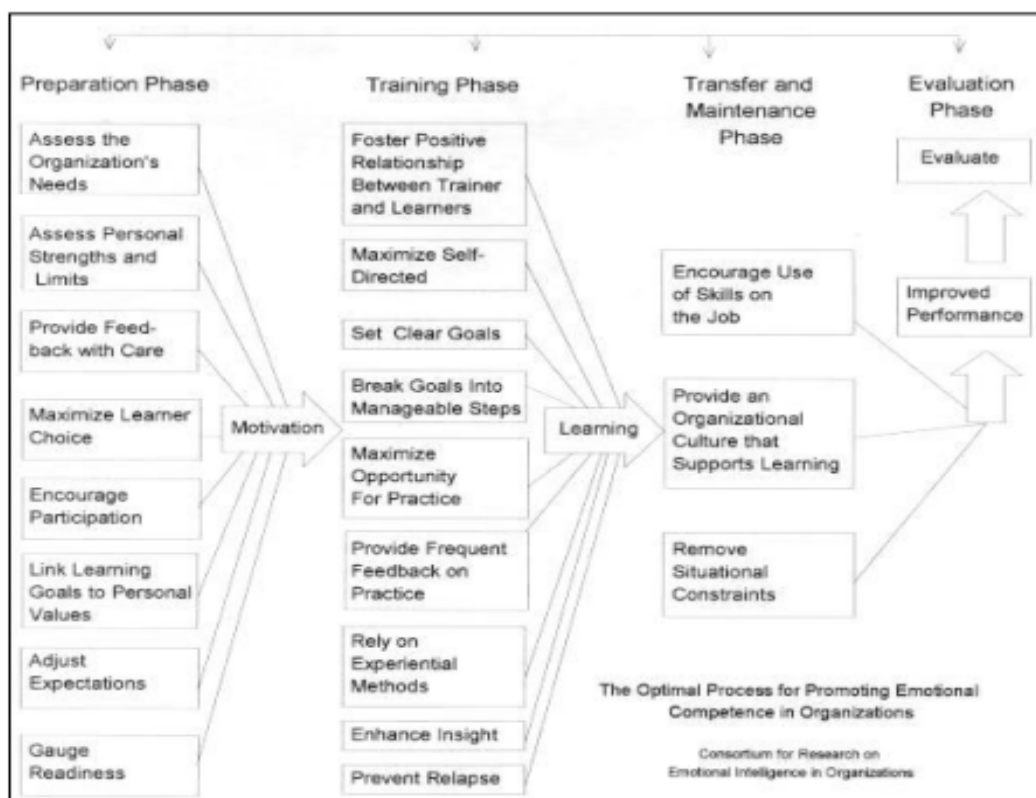


Figure 12 The optimal process for developing EI in organization (Cherniss & Goleman, 1998)

With the adaptation of action research, I as a researcher could design and implement the leadership programs to ensure that the participants find a balance between the action and their improvement in their EI competencies and can also reflect and see their changes in the way they think, feel and act. Grundy (1982) explains emancipatory action research as one of the types of action research that is focused on the transformation of the participants in the action from their self-deception and is directed towards both the individual practice and the social or educational change (as cited in Leitch & Day, 2006).

Emancipatory action research has been further categorized into two approaches. In the first approach, the researcher engages in the self-critical community of practitioners with the intention of self-study and improvement and making radical shift in practice through planning, acting, observing, reflecting, and critiquing the broad social, economic, and political educational contexts (Carr & Kemmis, 2003). I started with the intention of collective social action while I was drafting my research proposal. However, I could easily see the emerging complexities that were completely out of my control because of the pandemic. The limited internet facilities in the schools and colleges a challenge in addition to the lack of prompt alternatives made it the educational institutions suffer a lot even to think about making an emancipatory shift as they were struggling to make simple contact with their stakeholders and stopping the academic activities completely (Pal et al., 2021). Also, the implementation part of educational policies has been one of the weaknesses in the context of Nepal (Wagle et al., 2019). I found myself vulnerable and limited and felt as if I was failing right away even when I had not started the research. At this point with further research and discussion with my supervisors and other colleagues in the research community, I came across the second approach of emancipatory action

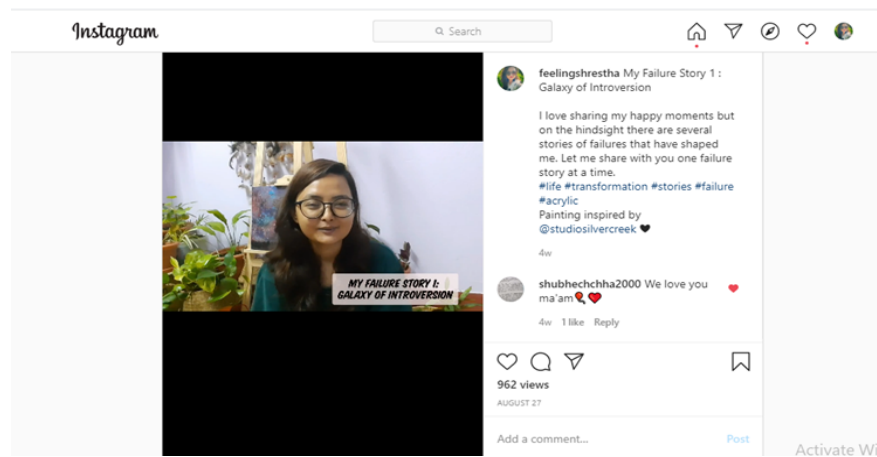
research. In this approach, the researcher develops the ‘living educational theory’ by acknowledging that each of us is the ‘living contradictions of ourselves’ meaning that we negate the values that we hold dear in our practice (Whitehead, 1993). This approach helped me create an alternative space of bringing together educational leaders working in multiple institutions in a safe and harmonious virtual space for critical reflective dialogues among the research participants. It also helped me and my participants become more introspective and mindful even during the complexities and accept my vulnerable self. Acknowledging my failures and vulnerabilities became a first step towards the diagnostic phase of my action research, which later helped me develop the other three cycles as well.

Action Research Phases/cycles

I developed multiple activities for the educational leaders in broadly three phases and cycles through my action research. They are planning, acting (Cycle 1, Cycle 2 & Cycle 3), and reflecting.

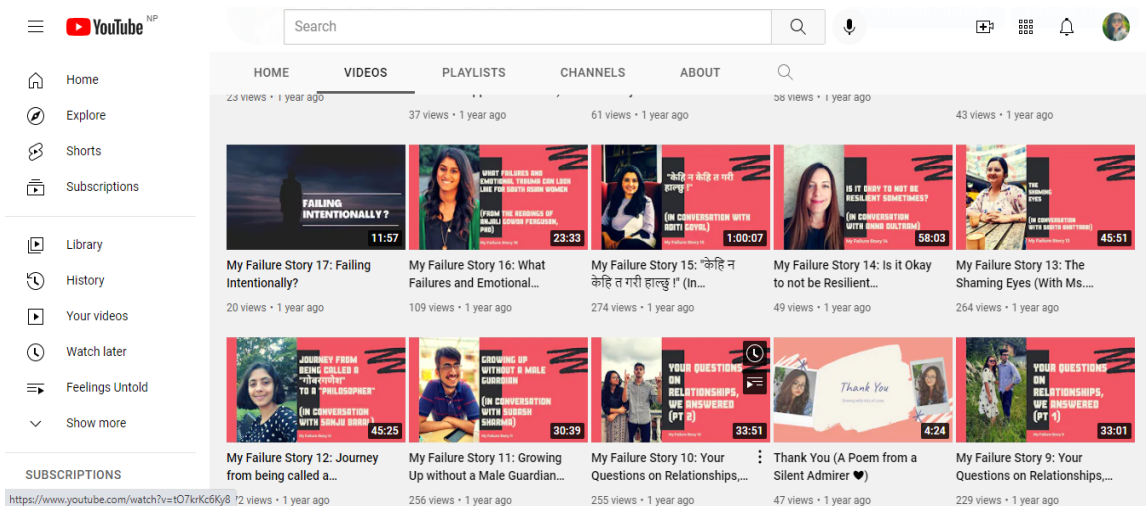
Planning/Diagonistic Phase.

The reflection, evaluation, and acknowledgement of my failures and vulnerabilities helped me realize the importance of looking closely at humanity and being conscious about life’s fragility, its impermanence, its imperfection, disappointment, and its twists and turns can be dreadful (Horsfield, 2018 as cited in Shrestha, 2021d). Thus, I felt comfort in participating in public discourses through virtual platforms given the context of Covid. I posted a video on my Instagram on 27th August 2020 sharing about my introverted personality how I considered it as a part of my failure on not being able to make friends which marks the beginning of my diagnostic phase.



Video 1 Seeing beyond failure and vulnerability as a means of self-compassion and empathy https://www.instagram.com/tv/CEXVFM_htT3/

The idea of the discourse was “to explain the educational influences in my own learning, in the learning of others, and in the learning of the social formations with which I live and work” (Whitehead, 2010, p.89). This stage helped me identify the problems that the educators are going through and helped me connect with my research question. I continued this for 18 weeks in which I had in-depth conversations with nine participants who were students, teachers, leaders in educational institutions, parents and shared multiple literatures related to emotions, EI, failures, vulnerabilites, education, and critial self-reflection. All of these discourses, in which the participants had consented to make public are in the channel *On the way to Transformation*.



Video 2 The public discourses that I made during my diagnostic phase <https://www.youtube.com/user/bhawana830/videos?view=0&sort=dd&flow=grid>

This phase not only helped me develop self-compassion through the acknowledgment of my failures and vulnerabilities but also helped foster empathy (see chapter IV), which has now become one of my values as an educator with active listening and sharing (Brown, 2011). Embracing vulnerability is the process of discovering and being aware of the new learning experience with the acknowledgment that it might encompass risk helping us with the empathic identification. Empathic identification involves sharing feelings and experiences more than just knowing what we are seeing which required me to also try to live the experiences or be in a position where the other person is (Boston et al., 2001). Magri (2019) argues empathy as one of the components of virtue acquisition, but not a virtue in itself, and can be morally relevant even when it is not driven by caring with “intrinsic significance of subjective experience, particularly of its affective and emotional background, which is captured by the phenomenological investigation of the horizon consciousness” (p.2). However, the responsibility to act in the world with empathy still has been questioned in the leadership domain in the public sphere where the discussion associated with vulnerabilities are not promoted (Chouliaraki, 2013).

Thus, my public discourses where I shared my deepest vulnerabilities also helped me create a safe space to live out my values and let others do the same for themselves by being compassionate, conscious, empathetic, and joyful for others to do the same. Personal disclosure in the public platforms has been seen as instrumental in allowing the members to maintain each other's relationships, develop connections and get support (Li et al., 2020). Almost seven months on planning helped me build trust among the education leaders and the significance of my research question more even during the pandemic. Apart from the public discourse, the weekly critical conversation in the critical friends (Ph.D. colleagues, colleagues from my organization, students, teachers) helped me further explore the deeper problem (lack of critical self-reflection).

Sharot and Sustain (2020) argue that people's decision on receiving a new information can alter on the basis of action, affect, and cognition. Receiving information is an important element *inshravana* which meant listening to our bodily senses and emotions and an education process that helps us introspect and then helps us in our perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1991). Thus, as a practitioner-researcher, I was conscious of the factor that whatever I will be doing will have to impact their action which means they need to receive information that they could implement right away as an action, induce their emotions and also improve their comprehension. Trying to integrate these three factors (i) action, with instrumental value, (ii) affect with hedonic value, and (iii) cognition, with cognitive value, I with the agreement of my supervisors and critical friends decided to adopt a context responsive approach, a workshop approach and continued my actions for the ways to improve critical self-reflection to foster EI for educational leadership.

Action/Implementation Phase.

With frequent consultations with my critical friends, my Ph.D. supervisors, as well as the validation group, I came to the conclusion that perspectives from educational leaders working on different background is important so inviting education leaders from different places as well as different age groups was highly important if we wanted to have diverse perspectives. Thus, the selection of the participants was purposive. The purposive selection of participants is a conceptually-driven approach where I as a researcher was deliberate and purposeful in selecting who was going to be a part of my action projects in answering the research question (Farrugia, 2019). Some of the variables I considered while selecting the participants were their gender, age of experience as educators, the geographical location where they belonged, and the type of educational institutions they were affiliated to. I, thus, made sure to invite a group of educational leaders from different gender, age group, and geographical locations. However, the common thing that they needed to have was internet access as we had to run virtual sessions given the time of Covid-19.

I along with my critical friends made a list of participants who fit our purpose and then finalized a set of 10 educational leader who would be our research participants. Then, I sent a request email to ten participants, out of which I got eight positive responses. I again had a face-to-face virtual conversation with them to let them know more about my research plans and its objective and sent the consent form. Eight of them filled out the consent form; thus, for the action phase, we had seven participants in the beginning. However, out of our eight participants, one had to drop out right before the first session because of their family issues, while another

participant had to drop out after the second session because of their son's health condition, leaving us with six participants for our research inquiry.

I was very conscious of the value of empathy and inclusiveness throughout this phase. But given the context we were in, we were continuously aware that we are working with limitedness of resources and thus the acknowledgment of our vulnerabilities was also needed throughout this phase. I divided 2021 into three cycles of action-reflection and each action was supported by one workshop/project (Emotional literacy workshops for educational leaders, Understanding Emotional identity workshop, and Critical self-reflection workshop). Emotional literacy workshop has been explained in chapter IV, understanding emotional identity workshop has been explained in chapter V, and the critical self-reflection workshop has been explained in chapter VI. The workshop in each cycle was determined after the reflection of the previous cycle and what seemed relevant and important after each cycle. All the six participants were part of the three cycles and each reflected on what worked, what did not work, and how can I/we improve what we have been doing. We, both the researcher and the participants embraced Thayer-Bacon's concept of constructive thinking and employed 'constructive teaching and learning in the workshops (Lagan & Davidson, 2005). We made sure to do that by emphasizing our voice by blending our subjective and objective knowing (Thayer-Bacon, 2000). For us, plurality was important within the discussion and sharing to gain a better understanding of our situatedness by envisioning ourselves as participants in an intersubjective world. For that, the actions were guided by the five values: (i) Collaboration - viewing knowing as social and knowers as in relation with others rather than as isolated individuals; (ii) Deep learning - enhancing understanding course content by promoting connections among its elements; (iii) Reflection -

encouraging participants to connect the course content by promoting their prior knowledge and experience; (iv) Engagement- discussing and building a point of view by means of feedback and dialogue regarding course activities; and (v) Caring- attending and listening to others so as to foster relationships that acknowledge and encourage acceptance of our differences and similarities. Given that knowledge is a constructive process, I and the participants were allotted enough time to discuss, connect, and reflect upon our learning to be heard even if we had differences in opinion (Thayer-Bacon, 2000).

Reflection Phase.

Each cycle had a reflection phase, both weekly reflections, and end of the cycle reflection. Each participant chose their own mode of reflection. Some found comfortable sharing their reflection in videos while some in audio and some of them in writing. Though there were some septic reflection questions after each session, the common reflection questions were to share how they felt, what stood out for them and how can they see the action being related to their professional development as an educational leader.

The process of reflection was a transformative experience for us as explained by Mezirow (2011) as it led us to reflect on a triggering event (disorienting dilemma) shared individually on a group setting that led to an awareness of inconsistency among thoughts, feelings, and actions, or realization that previous views and approaches no longer seem adequate, resulting in the experience of disequilibrium. This then helped us identify our prior interpretations or views (assumptions, perceptions, and presuppositions) that are held largely unconsciously. We then questioned and examined the deeply held views, including the question related to

context that shaped us and the consequences of holding them. The reflexion was also in the form of an engagement in reflective and constructive dialogue/discourse in which alternative views were explored and assessed. Then the revision of views and some broad perspectives led us to revise our actions during the workshops and beyond. The blend of the discourse with that of the theoretical perspectives included the processes of constructing, reconstructing, and co-constructing of the theory which Schon (1987) considers a part of reflective practice (as cited in Orland-Barak & Yinon, 2007). The reflection phase helped us build our competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships as a educational researcher.

These phases included *shravana*, *manana*, and *nididhyasana* but each phase can also be seen as focused on these three paradigms. In the first phase planning phase, I was in the *shravana* mode where I was listening more to myself and others. In the second phase, the action phase, I was more in the *manana* mode as I was being introspective while I was acting. I was exploring my strengths and limitations. I was being critical but also appreciative about my actions. While, I was more in *anididhyasana* mode during the reflection phase where I was being more sensitive towards the context, differences in perspectives, and in the multiple mode of expression of my introspection. With the completion of each cycle, I could find myself finding more meaning and clarity while at the same time also indulging in a new form of confusion. Thus, self-study emerged as another methodology in my research process to help me improve what I was doing. The following chapters were written to illustrate the blend of these phases.

Self-Study

The distortion that I saw within myself; the ideal moral self and the real self (see chapter 1), I engaged in an ongoing meta-analysis of my multiple aspects of my life; from maintaining my diary after taking classes to capturing reflective pictures that resembled my internal conflict to reflecting through poems (Creswell, 2012). The revelations that I made after them about my own self were discussed with my critical friends who listened, challenged, and corrected me when needed helped me gradually see as a harmonious self, and helped me foster deeper learning. This motivated to explore the concept of 'self' further in order to explore my personality and the development of my self-image as an educational leader through self-study (Loughran, 2004 as cited in Samaras & Freese, 2006). However, self-study as a methodology goes beyond personal growth and self-image and has also been seen in the area of program evaluation and understanding values of self and others. I could see the connection between the paradigms of self-study methodology and the wellness paradigm of being that I was focusing on by relating the three major paradigms of self-study with *shrawana*, *manana*, and *nididhyasna*. I could relate the teacher inquiry paradigm of self-study with *shravana*, action research paradigm with *manana*, and reflective practice paradigm with *nididhyasna*.

Reflecting on my own practice by questioning how can I improve as an educator became the foundation of my research and thus the systematic research of my own practice and reflecting on it was crucial for me (Schon, 1987; Whitehead, 1989). Action research methodology did help me in achieving this. Still, with the addition of self-study methodology I would be able to incorporate other methodologies like narrative inquiry, autoethnography. Since it is not done in

isolation, I could bring other educational leaders and students and involve in a dialogue opening route for collaboration, openness, and vulnerability (Samaras & Freese, 2006). My choice for self-study methodology was also to challenge myself so that I get ready to defend my argument when I complete my Ph.D. research given my introverted nature. Jung (as cited in Geyer, 2012) explains a continuum on which one may differentiate two ways of relating to the world and of making judgments: introverted and extroverted. Castro (2013) claimed introversion as a phenomenon, in which the human brain does not work in a hyperactive state and introverts do not seek inspiration in people as introverts' brains show weaker responses to human faces or people in general. Their brains are stimulated from different ideas and concepts. On the other hand, extroverted people are those whose brains need constant stimulation and radiate energy from intense emotions and feelings when they are around other people. Introverted people avoid the "unpleasant external effort by seeking satisfaction within the self, in imagery and day-dreaming" (Wells, 1917 as cited in Freyd, 1924, p. 77) while extroverts need a driving force to motivate themselves and like constant changes. Strom and Porfolio (2018) argue that self-study builds on the researcher's personal processes and inquiry and takes them open to the public critique for social engagement helping me in my openness towards social engagement. The critical discussion with my critical friends did help me throughout my research journey. It helped me to reflexively examine my leadership practices as an educator through the "intense exploration of the tensions" within my practice by utilizing "a dialogical partner" in the form of my critical friends and observers in the projects and workshops (Frick & Riley, 2010, p. 310).

Living Theory Methodology

Reaching here, the need to embrace living theory methodology appeared to be significant to help me complement the methodological inventiveness. I could also make sense of my need for metaphorical representations. I could especially relate Nataraja as the metaphor of my living theory methodology, the acknowledgment of my distorted self for the transformation in me and in others through the process of inquiry about my own learning specifically in relation to my values leading me to clarify the meanings of my values through practice by synthesizing the eastern and the western philosophy (Whitehead, 2008). Embracing the two methodologies; the action research methodology and the self-study methodology helped me acknowledge my failures and vulnerabilities and develop my critical appreciative self-understanding as a researcher, a woman with multiple identities.

My Role as a Researcher

As a practitioner-researcher, I have found myself in a state where I hold two mutually exclusive opposites together in practice; one when I am practicing my educational values, and the other when I am denying the same values (Ilyenkov, 1977). Thus, I, as a researcher traced my journey of growth to understand and improve the circumstances of the ones I hold responsibility for by exercising methodological inventiveness and asking the research questions internally to myself and discussing collectively with others and engaging in the process of transformation (Dadds & Hart, 2002). Transformation, according to O'Brien (2018) is a recognized need that involves and engages with the practical, political, and personal spheres that require imaginative and experiential ways of thinking by being open. Mezirow (1978) explains transformation as a shift in meaning perspective when they can no longer

comfortably deal with anomalies in a new situation and requires added knowledge, skills and creative integration of new experiences. The methodological inventiveness signifies working beyond action planning and assessing and integrating the researcher's content, context, and values in the inquiry. The integration is meant to provide a descriptive, original representation of the search of the researcher's own understanding of an issue and their educational development.

In the process, I developed self-empathy and focused on improving the practice even during Covid-19 when as a researcher I had to face multiple limitations like the restriction of movement, slow internet, and several other logistical hassles. Throughout the research journey, I found myself taking multiple roles; sometimes I was a curious child trying to make meaning of my disconnected childhood while sometimes I was an assertive woman trying to get beyond my gender roles. I found myself as a seeker, seeking calmness, collaboration within me and others. The other times, I found myself reflecting and analyzing. At times, I did feel like Devi (goddess) Durga as shown in figure 13. Goddess Durga in Vedic philosophy metaphorically represents remaining true to our values and convictions even during the time of adversity who with her multiple roles not only remains mentally active but is also continuously watchful on her journey to her goal. From acknowledging my disconnections, failures, and vulnerabilities (see chapter IV) to understanding others' narratives and bringing others into sharing their vulnerabilities by creating a safe space (see chapter IV) and then gradually fostering critical self-reflection through generated curiosity, collaboration, and addressing the need for a community (see chapter V, VI), I made sense that I had the traits of adaptability, equanimity, and courage as a researcher just Devi Durga in our culture.



Figure 13 Goddess Durga

source: <https://www.pillaicenter.com/archetype-deity-pooja-durga-pooja-p107.aspx>

The need for critical reflections as a practitioner-researcher helped me acknowledge as well as work on my flaws and vulnerabilities and helped me make adjustments through learning and analyzing the context. Given the pandemic and the lockdown, it was difficult for me as a researcher to find a research site amid the uncertainty as I had to drop the school I had first proposed to perform my action research. But with the discussions on education among educational leaders going around different virtual platforms, I could see the virtual platform Zoom as an emerging research site. In an action research conference, a conversation with Stephen Kemmis made me clearer about my research. With the emergence of virtual platforms as a research site, I chose Zoom as my site for my action research. Kemmis (personal communication, January 29, 2022) argued that social life and education are produced and reproduced - and transformed - in practices as they are composed of sayings, doings, and relatings making us shift the way we see our research space. With Zoom as the practical research site for my action research again considering the limitations

of the time, I invited via email the educational leaders from different gender, age group, geographical locations, working in different institutions if they are willing to be a part of my research process considering all these limitations.

My Research site and Participants

With six educators, I started my action research taking the virtual platform Zoom as my research site. I have used pseudo names of the educators (including critical friends and members from the validation group) to maintain confidentiality. With two male participants dropping out during the first cycle because of a family emergency, I continued with six participants throughout the process. A brief introduction of my research participants are as follows:

Richa (female) - She is affiliated with one of the prestigious government universities of Nepal and has been in the field of education for the last 19 years. Her role generally revolves around educating students but she also does many administrative tasks like managing the terminal and board exams. So, “helping students learn and help them become independent professionally is something I do”, is what she shared during our first interaction. When it comes to teaching, it makes her feel joyful and it makes her feel like she has a very responsible role to play in every student’s life. She feels like she is responsible for showing the direction to every student.

Suruchi (female) - She works as the manager at the leading organization working in girls’ leadership and education for the last three years and leads a year-long course called Lead Course for the students of Grade 12 to teach them different skills, give them different experiences enabling them to become leaders and change-makers. In our first interaction, she shared joyfully, “I love my job. I don’t think I

would be doing anything else if given a chance. I love, love, love my job. But having said that, I definitely feel like I do have a huge responsibility precisely because I am working with very young minds and shaping them in many ways”. She identifies herself as a feminist and wants to see women becoming more confident at the end of the program that she manages and runs.

Aasha (female): When we started our research, she was working as a manager in a reputed company as well as working as a faculty at one of the reputed institutional schools of Nepal since 2015. Her role was teaching marketing to Grade 11 and leading workshops and training for her colleagues. She has worked with different sectors, beginning with the media sector which she switched later into the education sector. For her, teaching is something she loves doing even when involved with something else. She feels empowered as an educator as for her it means doing something right and after each workshop facilitation, she feels very motivated and inspired. She became a mother during our third cycle and is now on a maternity break and is considering rejoining her higher studies in education and work soon.

Gaule (male): He is an education leader “taking care of too many responsibilities”, including teaching as he is involved in mentoring and grooming young entrepreneurs as well as in fostering the entrepreneurship scenario in Nepal. He has mixed feelings when it comes to his role as an educator, however, most of the time he feels ambivalent as this was the field he always wanted to work in. Working in the field of education for the last nine years, he feels that his work is meaningful and is creating an impact. When he works with entrepreneurs and helps them solve their problems gives him a lot of energy. But again, when he talks to them, he feels divided as they make him cautious as well as positive. Being overly cautious, he feels

negative. He feels like their business might face loss and won't run anymore and managing that feeling is very difficult for him. In our first interaction, he shared that given how subjective the idea of entrepreneurship is, he sometimes feels like he is confused regarding his own capacity as a mentor and wonders whatever he is doing is right or not.

Jyoti (female)- She is the youngest among the participants who is involved with the education initiative of an international organization working for educational development in Nepal since 2019. She also works as a freelance copywriter. Her reason to become an educator was that she felt like she was only complaining and finding herself unable to make any changes. She graduated with her Bachelors in Business Administration (BBA) degree in 2018 and often found herself complaining. She also felt like if anyone wrote about the country or the education system, she was just re-posting and re-sharing it. That is when she started questioning if she could do anything from her side to transform the nation. She found herself privileged who knew how to manage her emotions. She also was aware of the resources from where she could learn new things, get more exposure but when she used to look at the state of the schools in the rural areas of Nepal, and especially when she looked at her younger brothers and sisters studying locally in Dang, she realized something was missing in the education system itself. In our first interaction, she shared that the feelings that were associated with her role are anticipation and fear – because she was really excited and thus expected that the students would get inspired and could change their life through a better education system.

Kamal (male): Though he is working as a teaching faculty in one of the reputed institutional colleges of Kathmandu since 2019, he has been working in the

field of education for eighteen years. His background is a little inclined towards software and computer yet he has always been interested in the education sector. His role revolves around preparing lectures, creating workshops, and designing exercises to make learning effective. When he teaches programming to students, it is all about problem-solving, problem dissection, and tackling the problem. He also looks after how can make the learning experience better holistically, especially in capacity building. In our first interaction, he shared that was not sure how he felt about being an educator, however, teaching is something he enjoys a lot.

Along with these research participants, I formed a professional learning community that had my critical friends and myself. My critical friends included my two supervisors Dr. Gael Robertson and Dr. Dhanapati Subedi, three of my colleagues who were working together with me in my organization (Archana, Mahi, Silly), and one of my colleagues who was working together with me in the college that I was affiliated with as a faculty (Karma). I also had the validation groups comprised of my fellow Ph.D. colleagues and other university faculties. My professional learning community helped me throughout the process from being in my workshops and observing to helping me reflect in between the sessions and after the sessions. They helped me by asking critical questions, giving me needed feedback, and supporting me in making sense of my action reflections.

Multiple Methods for Data Collection and Generation

Data collection happened systematically throughout the process of practice. Embodied knowledge of practitioner-researchers, both me and my research participants were the primary data source in which we created a safe space to share the report of our educational influences to support and explain our ongoing cycles of

research. The Rosestone Collective (2014) argues that safe space is the re(created) classroom spaces that is conscious about including the voices of the marginalized identities where everyone speaks and acts freely, form collective strength and resistance for building and rebuilding knowledge. Thus, data collection was done through observation, interviews, conversations, workshops. While the conversation, observation went throughout the year in different forms, I particularly had in-depth interviews thrice; at the beginning of the research to explore the individual needs of the participants and their living values, in the middle of the research period to understand the progress, and in the final reflection, phase to explore their overall research experiences. Regarding the workshop, I conducted three major workshops, the first for ten weeks, the second for five weeks, and the third for three weeks throughout the year with some continued workshops in between. Similarly, I also included video/audio tapes, transcripts of conversations, as well as other artworks for the process of reflection and analysis and provided them as evidence. While some of the participants were ready to allow me to record their audio/video, some of them wanted me to collected the data making notes when they did not feel comfortable. Whitehead et al. (2020) argue that the most important aspect of data collection is producing an evidence-based validated explanation for educational influence through a visual narrative which has been considered throughout the research process. Thus, observation was another important method for data collection. I conducted structured classroom observation by preparing some guidelines, so each of my workshops were observed by three of my critical friends who provided me with feedback after each session. Then I observed the research participants during the workshop and provided my reflection to them after each session and also had one on one conversations on need basis for them.

Multimedia Presentations Using Digital Technology

One of the important characteristics of living theory methodology is it uses visual data to clarify the meaning of associated values and to enable empathic resonance. Blikstad-Balas (2016) argues that the use of video helps to dissect the complex and multifaceted phenomena into smaller entities which help the researchers to look for patterns that are otherwise difficult to observe directly. Given that education is a value-laden practical activity, the personal knowledge of the researcher can be both powerful in expanding competence while also challenging. The challenge is not just to understand its limitations but also to communicate them. One of the challenges of communicating the meanings of embodied values in the data collection process of educational research is also related to the limitations of the words in print. Therefore, I made sure that the video data is accessible for all the research participants, the observers, and the critical friends for the process of validation as a crucial process throughout the data collection process. Whitehead (2018) argues that “the use of digital data in living theory is different than that from a coding or category system” (p. 45), and highlights the significance of reflective writing in the contexts where there are problems of collecting video data because of physical or psychological challenges. Thus, reflective writing was another means of data collection where both the researcher and the participants wrote and shared their reflective writings after each session.

Explanations of Educational Influences in Learning

Living theory requires a researcher to collect data and produce concrete evidence to demonstrate that they have improved their practice as an educator through ostensive and lexical expression (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009). Ostensive expression

refers to the expression of the values and the principles that the researcher is associated with in their originality of mind and their critical judgment during their practice. Lexical expression refers to the meaning of words or values defined in terms of other words or values. Whitehead (2013) provides an example to clarify the significance of the use of both the ostensive expression and the lexical expression in the research by explaining how he would make his readers comprehend the solutions for the poverty in print-based academic text is. First, they would focus on explaining ostensive expressions of meaning to show how the poverty in print-based academic texts can be overcome through digital narratives. Then, they would use lexical definitions to draw the readers' attention to academic texts to explore their implications for overcoming the poverty in print-based text. The idea of giving importance to both the ostensive and the lexical expression is to focus on the diversity and ecological complexity of the living spaces of the researcher to explain possible educational influences. I have done the same while collecting data through the workshops. I made the participants aware of my values and their meaning and learned about theirs and then moved on to explain what the academic definitions of those values are or what the academic words signify in the workshops. Whitehead (2018) argues the importance of educational influences by connecting data with the educational responsibility. Polanyi (1998) claims educational influences are the personal knowledge and trying to understand the world from both the individuals who acknowledge the importance of creative response and those who resist it. The principle of action research in education is a value-laden practical activity that shows the historical and socio-cultural influences associated with the researcher's continuous professional development.

Quality of Inference

The nature of living theory methodology is characterized by the inclusion of 'I' as a living contradiction and is, therefore, associated with the self-study of teacher education practices (S-STEP). Whitehead (1972) argues that the researcher should perpetually ask questions related to the validation of the knowledge that they are claiming. Thus, the overall process was messy and confusing divided into parts and the journey started feeling like bringing everything together into a coherent whole. This dissertation is a part of doing the same, bringing my messiness into a meaningful whole. My messy self has been inferred through narration, dialogues (monologues), metaphors, poems, and paintings.

My childhood has been highly influenced by the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Vishnu Puran*, and other *Vedic storytelling*. Thus, the narrative inquiry has been the base of my writing process as I bring some of the crucial experiences through narration together into this dissertation. Dialogues play a crucial role in my meaning-making where I have monologues with my inner selves. When I realized that my narrative fell short to share my emotions, I used poems, painting, photographs as the non-linguistic genres for the holistic representation.

Campbell (2013) has used empathetic resonance to communicate the meaning of the researchers' ontological values of 'being loved into learning' in their explanations of educational influence. The use of visual data, therefore, is played an important measure to look into the validity and ethical consideration as it focuses on the significance of the relational dynamic awareness to comprehend the relationship between me and my participants. The living theory focuses more on the educational influences of the researcher and keeps the researcher at the center by focusing on their

improvement of practice and developing their own living theory. Thus, I have used auto/ethnography, one of the ways of writing a dissertation proposed by living theories, to bring my educational inferences and to focus on my improvement in practice (Whitehead, 2018). This helped me understand ‘writing as inquiry’ and explore myself from a socio-cultural perspective. However, as the research journey progressed, I realized that asking the critical questions was very important for my meaning-making process and also for the dissertation, so along with the auto/ethnographic and narrative inquiry, I also started seeking more critical discourses and thus the need for critical friends and validation groups played a crucial role in helping me bring my critical auto/ethnographic writing. Whitehead (2008) emphasized the importance of the validation groups as an important aspect of validation for the self-study practitioner-researcher. Hebarmas (1976), as cited in Niemi (2005), claims that the connection between understanding and reason normally consists of moral righteousness, reasons, belief that the action is the right thing to do, and the demand of the context. My validation groups consisted of my colleagues, critical friends, supervisors, friends from Ph.D., and faculties of KUSOED who used the critical lens of social validity provided by Habermas (1976) on comprehensibility, rightness, truthfulness, and authenticity (as cited in Whitehead, 2008).

Ethical Considerations

Action research findings can shift from their emancipatory purposes if the researcher is not morally and ethically aware of the social, political as well as economic conditions of educational practices (Van Manen, 1990). Apart from that, prior ethical considerations avoid the risk of harming both the participants and the researchers and minimize the risks of leaving negative legacies. To maintain the

general ethical code that is confidentiality, I have provided pseudo names to address my research participants. This helped me demonstrate respect for the participants by being conscious about protecting intellectual freedom by understanding that an individual has the capacity for originality and critical engagement (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005). Intellectual freedom protects the voices of diverse communities and helps foster interpersonal relationships, empathy, and respect. Right from the planning stage, moral and ethical considerations should be prioritized and documented properly.

Whitehead and McNiff (2006) provided three basic categories for ethical framework in living theory action research: access, safeguarding rights, and assuring good faith. This involved obtaining both the oral and written permission of participants and safeguarding their rights of voluntary withdrawal from the research process at any time if they wish to while assuring their confidentiality. Because the nature of educational research asks both the researcher and the participants to explore sensitive topics, like reflecting on educational influences and values, it is important to negotiate access and limit the publication and distribution if needed. Thus, it is always important to contact all the participants and secure their permission prior to publication. I started the research by taking consent to use their photos, videos, reflections, and other relevant data-texts to make it available for public discourse and in publications.

Meanwhile, owing to the importance of visual data in living theory research, I was conscious of the potential ethical problems that might arise if I did not obtain permission to make parts of a video public. Similarly, Brandenburg and Gervasoni (2012) highlight how dealing with sensitive issues and reporting them mindfully

demonstrates trust in the self as well in the practitioner-researchers throughout the process. The ongoing need for critical appraisal extends beyond the associated institutions and ethical standards and goes much farther than commonly accepted criteria. Ernest (2012) provides a framework for ethical consideration which asks the researchers to critically reflect on the outcome of the presentation and publication in public forums and to observe how the researcher's assumptions and beliefs have been challenged, supported, or altered throughout their practice. I made sure I followed this through the help of my critical friends and validation groups.

Similarly, self-study and autoethnography are both a process and a product (Edwards, 2021). In this research, I have tried to deepen my understanding of the complex dimension of the relationship that I shared with my mother. Apart from that auto-ethnography accounts self-experience, but that experience which is self-described does bring my relationship with others. Thus, an on-going reflection on my ethical responsibility was needed to ensure accountability and care as a responsible researcher that required constant negotiation of consent with myself and also with my mother. During the process, I have often felt out of place and distanced myself from my relationship with others, especially with my mother. Importantly, as the research needed significant stories of my mother's life, I felt the need to ensure relational ethics (Ellis, 2007) which proposes a process consent. It meant showing my mother the paper, reading the excerpts that included her story, and editing the parts that upsetted her. Thus, the parts of the chapter does read incomplete sometimes with only the half of the narration of the story, I have left it that way to acknowledge the care for myself but again to address the relational ethics that I had with my mother.

An ethics of the self for me was to take care of my mental wellbeing- getting enough rest while writing and reflecting on the difficult events that happened in my life; giving a certain timeframe to end the dissertation as autoethnographic reflection is actually an unending process (Lee, 2018), and being wary of the potential threats to my personal and professional reputation. So trying to find the balance between vulnerability, authenticity, and care was something that I undertook as my ethical responsibility as a researcher.

Chapter Summary

Chapter three is the methodology section, which consists of my philosophical underpinnings and research paradigms. Here, I have discussed my ontological view, brought the context of multiple realities, and shared my epistemological viewpoint. Here, I have discussed how my inquiry is a quest for knowledge that I think each of us has and I am simply scaffolding the knowledge and bringing that into the light as a part of contribution to the field. Similarly, I have clarified my axiological viewpoint and explained the research as value-laden. Then I discuss the research design, phases of my action research projects, data collection process, and meaning-making process of the research. I have shared that the quality standards that I maintained in the research were the standards of living theory action research and research as an autoethnography where consent, the authenticity of data, and confidentiality have been focused.

PHASE II: ACTION PHASE

Phase II is the action phase. I divide this phase into three chapters: IV, V, and VI. The three chapters are the emergent themes that generated as we worked on the conceptual framework of critical self-reflection. In chapter IV, I explore how I was a living contradiction and what was the gradual process of working on my emotional literacy. I then unpack the journey of the research participants and discuss how emotional literacy can be enhanced. In chapter V, I bring the narrative of the research participant as well as mine to explore the socio-cultural context of emotions. Here, I discuss the significance of critical self-reflection in understanding the socio-cultural aspect of emotions. In chapter VI, I discuss the need of creating a safe space for critical self-reflection. Here, I also share how I, along with my research participants were able to do so during the time of pandemic. In this phase, I make meaning of my research journey, field work, and reflection notes divided into three action-reflection cycles.

CHAPTER IV

ENHANCING EMOTIONAL LITERACY: UNPACKING THE LIVING
CONTRADICTION, THE 'AHA' MOMENT

In 2015, I lost someone; someone very special to me.

It was a tragic death, a consequence of a road accident.

I cried, cried, and cried for days, weeks, and months.

But with each passing day, I realized that the pain hadn't gone.

I didn't know whom to ask for help.

I didn't know if talking about it was important then.

I was already teaching for the past three years,

as a teaching fellow who was in a village to help the ones who were in despair.

A topper in her studies, she knew multiple complex vocabularies

Yet, she was illiterate in choosing the words

that aptly expressed how she felt in her heart.

It already has been six months since the earthquake, children face other insecurities in Nepal. Of the 8897 people who were killed in the devastation six months ago, a third of them were children. For some people, the earthquake maybe just a memory now - but the children in the hardest-hit zones are still facing

insecurities and problems. Abhi (pseudonym) one of my grade nine students, had just turned 13 when the earthquake struck and damaged his shelter. Although he has returned to his school, which luckily was not badly damaged, he is still sad because he sees his future as bleak. He used to be top of the class and was very confident about becoming a doctor. But, after the earthquake, it was noticeable that he was not able to concentrate on his studies.

Abhi today shared: "On the one hand our family is facing a financial crisis and on the other hand, we four families with seven members each are now living under the same tent, which has created a lot of mess in my life."

Excerpts from my diary written on October 27, 2015

The conversation with Abhi triggered multiple unpleasant emotions simultaneously – fear, anxiety, trauma, and loss that was inside the back of my head during the earthquake but had not surfaced in the conscious. Most of all, the disconnection I had with my emotional self surfaced, especially with my mother. As Abhi's teacher, I felt I felt lost and helpless too. I felt I was there to help him in his studies but helping him navigate through his emotions was more crucial than teaching him grammar. I felt cold and numb, unable to ask what words or vocabularies would be helpful for me as his teacher in a conversation like that. In trying to understand that, I also remembered that I had not called my mother and have had a conversation with her with any of these emotions. *'Thik cha'* (Everything is alright) was the only phrase I used to share with her whenever she used to call me. Lack of words to express exactly how I was feeling was something I was going through. The conversation with Abhi was brief, but the emotions he was going through for his family was something that I was lacking, a sort of numbness surfacing around. I felt

like an illiterate in terms of emotions and its expressions. Brackett (2020) argues that emotional literacy helps both the students and teachers tune in to their emotions and teaching-learning by teaching them emotional skills for handling difficult emotions to thrive. My emotional illiteracy was being reflected in my conversations with the students where I would suddenly go quiet when they used to start sharing their difficult emotions, my troubled mental health as I had started become angry frequently, and my social life as I was feeling a disconnect with my family members more and more. This had also started deteriorating my physical health (Basu & Mermillod, 2011). I could relate to Bump (1995) when he shared that his vocabularies for expressing emotions were “limited to usual mad, bad, sad, or glad” and the more education he received, the more he felt like he had “anesthetized and endowed with an amazing ability to spin a complex web of words to defend from emotion” rather than expressing it (p.1). My conversation with Abhi was like coming out of that anesthesia, that abrupt moment of realization where I experienced an indication of illiteracy and also my readiness to learn something that I was unaware of before. This was the first time when I realized I was a living contradiction, especially as an educator. I was not a self-aware educator which I thought as an important value of an educator. Tisdell (2008, p. 31) calls these the “sacred learning moments”, the ‘aha’ moment, after which I realized the need for some soul searching and learned the usage of emotional vocabularies. This led me to the journey of critical self-reflection that changed my perception of success and failure (Mezirow, 1991).

Shravana: Listening to my Emotions and Connecting with my Inner Self

My hesitation in continuing difficult conversations with my students made me listen to my own voices of my inner self that I was unconsciously running away from.

Steiner (1984) drew the relationship between our bodies and our emotions. Just like our bodies are real, so are our emotions, thus if repressed for a long time ultimately become irrepressible and start manifesting in our bodies in some ways. My body too started manifesting my repressed emotions through frequent illness and extreme anxiety attacks. *Shravana*, or the hearing of the truth for me meant understanding my ‘living values’ through the meticulous listening of the self (Simjith & Vasudevan, 2017). Active listening to my inner self was important for me to give me meaning and purpose in my life. Whitehead (2004) argues that the values are clarified and communicated in the course of their emergence in practice with the help of digital visual data from the practice. I embarked on a journey of listening to my inner truth through digital visual evidence.

On August 6, 2014, I opened my Instagram account @feelingshrestha with a picture that I had on my phone with no caption. I was already working in the village of Lalitpur as a volunteer teacher for one and a half years then, and it was a very random decision to register that Instagram account on that day for I remember being bored and scrolling through my smartphone just to keep myself busy. Vogel and Rose (2016) argue that people use social networking sites selectively by presenting their most positive traits and appear to be happy and successful. I was also doing the same. Furthermore, I had chosen my username @feelingshrestha as the English translation of my Nepali name ‘Bhawana Shrestha’ for two reasons: first, my name is very common in Nepal and there were several other Instagram accounts already registered with that name; second, I had never actually liked my name since childhood because of how common it was. Therefore, in some ways, I opened this account to give a new turn to my identity. Little did I know that I had been disconnected from my inner self for a long time (see chapter I). I was a little hesitant to use this platform in the

beginning because of how novice I was when it came to editing the pictures and because I was staying in a school hostel in the village and felt that I did not have anything exciting to share. Thus, I just had seven pictures posted in the year 2014.

Jorge (2019) in their study through the hashtags of Instagram concluded that the use of Instagram is associated with outdoor activities, socializing, and sharing those pictures of indoor activities that have the potential to circulate around in terms of popularity but do not have any form of reflection. In April 2015, I was still working as a fellow but wanted to leave the school hostel and decided to commute to the school from Kathmandu city every day. Though my commute time was lengthy, my evenings and weekends slowly started to become more fun as there were several places to hop around. By then, I had already known how the filter of Instagram works. So, the process of posting my filtered pictures continued. I used to post my pictures whenever I used to go out with my friends or had achieved something in my life. My focus was on the pictures' quality, not captions. The captions used to be the hashtags that were on the trend. I lost my close friend in an accident in February 2015. Rather than sitting down and acknowledging my emotions, I had carried my life forward without even giving time to accept what had befallen on me. Basu and Mermillod (2011) claim to recognize and understand one's emotions across the moment as well as across times and then acknowledge and manage it as one of the important measures of emotional intelligence. As I look back, I lacked that as I always felt like I was running away from my emotions associated with that event. I was not being able to live my values of acknowledging and seeing beyond my vulnerabilities and considered myself a failure. One of the *puranas* that my mother had taken me to during my childhood had the tale of the round of birth and death in relation to samsara 'as an unending and untrustworthy fluctuation between physical, emotional, ritual,

social, and economic states” and is ultimately the result of karma, my own evil actions leading to the suffering in me (Bennett, 2002). Unconsciously I blamed myself for the suffering that I was going through and without even understanding what those lines of Puranas meant, I started despising the notion that evil actions lead to suffering. Most of all, I had blamed my mother for taking me to those *puranas* and letting me listen to them because of which I was suffering, I thought. I neither post anything about the accident on my Instagram nor reflect on why I was running away from my vulnerability. Similarly, Nepal was hit by a devastating earthquake on 25th April 2015 taking the lives of 8970 people where 198 people went missing, and 22,303 people got seriously injured (Subedi & Chhetri, 2019). Given the risks as several aftershocks hit the country for a few months, I too was living in a shelter, but my posts on Instagram did not mention anything about the pain, rather it was filled with happy pictures of the sunny garden. Steiner (2010) calls this state the stage of ‘numbness’ where people are unaware of anything they feel. This state of unawareness of emotional illiteracy was a common experience for me to not have apathy even in situations when there might have strong emotional reactions.

Strong emotions that are left unacknowledged for a long period can result in the explosion of emotions or physical distress (Venart et al., 2007). Later in May 2017, I suddenly started feeling hollow. Nothing specific had changed in my life. At that point, I had already started working in one of the reputed colleges of Kathmandu and was doing my M.Phil. in English. Apart from that I was earning well and had friends to go out with if I wanted to. But suddenly a nagging feeling of loneliness and anxiety started to haunt me. For Steiner (2010), it is the state of physical sensation where the body starts manifesting emotions but the person is still unaware of their emotions because of their emotional illiteracy. For one of my academic assignments, I

was going through different books and that's when I found this vocabulary called 'Emotional Intelligence' which I had not heard before. That was the point when I got my hands on the book by Goleman (2006) where he emphasized the importance of self-awareness to live a happier and more productive life. Goleman (2006) had defined self-awareness as not being swayed by emotions or overreacting to what is perceived but a neutral lens through self-reflection by taking a slight step back from the experience amidst turbulent emotions and being aware of what is happening and acknowledging it.

Understanding self-reflection and self-awareness was the moment of eureka or the moment of revelation and a beginning of my transformative learning process as an adult learner (Foote, 2015). Unpacking the notion of death and how I interpreted it was the moment of eureka that led me to awareness of myself, my values, and the contradiction associated with it. The fundamental Hindu belief is that an individual's *atman* (soul) attains *mukti* (liberation) into a transcendent reality or an entrance into *swarga* (heaven) as a part of their *karmic* (one's action) reward. However, the experience of the death of my close friend was such that I had not found any trace of whether he has found any liberation. Also, my Science teacher at school had gone against it and shared that there is nothing called rebirth there is no proof of going to heaven or hell. This understanding led me to reflect on myself within the context I was in then. The contradiction in the belief system that I had around life and death based on what my mother had taught me to what my teacher had taught me was evident in my role as an educator that I did not want to be like my mother whom I thought rumbled without evidence and wanted to be like my Science teacher who wanted evidence for everything. So when my students used to come to have a conversation of emotions, I was not able to as I did not know if emotions can be

learned through evidence. However, with heavy emotional distress, it was quite difficult for me to just think about life or my role as a teacher. The need to then reflect was important however, journaling was the only way I knew as a strategy for critical self-reflection then and at that point to journal on a blank paper, so used art as my form of expression (see chapter III). Then for the first time, I thought about the purpose of my life, and also for the very first time, I posted about my view on life and death and on what I considered as failures to find the purpose of my life and shared my vulnerability in relationships. The feeling of *'laaj/lajja'* (shame) and guilt were the two major emotions I felt I had felt most of the times, the most prominent emotion in the eastern context (see chapter II). I remembered an incident when I was simply sitting in the balcony of my house and my *aaji* (grandmother) had come and commented on my boy-cut hair and blamed my mother for not helping me grow my hair so it could be braided. She had growled in fury, *"esko aama le kapan koridina pani alchi mancha"* (Her mother feels lazy even to braid her hair). Other women hearing the comment had laughed about it and when I had later shared that with my mother, she had just turned quiet without responding anything. Since then every time, I saw my *aaji* or the other women who lived nearby I had extreme shame for how I looked and guilt for having a mother who made me look that way. It was important to self-examine these unconscious narratives and emotions of shame and guilt further. Mezirow (1991) called this as the second phase of transformative learning (as cited in Kitchenham, 2008)

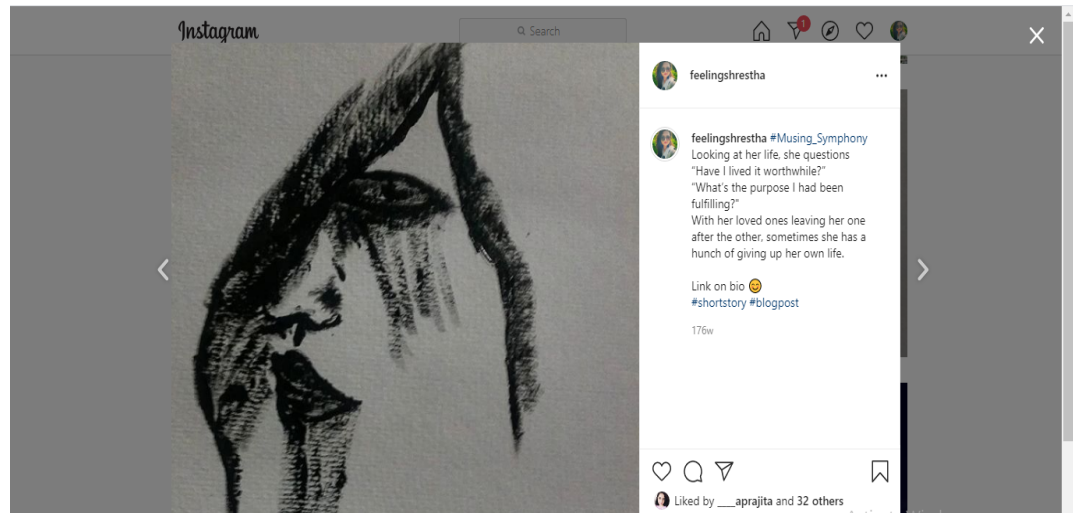


Figure 14 A picture painted by me along with an article where I had shared about how hollow I used to feel

Expressing these emotions in the form of art was the route to my third phase of transformative learning. In this stage, I was more critical of my socio-cultural assumptions and the setting where I grew up (Kithchenhan, 2008; Mezirow, 1991). While I was expressing myself, fear was the most prominent emotion that I felt. I was worried about how people would react to my post and the questions that I might get. However, nobody asked me anything about it. I had anticipated, everyone would hit that laugh button and would hover me with questions just like the way aaji and other women had done to me as a child. That not just took a heavy load off my shoulders but also gave me a little bit of courage to go back to my life and reflect on what I was considering as my failures. My feeling of shame was also stemming from the growing body weight as a female that I was not being able to control. The disconnection between my ideal moral self and my true self regarding this had started to stem from how society had perceived an ideal body image of a female. The socio-cultural factors have a significant relationship with body image resulting in internalized pressure on self (Cafri et al., 2005).

Finding the roots of my feeling of shame and then my not being able to fulfill my ideal body image stemming from the social factors helped me see how I was ignoring my emotions of anxiety considering myself a failure. Brown (2011) argues that vulnerability is the key to wholehearted living and our courage is measured with reference to our vulnerability. The simplistic protagonist Bhima is considered as the most authentic human, according to Mahabharata and called the 'timeless man' as he had his strengths but also embodied weaknesses, concerns, care, fears, and follies (Simjith & Vasudevan, 2017). The reflection and acknowledgment of my vulnerable self gave me the courage to consult a professional who asked me to get help from a gynecologist given I had not had my periods for about six months along with the increased body weight and if that was the cause of all those frequent anxiety attacks I was having. It was a good decision as I got diagnosed with Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS). PCOS is considered as "a reproductive endocrine disorder with symptoms of modest importance compared with other conditions with more obvious effects on wellbeing" and the consequences of this bring "psychological distress" in the women affected with it (Barry et al., 2011, p. 2449). With continuous reflection on self, I was slowly being able to observe the benefits of regular reflection and how acknowledgment of my vulnerable self had started to make me more conscious of my context and was giving me some strength.



Figure 15 One of my posts on Instagram where I had shared about my pain and felt relieved. Rather than commenting on why I did so, some of my friends had started to empathize with me.

Because of my fluctuations in hormones, I used to get swollen randomly and used to feel piercing pain all over my body. The newfound courage, love, and empathy had come as a ray of hope in my life. So, rather than focusing a lot on reflecting and writing in a diary, I thought of making it a little creative, colorful, and easy (as shown in Figure 15). That's how I started sharing my reflection on my value and shared my self-reflection via my Instagram posts on 1st January 2018 as a part of critical reflection. This commitment engaged me in the culture of inquiry concerning how my reflective practice could harness the positive values of love, compassion, and a feeling of self-respect for myself and others, foster a love of learning, and more importantly, help me find joy in being human and living.

Manana: Introspecting on my Vulnerabilities

Manana, the contemplating of the truth influenced me immensely in general. In particular, it helped me to accept the disconnection from myself (see chapter I) and become mindful of my present to develop resilience, confidence, and optimism. Petrides and Furnham (2001) argue that the trait EI model includes aspects like emotion expression, emotion regulation, self-motivation, and optimism (as cited in

Fabio et al., 2018). It was possible only with mindful critical introspection of the self, which helped me acknowledge my limitations and seek solutions within my limitedness by accepting my vulnerabilities. Brassey and Kruyt (2020) argue that mindfulness or integrative awareness or being aware of the changing reality emotionally and physically helps shift from viewing challenges as roadblocks to solving problems. For example, the following self-reflective Instagram post shared my heightening mindfulness, resilience, and optimism with my increasing acceptance of what I was going through at that moment.

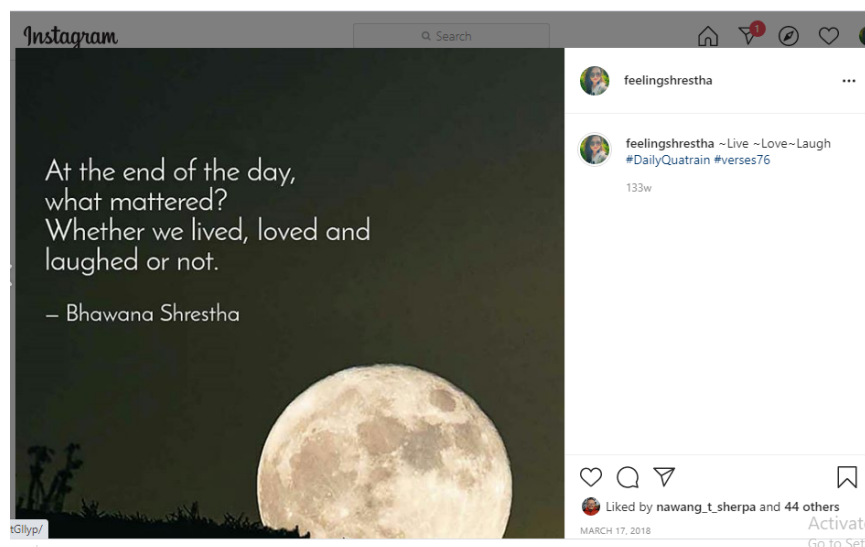


Figure 16 76th day of reflecting after committing to regular self-reflection

Loscalzo (2014) argues that failure can be therapeutic to help us see beyond ourselves by guarding our unbridled arrogance and offering humility. Through *Manana* on my failures and vulnerabilities, I was able to enhance my consciousness towards my own self which not only developed compassionate self-love but also helped me to become more empathetic toward others. With my living acknowledgment, I was hoping to achieve two things: (1) promote innovation and improvement after learning from each failure (Cannon & Admondson, 2005) and to

improve my interpersonal relationships (Zhang et al., 2020). As I had recently started my organization then, it was important for me to introspect and reflect not just on what I was lacking but also come up with innovative ideas and approaches to foster EI through the organization.

The continuous learning from our mistakes helped me improve my practice as a leader by developing our conceptual framework, the hexagon of critical reflection (see chapter III), 'LISTEN' the acronym for Listen, Introspect, Share, Try, Express, Nurture. For us 'Listen' was the core of all, the ability to listen to oneself and others by suspending initial judgment and just accepting our vulnerabilities and failures to nurture self-awareness and empathy. The idea was that only by opening ourselves up to new possibilities but also to introspect on if we can move to the next step of relating it to our own life. Ratnam (2019) explains the two-fold process of listening which can be done when listening to oneself and also to the participants. This first process involves words, the form of sharing through which coordination can be built between each other in the form of dialogue with active engagement. Engagement with words is helpful when it comes to listening to self. The ability to use vocabulary to express oneself by naming the emotions is considered beneficial for emotional and physical health (Vine et al., 2020). The second process of listening involved non-verbal cues of the responses and their emotional reactions such as wordless encounters, and gestures. In relation to self, the recognition of the triggers of any reactions of emotions helps understand the cause of human behavior as the second process of listening to self (Lee et al., 2019). Then, 'Introspect' meant self-reflection where we empower ourselves with insightful tools that trigger questions about self, relationships, and preferences for fulfilling work and come up with personal life philosophies. Herwig et al. (2018) explain introspection as the processing of emotions

for enhanced amygdala activity. The introspection of emotions helps is a mindful approach to train and improve emotion regulation in order to increase self-awareness. This then leads us to the step ‘Share’ that encourages us to share our feeling and our life philosophies based on our prior life experiences without any inhibitions. This is also the step where we believe one fosters empathy by creating a climate where we share in a kind and compassionate tone to others who may not necessarily agree with them. When we share we improve our articulatory skills while the others listen actively, fueling the development of empathy. Another step, ‘Try’ meant that after having listened to our own as well as perspectives of others regarding self-knowledge, relationships, as well as the idea of fulfilling work, it is important we go out in the real world and try implementing their newfound or previously held but now enhanced convictions. Once out in the ‘real world’, many variables will affect our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. There are also chances that we might fail again, so in this step ‘Express’ we again express our newfound experiences and reflect again to finally reach the step ‘Nurture’ as we gain critical insights about ourselves as well as understanding others’ point of view, learn to nurture the LISTEN model to become a better version of themselves throughout their lives. This model developed as a blend of eastern and western philosophy (see chapter III) was helpful for me both in my personal as well as professional life to develop self-awareness and empathy.

Nidhadhyasana: Meditating

Joya and Surpi (2021) argue that to become *Acharya* (expert or the educator), an individual has to undertake the activity that has been introspected in a mindful and holistic manner. What has been understood out of total belief and introspection leads to heightened self-awareness and empathy only when it is mindfully performed. My living

theory action research methodology provided me the opportunity to execute what I had introspected and helped me create a space as an agent for educational improvement and change just like an acharya does at the stage of *nidhadhyasna* (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009). Archer (2000) argues, “performative concerns are unavoidably part of our inevitable practical engagement with the world of material culture; the practical order” (p.198). McNiff (2013) claims that the first task of any educator belonging to any country is to seek to know themselves and articulate their own values to hold themselves accountable for their behaviors and practices. After introspection, I started highly valuing self-compassion and gradually started to suspend my judgment of self on the basis of my failures and vulnerabilities.

LISTEN (श्रवण), started to become my framework in my day to day practice. Being an educator and also the founder of a venture that works on emotional intelligence, people kept me on a pedestal and evaluated whether I am handling the critical incidents with emotional intelligence or not. Given how an individual's identity, nowadays, stands on her social media (digital) presence to a greater degree (Ganda, 2014), there are times when people always expected me to be positive and successful and not make any mistakes. An example of this is one of the interviews I had as a guest of a show where I was asked the show's host, a similar question in the following video on 22nd December 2019.



Video 3 Acknowledging publicly that I still make mistakes as an educator and the founder of the organization that fosters EI
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nag7VvrEsuk>)

Host: “When did you start your organization ‘My Emotions Matter’?”

Bhawana: 10th March 2018

Anup: When did you realize that you were emotionally intelligent? How has your life become different since then as an entrepreneur? Is EI related to the success you have been able to achieve so far?

Bhawana: Though I had not started any venture before, I feel I had an entrepreneurial mindset. I started my career as a journalist, then moved towards teaching, and then only thought of starting my organization. If I have to look back, I would say I was someone who used to express without giving much thought or reflections to anything of sorts. I used to share my critical feedback without thinking about how the person on the receiving end would take that and how they would feel about it. This has been changing and has come to

be seen through my teaching. I used to be someone who took the feedback provided to me personally but never thought about how others can do the same. However, through my continuous practice, I have been able to reflect on my flaws and am being able to accept them. Rather than one specific moment when I have realized that I have finally become emotionally intelligent, it is more of a continuous process of learning and improvement in my practices.

This acted as the step of sharing for me in which I was in a conversation where I was sharing my thoughts after being involved in affecting understanding or the step of listening and then introspecting. This conversation was meaningful as it brought my untold narrative into the limelight in the context where I as an educator working in the field of EI was expected to be flawless all the time. This also showed me how educators are asked “to make themselves invulnerable, immune to the possibility of failing, while others seem to enjoy risking self” (Bullough, 2005, p.23). At this point, I could also relate to my mother who was expected to be flawless at all times. With my father away from home, she had to take care of us, cook for us, look after the house, work at school, and in between also take out time to chat with my aaji and other women of the village. This was the first time when I realized there was actually something that I could have a conversation with about my mother. But somehow, I left it on the back burner. I opened up to my mother only after I reached the second phase of my action-reflection cycle (see chapter V). As an educator, anyone can easily resonate with Palmer’s (1998) conclusion, “teaching is the daily exercise in vulnerability” (p.17). It might be the reason, I have rarely seen my fellow educators publicly acknowledging their failures and vulnerabilities. In this conversation, I have claimed that, by default, as a human being, I am not perfect. In Nepali culture where teachers are considered to be someone perfect in the field and taken as an expert who does not commit any mistakes or has any

flaws, it is difficult for the educators to share their vulnerability publicly. Thus, the conversation made me realize the contradictory situation I was in. As much as I realized the contradiction, it was a little difficult for me to comprehend how *gurus* can not be perfect at all times for I had associated gurus with Gods all the time. As an educator, I was sharing about the importance of being self-aware; understanding one's values, reflecting on experiences, and acknowledging one's vulnerabilities, as the first step to becoming emotionally intelligent (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2017); but outside the classroom, I was being considered as someone immune to the possibility of failing or even being vulnerable. I felt like a preacher more than a practitioner who preached about self-compassion but did not practice herself, per se, who did not exist in the real world, and realized myself as a "living contradiction" (Whitehead, 1989). Thus, moving on to the next step which was the step of 'trying' was important. Archer (2000) calls the 'discursive order' on the emergence of emotions, 'sociality'; "the participation in the social realm entails concerns about self-worth which cannot be evaded in this discursive environment" (p.198).

I started realizing that continuous reflection on our self and the acknowledgment of our failures and vulnerabilities will not let us disconnect with ourselves or our existence: rather it improves our relationship with ourselves. Being born as a girl, that too in an indigenous family and raised in the terai region of Nepal, I had started to feel disconnected with my existence with multiple contradictions in my socio-cultural setting (see chapter I). These stereotypes and obligations impacted my self-esteem and independence as an individual who lacked the courage to question the validity of the prevalent negative stereotypes in childhood and teenage years. I remember an incident when I was out with my younger brother and his friends in a nearby river to learn to swim with them when I was around nine years old. While I had just made a plunge in

my river like my brothers, my mother came out of the blue, pulled me out of the river, dragged me to our home, and beat me black and blue. Till date I have not been able to learn to swim out of the fear of my mother from that day. It was just a small glimpse of it, but my mother was always concerned about what the other people of the society would say to me and her. With my reflection on this incident, I published a video on my YouTube channel on 11th September 2020 where I explained how the culture I was raised in and how my mother treated me when I wanted to express myself impacted the way I behave even today. When I came to Kathmandu for the first time and saw women in the swimming pool, I had turned blue out of shame. At this stage, I was trying to understand and label my emotions while at the same time also express it.



Video 4 Sharing about how my childhood experiences, especially that with my mother has shaped me as a person today (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9I5K-VAQ0g>)

Ventegodt et al (2003) explain inferiority complexes make the connection with ourselves very hard as the crippled self-image disconnects with our deep selves. Building a bridge for that connection is important and in this regard, I found Kittay's (2017) notion of empathy when explaining her definition of being human very intriguing that humans we do possess the virtue of empathy but the significance is when

we are able to embody it in our daily practice. This is what I consider nurturing, or building a habit that helps improve our practice.

I relate to what Ventegodt (2003) and Kittay (2017) have argued about the acknowledgment of failures and vulnerabilities and how it helps us be more like a human being. However, in the society where I live, just like how Loscalzo (2014) claims that to achieve success, failure must be avoided. I could relate to him when he started sharing how he first got exposed to the concept of failure in his elementary school. As soon as I was enrolled in my elementary school, I could quickly realize how I started living in continuous fear of failing tests, and subjects, and would ultimately be left behind. I also realized that not just in my studies, I was also not allowed to be poor in other extracurricular activities. My teachers would not accept me if I was unable to pass the subject they were teaching. I would be punished and left behind if I did not pass the terminal exams and would never study along with my friends. I had to raise a hand to answer my teacher's question even if I did not want to speak because not raising my hand would be considered a failure and might mean that I had not read the allocated chapter. My teachers and parents did whatever they could to eliminate failure from my life. Today, I can empathize with them and see why they were trying to eliminate failure from my life. My failure was not simply my failure; it would have been considered the failure of the educational institution I was studying. More than that it meant the inadequacy of my teachers who were teaching me and also of my parents who were getting meaning in their lives associating their contribution to my success. However, how much they tried, I failed several times; from not achieving my desired grades to being rejected in a job and in love, from feeling insecure and low to feeling negative about myself and others. I completely agree with Loscalzo (2014) that there is a rich possibility of failure as we head towards achieving our goal given how complex and

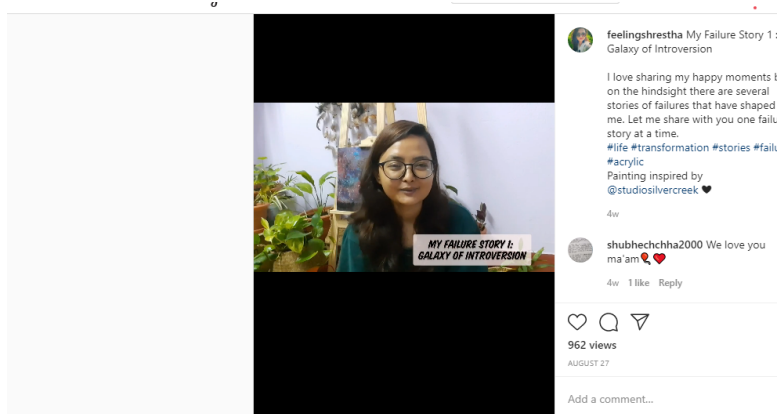
uncertain life is biologically and experimentally. I was looking for an encouragement as a student to receive positive criticism to optimize my learning experience by properly conveying where and how I have failed. I was searching for tools and techniques for reflection, acceptance, acknowledgment, and to work on them but I was forced to understand why success was so important. The need to understand this led me to social engagements as a part of my Ph.D. studies where I moved ahead trying to reflect on those experiences and explore answers to my research question how can I support educational leaders to enhance their emotional literacy to help them improve their professional practices?

LISTEN: Enhancing the Emotional Literacy of Educational Leaders

The use of dialogue can be taken as a basis for meaning-making by establishing the validity of ideas and promoting action (Placier et al., 2002). Productive dialogue requires community as the creation of it allows further support in the exploration of our individual exploration. My social media community, especially the community of my Instagram became the platform of my dialogues during the time of Covid-19 as my physical mobility was restricted and my dialogues seemed to run in cycles as discussed by Placier et al. (2002) from being the platform to sharing personal reflection, professional interchanges as well as public analysis.

To closely look at humanity and be conscious about life's fragility, its impermanence, its imperfection, disappointment, and its twists and turns can be dreadful (Horsfield, 2018). Therefore, the journey of seeing beyond failures and vulnerabilities as a part of critical reflection for the growth of self-compassion and empathy has been a continuous process that evolved, took different forms, and had different forms of expression. I posted the following video on my Instagram on 27th

August 2020. It showed me discussing my introverted personality which I kept on considering as my part of failure for not being able to build new friendships and maintaining the old ones. For Jung (as cited in Geyer, 2012) an individual might relate to the world and make judgments in two ways: introverted and extroverted. Castro (2013) claimed introversion as a phenomenon, in which the human brain does not work in a hyperactive state and introverts do not seek inspiration in people as introverts' brains show weaker responses to human faces or people in general. Their brains are stimulated from different ideas and concepts. On the other hand, extroverted people are those whose brains need constant stimulation and radiate energy from intense emotions and feelings when they are around other people. Introverted people avoid the “unpleasant external effort by seeking satisfactions within the self, in imagery and day-dreaming” (Wells, 1917 as cited in Freyd, 1924, p. 77) while extroverts need a driving force to motivate themselves and like constant changes.



Video 5 Seeing beyond failure and vulnerability as a means of self-compassion and empathy (https://www.instagram.com/tv/CEXVFM_htT3/)

I do not know if you can relate to me or not but I was a very quiet child who did not like to talk to anyone that much at school. I had very few friends. Even at home, I used to stay quiet in a very dark room. Then, I did not know what was happening to me; if not being able to make friends was a problem or if trying to

stay alone was being rude to someone else. The most important thing was I was not being able to accept, acknowledge, and express what I was going through.

In this video, I found myself calm sharing about my living value in an elaborate way. Before that, I used to share through short poems that people might not have understood. But this was the first time when so many members of my community on Instagram shared their thoughts and feelings with me showing how much they could relate to my experiences. I listened without any judgment and was empathized. Most importantly, I felt that I was being accepted for the person I was. While I was sharing this, I was also mindful of the extroverts who were opposite to me and empathized with them. From this experience, I realized that acknowledging our vulnerabilities does not only develop self-compassion but also fosters empathy among the ones who are sharing and the ones who are actively listening (Brown, 2011). The social engagement through video helped me and the other people who identify themselves as introverts empathize with each other through shared vulnerability and emotions we felt.

Gradually my public discourses where I shared my deepest vulnerabilities became my way of trying to create a safe space to live out my values and let others do the same for themselves by being compassionate, conscious, empathetic, and joyful through healthy acknowledgment of our failures and vulnerabilities and reflect critically. Meanwhile, I also started receiving feedback regarding my LISTEN conceptual framework and if other educators could see any relevance in it as a model. Reflecting critically, one of the persons with whom we had shared our approach wrote in our public account that the 'LISTEN' approach that I had shared around a year back had helped her navigate the challenges she faced during her leadership journey as it

made her more curious about her emotions which helped her figure out her needs and that in turn helped her acknowledge them and address them (Shah, LinkedIn, 8.9.2020).

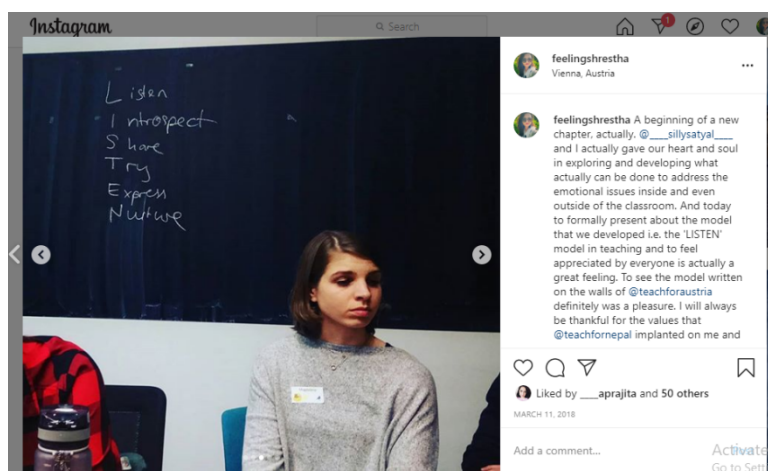


Figure 17 A photograph of LISTEN model written by one of the participants of the Vienna Calling Conference as I was sharing about how the model was being helpful for us to become more self-aware and empathetic; taken by me and posted on my Instagram

Based on the reflection and the feedback from critical friends and also adapting the ‘LISTEN’ model of critical self-reflection we shared our failures and reflection was a part of the process, I started having a conversation with our close friends. Those conversations helped us feel more connected leaving us wanting to share further. However, something that we realized was that it was difficult for us to label what we were feeling because of the lack of vocabularies. Therefore, I started using narratives of childhood to express as that helped us understand our socio-cultural roots and later on help us further understand why we are feeling what we are feeling even if we did not have the right words in the dictionary. Flores (2014) argues, “from telling stories to hearing them, our mind operates best through the structure of a narrative. It is narrative that is very much a part of our cognitive development as empathetic beings and literary narratives that demonstrates to us the human experience by having us experience them first-hand” (p.10). This motivated me to

give it a try. Whitehead (2010) argues this as the explanation for the educational influences of our own learning through social formations.

The narratives provided us an opportunity for me and the others who were part of the conversation and the ones who were watching it as a thread of connection in our narratives. Narratives are considered valuable across all cultural groups as a method of promoting mutual understanding, providing meaning to one's life by making us feel that we are a part of a larger group (Moore & Hallenbeck, 2010). The engagement and the conversation on our reflections continued bringing more participation with shared empathy through personal messages and comments started to increase, not just to me, but also to the ones who shared their stories with me. Sharing her joy, Diksha, one of the participants with whom I had a conversation on her reflections in failures sent a message writing that after she shared her reflections, she started receiving a lot of messages where others found her narrative and reflection relatable (Diksha, Personal Message, 4.10.2020). Sardello (2009) terms this as empathic resonance that involves the apparent expression of meanings in a process of constructing shared meanings of the expressions of energy-flowing embodied values. The method involves the use of video data where a cursor is moved backward and forwards along the video-data coming to rest at the point of strongest resonance with the researcher's receptivity and response to the expression of the energy-flowing value she is seeking to represent and communicate (Sardello, 2009). Here, I used empathic validity explained by Dadds (2008) for the living theory action researchers to foster create greater empathy among the people. According to Dadds (2008), there are two kinds of empathetic validity; external empathetic validity which influences audiences with whom the practitioner research is shared, and internal empathetic validity which changes the practitioner-researcher and research beneficiaries through

their decentering from their own perspectives in order to reach the perspective of the others. External empathetic validity is important for the development, expression or communication, and sharing of the deeply held energy-flowing values as explanatory principles as well as to work as the living epistemological standards of judgment for evaluating the validity of living educational theories. Using the process of empathetic resonance and empathetic validity, I wanted to see if the energy through the sharing of critical self-reflection helped in fostering emotional literacy.

Four months into the narrative sharing and having critical dialogue over experiences of conversations with ten individuals helped highlighted me realize the need for educational leaders to understand eight basic emotions and how they are connected with the emotional vocabularies that we use in our practice. During this time, I also engaged with my friends, colleagues, students, and also the ones who are on my social networking sites. I gained new perspectives on creating knowledge both individually and collectively through the cycles of productive dialogues. These critical reflective cycles of dialogues worked as a continuous support to the reflection of my practices accessing the quality of my work, and improving myself as a human.

With this new found knowledge, I came up with my first action plan as a Ph.D. student and that was to provide a workshop on emotional literacy to the educational leaders that not only shared about the importance of basic emotions but also helped them see the connection of it with the socialization process and for that I used the blend of Vedic philosophy and western notion of emotion like *lachhadori* and adapted LISTEN model of critical self-reflection where the participants had to listen to their emotions, introspect on what they are feeling and why they are feeling, share among each other and try to do that in their practice and later on each week we

meet they had to express how it worked and if they are going to nurture it. We reflected this process through the Vedic educational process *shrawana, manana, and nidhdhyasana*.

Shravana: Listening to the Participants' Emotions and Connecting with their Inner Selves

Workshops or trainings on emotional literacy are considered as the space where one can listen to, understand and master our emotional lives (Steiner, 1996). As a part of the workshop, one expresses how they are feeling, try to describe them and present them in an understandable way for the group of participants, get reactions to it. While some participants take this process as therapeutic and attempt to encompass it right away in their professional lives, some remain ambivalent about it and simply try to be authentic and understand the importance of emotions and needs. For Richa, the purpose was clear from the day she became the part of the action project was to learn and use her learning right away for her teaching-learning processes, especially to help the students become more independent when it comes to their emotional maturity. Emotional maturity reflects the level of emotional development in which an individual continuously strives to understand their emotions for their physical and intrapersonal wellbeing (Joy & Mathew, 2018).

Suruchi's goal was also to learn from the process and improve her practice as an educator, however, she was more invested in helping young girls with their emotional understanding which had stem from her own unfulfilled needs which lay behind her own feelings as being a woman (Azgin, 2018). On our third week of the workshop when we were sharing about the emotion anticipation, she shared an incident how she overburdened herself with works to prove herself because of her

lack of confidence. Suruchi shared, *“When I first joined the organization, I joined as an associate, which I did not enjoy much and wanted to quit. However with the promotion there was more on my plate. The promotion made me excited and prompted me to strive for the program manager post. I tried very hard to prove myself that I started overworking and burdening myself impacting my mental health. I wish I hadn’t done that even though it turned out well for me professionally. She added, “for me it is important that other females do not take such unnecessary pressure just to prove themselves”*. Albers (2021) argues that our positive emotions are tied with maintaining proper and positive relationships with other fellow beings by helping them in their personal growth and flourishing. Jyoti, the youngest participant of the workshop, feels privileged to learn new things given that she can have more resources than the other participants given that things have changed a lot and the schools have gradually started to focus on socio-emotional learning in the institutional schools. Thus for her, understanding more about emotions meant helping her siblings and other students who could not afford to join institutional schools for her village. Gaule shared a similar notion: *“Helping young students in their entrepreneurial journey makes me feel joyful with the thought that I have been able to impact their lives.”*

For Aasha, teaching and even the workshop is for her self-growth and motivation. She said, *“I feel inspired and motivated after workshops and understanding emotions is eventually helping me become more self-aware as an educator. But there are times when I feel unpleasant about not knowing how to support others without knowing how to support myself.”* Kamal shared, *“as a teacher I feel frustrated, guilty, as well as anxious with my roles and responsibilities associated as an educational leader, especially when it comes to my own aspirations as an individual and the aspirations of the students and the institutions that I work for*

as a whole. I feel disconnected as an educator.” Listening to each other felt like “open hearted incorporation of emotions in the practice of soul healing” (Steiner, 1996, p. 33). Listening to emotions meant understanding what and how strong the emotions are, what causes them, and how and when to express or manage them. Most importantly, it helps us become better by connecting us with our inner selves. I was noticing that shift within myself where I was comfortable sharing and listening to my own emotions as well as others narratives of their emotions. For example, on the second week of our workshop, I started by sharing that, *“in my own life – I am trying to become more emotionally literate. I have not become perfect but I am trying and learning. It is a continuous process of connecting with our own inner selves and gaining personal power for our leadership journey.”* Listening to inner truth meant not defining ourselves in terms of others and acknowledging ourselves and our emotions without feeling guilty about our emotional needs (Perls, 1969).

As we started sharing our narratives as a group, a deep need for introspection was emphasized as we started noticing a pattern where we were surprised to find the emotions that we felt and expressed were gendered and was highly influenced by patriarchal mindset in our context (Singh & Bhargave, 1990 as cited in Vences & Antony, 2017). At one of the virtual discussions with Nepali participants when I was sharing about my research works and action projects, one of the participants shared, *“Ei bhaeneko the keti Haruko lagi yo, yo bhaneko emotional hune, chichayaune, karaune haina? Keti haru le testo garda thikai huncha, ketaharu lai suhaudaina”* (EI is for women as it means expression of it through shouting and crying. They can do it. Men should not express in such manner).” This educational process of *shravana* meant understanding the notion of numbness, physical sensations, and chaotic experiences (Azgin, 2018; Steiner, 2010). The participants were able to experience the

physical sensations. Also, they were conscious about the emotional experiences like the quickening heartbeat, pressure in the chest, ringing in ears. Still, they were not able to acknowledge what they were feeling due to the linguistic barriers and also were not able to differentiate the different functions of the emotions. All the female participants expressed they find it difficult to express anger unless it is extremely important. Especially the differentiation between anger and disgust was complex for them. While the two male participants shared that they feel difficult to differentiate between sadness and anger. Similar narratives and experiences started to emerge from participants' personal and professional lives, making us into another stage of our educational process of emotional literacy, *Manana* or the introspection.

Manana: Introspecting the Functions of Emotions

Manana, meant crossing the verbal barrier and being truthful to our emotions by sharing our honest feelings using the right vocabulary by understanding the differentiation of our emotions and moving towards the stage of introspecting on the causality (Steiner, 2010). When we experience emotions, we are usually unable to extract whether we are feeling anger, disgust, hatred, or shame, with differentiation, it helps us untangle the chaos by helping us understand the exact composition of feelings by discovering our tendencies to investigate and eventually recognize the cause of our emotions.

Introspection of our emotions is possible only when there is a cooperative contract, an agreement between the participants in such a way that ensures psychological safety. Psychological safety as a shared belief that helps create engaging interpersonal learning and facilitates the willingness to learn and contribute towards shared goals (Hunt et al., 2021; Steiner, 1996). Thus, we moved ahead with

our emotional literacy workshop by creating a mutual agreement among each other as a group. Our agreements were to avoid putting down of our self and others, listen to one's emotions and to other's expression actively, be mindful and participate, engage with questions, and speak up for ourselves and also create a safe space for others to do the same, be punctual and also acknowledge and respect each other's vulnerabilities. Emotional literacy is possible if we give each other the permission to feel and engage in an emotionally charged discussions by opening our/their hearts without blame and judgment where each of us could suspend our fear (Brackett, 2020). Ensuring these prerequisites, especially, a safe co-operative environment with a mutual agreement among the people who are interested in emotional literacy we moved ahead with keeping the conceptual framework in mind and here we were particularly concerned about introspection and sharing, the second and third stage of our LISTEN model. Mezirow (1991) explains similar in his third phase (a critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions) and fourth phase (recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change) as a part of transformative learning.

We followed the three learning process schemes provided by Mezirow (1978) while facilitating the session to make the introspection more critical. Along with that, we also used the three types of learning as suggested by Mezirow (1978), the instrumental learning, dialogic learning, and self-reflective learning. Kitchenham (2008) describes the three process of learning within the revised transformative learning theory. The first one is learning within meaning schemes in which the learners work with what they already know, contemplate on it and revise. Each of our workshop was divided on the basis of one of the basic emotions and each emotions. Every week we started discussing about that emotions with what we already know

about that emotions and trying to contemplate more on when and where we have felt that or what triggered that emotion. This section was more of an instrumental learning about emotions when the participants share their prior experiences and what they expect to learn out of what they expect from the workshop. In our second week on our session related to anger, the workshop started with Kamal sharing what had happened in his life few days back. He explained,

“I was supposed to take a decision about enrolling someone. And I had done my analysis and explained that this person wouldn’t be the best fit to the institution. After I decided, when I went to work, I saw the same person I thought wouldn’t be the best fit. So, I had to face that person directly and since my decision was overridden, I felt extremely angry. And I felt like why they didn’t understand even when I told them so much. I usually feel angry in situations like these.”

After the sharing, we used to move ahead with the other part, which usually was the dialogic learning method. We were also in the second learning process, learning new meaning schemes that are compatible with the existing shemes within the learners’ perspectives. After that through the medium of dialogue we shared the underlying emotions and what inference it might have on the basis of our prior knowledge and gradually constructed a new idea or understanding. Questioning each other helped us understand the new concept and perspectives (Kacukuydin & Cranton, 2012). An example for this is provided in the vignette below from our third workshop which was about the emotion anticipation based on Plutchik’s (1980) wheel of emotions. It is a part of our natural converstion from a larger conversation.

Bhawana: “We will continue our session.

For my part, sharing my reflections. I have a combination of two sharings to make – First, I have noticed various patterns from your experience sharing in the first half and would like to reflect on that and the second is that I have also learnt a lot about things and would also like to share that.

The question I have is ‘Whatever you learnt about anticipation, what does it have to do with you as an educator? When I say educator, you don’t have to necessarily relate it to being an educator, you could also relate it to your experiences as a writer or a project manager. You could think of anything. You could also think of yourself as a mentor.’”

But before that I would like to share one of my observations – People anticipate happy experiences. If you noticed in the experiences that the participant shared today, you can see that people were anticipating happy events. Some of you were looking forward to your next promotion, some were looking forward to your next session, some were looking forward to something you really wanted to do, and some were looking forward to your next job and how will it be. Also, one thing is that, a lot of people tell me that they are pessimists and they don’t think positively. But when it comes to this feeling of anticipation, it doesn’t matter if you are optimist or pessimist. This is how our brain is wired that we anticipate positive experiences. Our brain is wired to anticipate positive experiences.

To understand this is very important, I would also like to listen to your thoughts on this. But the reason why we anticipate positive experiences is because we want to affirm the anticipation. So, Mahi was sharing that she looks forward to external validation and others were also sharing how they sometimes feel like they are working for external

validation. So, what anticipation does is that – because we look forward to happy experiences, we affirm those experiences. We try to maintain and affirm those experiences.

It depends on our audience but mentally we start making statements. Like for example, a statement could be ‘Running an education initiative as a female educator is a tough job in Nepal. You need a male co-founder.’

So, earlier I did ask you about how the mental picture looks like. Now let’s think about how we plan. When we anticipate happy experiences, the planning becomes about affirming those happy experiences. For instance, my example is that I am going to start my educational initiative. As an entrepreneur, I am a woman and it will be difficult for me as a woman in the society. Now, I will start looking for things and I will start mentally planning in a way asking myself if I will need a male co-founder. For example, I don’t know about Suruchi, why she overworked despite telling that overworking is not good. Maybe, she could explain further but the affirmation could be : When Suruchi was sharing that the getting of the position would require a lot of hardwork from her side, there could be two to three reasons for that. One of the reason could be that she might be feeling that to get promoted in ABC is a difficult task and hence I will do it. That’s why I have to work harder. Another reason could be that, because she anticipated that promotion would be a happy experience for her, she might have had that thought that people in ABC think of me to be weak. Just an example, when Suruchi was working as an Operations as an Executive to directly get promoted to the program manager takes a lot of time, so a lot of people could not even believe her capacity. She might have felt that since people don’t believe me, in order to reach to my happy experience of getting a promotion, I might want to work extra. So, that could be one thing. Another example

could be, for all the people who said that they look forward to preparing for the sessions and preparing for the classes....Inclusion is important....so I will look for text books written by both female and male educators for my classroom. I think it will be difficult for you guys to understand by the way I am explaining....but what used to happen in my class was that I had not seen any female teacher, neither I had gone through any books written by female educators. So, maybe I believe that a lot of talks just don't happen about females in these writings. So, my anticipation would be – I would get a happy feeling and I would look forward to those days when I get to read books written by females and I will start affirming it. For me, I will plan and I will start preparing mentally that now in whatever classes I have, I shall keep at least one book written by a female author. So, think about your pattern and things you look forward to it.

Suruchi: So, the competitive side of me really came outside. Very true!

Bhawana: If you have understood what I have been explaining, then please share that. Please share your reflections as well as explain giving your examples. If you have anything to share with this context.

Silly: Just wanted to ask a question for clarity. Let's say, I have a class and I am anticipating there could be disturbances in the class because of my prior experience. So, how will I tackle it and how will my thought patterns and action patterns be shaped because of that? Is that what you are trying to ask?

Bhawana: I will come to what you are saying in a while. That will be covered in my second pointer. We anticipate based on our context.

But what I am trying to ask is anticipation and it's relation to affirmation. What I am trying to say is whatever we look forward to, we want to affirm that. For example, I

would like to give the example of Suruchi itself since she shared she is competitive. For instance, she said she wanted to become a program manager a year after. When she thought that, she starts finding affirmations. She will look for problems that might come her way. Sagar is already going to past experiences. Now Suruchi will start thinking – since becoming a program manager is going to be a happy experience for her, she will start looking at the societal factors all that. She will make a list of things and qualities she needs to possess in order to become promoted. She will start thinking of the problems she might face. She will start thinking that I will be the first person to get this position at such a young age and people start creating internal validation for themselves.

For example, some people might believe that they are going to get married this year and then you go out and say and the priest also says that you are going to get married this year. And then we go like is it for real? And then we meet a guy, and maybe the guy asks us out. And then us start believing that things are really working out for real. So, all the incidents that come in between us start treating it as affirmations. And then you start believing that whatever it is you are anticipating, that has to happen.

I am not trying to say this as wrong or right. But I am just trying to say that's how it works. This is how we try to keep confirmation affirmation based on the discreet theory of emotions.

Can you think of any examples?

Kamal:I'm still having a hard time understanding what you just shared. Can it be rephrased as anticipation as an emotion brings up affirmations and that drives our actions?

Bhawana: I am not sure if we can say that anticipation brings up affirmations. I would

like to restate that mostly because anticipation is about positive experiences, in the quest of positive experiences, we start building up affirmations and that drives our actions according to Plutchik.

Jyoti: Is it about affirmations manipulating our goals?

Bhawana: We sometimes start anticipating feelings – we start anticipating feeling joyful, feeling happy and rather than preparing for that event we start preparing for those feelings. And rather than planning looking at our current context, we start planning by keeping in mind that we will have joyous feelings. Our responsibility and task sometimes is to distinguish what our anticipation is, what our affirmations are and observe if our affirmations manipulate our anticipation.

Aasha: I was wanting to share. I could relate to what Bhawana said with the time when I was working-from-home. I was anticipating that maybe working from the office would help me work in a focused manner. My workplace also shifted another place. I was anticipating that my office is shifting to a new more fun place, it will be fun now. I will be able to focus more as there will be better views I will be able to see from this office. I was hoping that but when I went to office but then the routine that came along with it, waking up and reaching at 9 a.m., completing my chores before 9 a.m., I somehow didn't feel that joy. I was being able to see such scenic mountains in front of me, the place was so good, everybody was back to the office after so long. But more than that facility, freedom seemed more important to me.

These dialogues where we questioned each other helped us build our meaning-making through reflection. We introspected and became aware of specific assumptions that we had and tried to connect that with the a new formed perspective

through which we made meaning. We also reflect on how we are going to use this knowledge for their next course or in their leadership journey. In one of the sessions where we discussed the emotion fear, Aasha shared how the fear that she has as an adult is mostly because of what her mother told her during her childhood, which are usually superstitions. Also, the fear associated with her study was based on how she was scolded once when she had failed her exams in her eighth grade. Noticing these concerns based on the discussion made her aware of her thought processes and how her emotions have been conditioned. Ghaemi Kerahkrodi and Michal (2020) argue that the early caregiving adversities both emotional or physical to the infants by parents or caregivers or social stressors during childhood are highly potent stressors in adulthood. Aasha shared that understanding these notions has made her reflect on her own teaching patterns and what she expects from her students and how she is not just fearful for herself but also projects that fear in her students when they do not meet her academic expectations. Mezirow (1994) explains this as perspective transformation and provides two dimensions, including the change in the meaning schemes. The first dimension is through the accumulation of new concepts while the second is through sudden transition in the meaning through incidents that might be painful. We were noticing gradual change in how we perceived things. Jyoti after reflecting on the session that we had for the emotion 'disgust' shared that depending on the severity of appeal or revulsion the feeling of disgust could surface up and might more be associated with failure, which she had not thought of before whenever she felt disgusted. Initially, whenever she felt disgusted, she used to avoid those situations and never think about them. But with this new information, she realized the importance of better understanding the situation as what event or behavior is considered distasteful or disgusting might be sharing more about what the individual considers unhealthy.

While Jyoti took the same session as a part of new learning, for two of the other female participants Richa and Aasha, it was a triggering and painful moment where they went back to the context when they were abused. It was uncomfortable for them to share but they also realized how they were disgusted and tried to avoid those contexts but were unable to because they were not being able to express their disgust (Joy & Mathew, 2018).

Though the process of dialogue and questioning in each of the workshops continued to be the same. Also, we all were the part of same discussion; the meaning we were making was individualistic, and those meanings would be significant only when we would involve ourselves in critical discourse (Freire, 1970; Mezirow, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978). This led us to the other steps of LISTEN: try, express, and nurture through continuous *nidhadhyasana*.

Nidhadhyasna: Bringing into Everyday Practice

Nidhadhyasana as an educational process is the stage in which the participants strive for their own experience with the intention to transform from whatever they have listened and introspected (Simjith & Vasudevan, 2017). Steiner (2017) explains this stage as the state of learning empathy in emotional literacy. With the differentiation of emotions and understanding the combination and function of each emotion, an individual understands the intensity of the emotions others are feeling just like when they are feeling with utmost awareness about its texture and subtlety. An example of this can be shared through a vignette which is a part of one of the sessions where we discussed the emotion sadness.

How intense was your sadness? Let's name it.

How intense?	Disgust?
High	Grief
Medium	Sadness
Low	Pensiveness

Figure 18 One of my slides that I had used during the workshop

(Addressing the slide)

Bhawana: According to Carver (2004) basically, sadness is conceptualized as resulting from the perception that a goal has been lost, without the possibility of restoration given one's current abilities. Sadness has been associated with a goal. When we feel like we won't be able to achieve the goal now or the chances of us achieving that goal reduces because our abilities won't be able to fulfill it; that is related to sadness. Sadness can be related to anger as well.

If you all remember, when talking about the emotion 'anger' we had talked about how anger is an emotion that arises when you want to fight against a problem. Sadness is a feeling we get when we feel like we have lost something and we won't be able to restore it or regain it given our current capabilities. So, that is how sadness has been described.

Sadness can be caused by different events. Varied events can cause the feeling of sadness in different people. While the experiences and examples given when discussing

‘anticipation’, ‘anger’, ‘joy’, ‘disgust’, might have been similar. In case of sadness, the experiences and examples might be extremely varied.

Sadness also varies in intensity and this is something we can become aware of easily (Plutchik, 1980). In some situations, I might be feeling extremely sad whereas some other situations might not trigger a lot of sadness in me. While it might be difficult to distinguish the intensity of other emotions, distinguishing the intensity of sadness is considered to be comparatively easier.

So, low intensity sadness is termed as ‘pensiveness’, medium intensity sadness is termed as ‘sadness’ itself and high intensity sadness is termed as ‘grief’ if we have to go according to the vocabulary definition. However, even though we might notice whether we are feeling pensive or we are feeling grief internally, due to the societal context, we might not be quite open in expressing our sadness. Sadness is mistaken as a highly negative emotion and it is contrasted to all the positive emotions. Hence, not enough space is given to express sadness and in fact it is seen that people are implicitly told that they should not be feeling sad.

Any thoughts you guys have so far on what I have said?

Kamal: I think even more than other emotions, the societal norms highly apply to this emotion of ‘sadness’. So, by saying that sadness is not a socially acceptable, people try to reduce social complexity and maintain social order.

Bhawana: So, you feel that societal norms and the context of culture is highly related to the emotion of sadness even though it might not be the case with other emotions?

Kamal: Yes, that is true.

Bhawana: Does anybody else want to share something?

Jyoti: When my sister was grieving and crying about a relative's demise, my grandmother stopped her saying she shouldn't do that since it would block the relative's path from going to heaven.

Suruchi: I was also thinking along the lines of how we are not encouraged to be open about our sadness in the society. I was also thinking about this. And we don't talk about mental health that openly. Generally too, if you want to go and see a therapist, it is stigmatized a lot. It is untrue that people only go to a therapist when they are suffering from mental health problems. Sometimes, when people might not be finding answers to their questions, they might also want to visit a therapist. However, the stigma that is associated with going for therapy, makes people tell that you are not mad or you are not even going through something that large, so why even bother going to a therapist?

When it comes to expressing joy, nobody ever tells you to not be happy. However, when it comes to expressing sadness, many taboos are associated with it. I think people are also generally not equipped to deal with sadness. So, like when a person shares that they are feeling sad, what can you do?

I personally too also feel really awkward when people share their personal issues. I am trying to get better at it and have gotten better at it due to my exposure to working with young girls. But in general, when people share they are feeling sad, I don't always give the best of responses and I feel awkward. So, sadness is a feeling we are not equipped to deal well with. So, in the society, we are not equipped to deal with sadness and how do

you be there for someone when someone is grieving. So, I think that is something I noticed.

The process of dialogue, though, was helpful for us in becoming more aware about our emotions and fostering empathy, unless executed, our practice would not improve. Learning to become aware of other's feelings by understanding the intensity of emotions with clarity is like developing a capacity where we do not ignore or abuse other's feelings with our reactions (Joy & Mathew, 2018; Steiner, 2017). For us this was the phase of trying where the educators would go back to their respective life and try to execute what they have learned in the session in their practice. Mezirow (1991) considers this phase as the exploration of options for new roles and relationships while acting and planning the course of action by implementing the acquired knowledge and skill. Reflecting on their practice, they would then express their competence and confidence while practicing the acquired knowledge (Mezirow, 1991). Aasha after her practice with her students and mentees expressed that she noticed that her sadness is triggered when people, especially her closed ones do not value her leading her to not open up. Thus, she realized that she should also give space to her students whenever she perceives that they are sad. Apart from that she expressed, *“When I knew I was sad, I accepted the emotion and became more willing and open to learn more about my needs. For instance, I was feeling sad last week. I took this as an opportunity to connect with my loved ones and I met my family members and relatives. Handling sadness in a matured and balanced way helped me become more empathetic towards my students as well.”*

Mezirow (1991) argues that a reintegration of the acquired knowledge in one's life is crucial for transformative learning. When associated with emotions, emotions

being fluid, the awareness of emotions and the practice of empathy is sophisticated and thus has to be emphasized in each interaction within oneself and with others with intention. This is the stage of nurture in LISTEN. Steiner (2017) explains this stage as the stage of interactivity in emotional literacy as the greatest challenge to pursue emotional literacy is to practice it in real life situations with courage. Joy and Mathew (2018) define this as emotional maturity where an individual learns to develop stable interpersonal and inter-personal competency to cope with different real life circumstances.

Reaching this point, I also could associate *Nidhadhyasana* with the four building blocks of Non-Violent Communication (NVC) process to foster compassion: observations, feelings, needs, and requests (Rosenberg, 2003 as cited in Azgin, 2018). Observation meant active listening by suspending our judgment and developing the capacity to identify our feelings through sensations. Then the individual reflects on the observations and sensations critically by asking which need of them are not being fulfilled or fulfilled so that they are feeling those emotions, just the way Plutchik (1980) had explained about the functions of emotions helping us understand ourselves better and then entering into the phase of interactivity where we make request to meet our unfulfilled needs by breaking our verbal barrier with courage and compassion.

Reflections and Realizations

The journey to support the educational leaders to foster emotional literacy through *shravana*, *manana*, and *nidhadhyasana* was like moving from the stage of information to the stage of knowledge and finally to the stage of wisdom making the journey of transformation resonant in itself (Simjith & Vasudevan, 2017). The first stage of information was related to reading, researching, sharing through books,

writeups, and workshops. The stage of manana was analyzing the acquired information to build that into knowledge through the iterative process of learning and introspection. Then the wisdom stage was to put that knowledge into practice in real-life scenarios that needed courage and compassion, the most challenging phase. However, the challenge does help us in our critical self-reflective process. Hegel (1874) also illustrated the development of emotional intelligence in three phases (as cited in Taylor, 1975). The first step in Hegelian dialectic is considered the phase of thesis where the information is attained, then it's the phase of antithesis in which the opposing ideas emerged that needs deep analysis and introspection, and the final phase that is synthesis where the leaders gather the technical rational skills to implement the thesis which again needs critical self-reflection. Reflecting after the session, I had written in my diary.

I can gradually see the participants realizing the difference between the ideal and actual effects, which made me disconnect with myself all these years.

Listening to their narratives, I think that we all are the same and being born and brought up in similar contexts, we tend to feel the same feelings. It feels like I am no different than Suruchi or Aasha or Jyoti. Because the culture is such, even if we feel a certain way, we are expected to express the same way using the same kind of vocabulary because of our communal culture.

(Personal diary, March 5, 2021)

Tsai and Knutson (2004) argue that how people want to feel (ideal affect) is different from how they actually feel (actual affect) and culture plays a huge role in creating that difference. Gaule in one of the sessions shared that his definition of what he considers leadership and even his goal setting has been changing according to the

context that he was in. The idea of patriotism that had been seeded in his childhood made him think that as a leader, he had to make his country proud but growing up and being a part of several movements and communities, he started realizing that change can be small and if he can learn each day and then share his learning then he feels that his goal as an educator has been fulfilled. He further added that whenever he shared his actual feelings of making small impacts as an educator, he had avoided his feelings of joy and had shared it as a feeling of anticipation towards contributing towards a larger goal of making a bigger impact for the country. Caddell (2005) who had done her research in the heightened tension of the conflict era, the same era when Gaule was at his school concluded that Nepali schools have been used as an important space through which the images of ideal Nepali citizens are promoted by fostering patriotism.

Similarly, the role of gender in terms of emotions that we feel started to emerge throughout the sessions. Female educators were usually hesitant in expressing emotions like joy, anger or even disgust which male educators were mostly expressing. Even if their actual affect was anger, their ideal affect was either guilt or shame, the emotions that have been considered as basic in the eastern philosophy (Bharata-Muni, 1951). Jyoti, in one of the sessions, expressed that once when she was commuting from Kalanki to New Road in a bus, she was harassed by one of the very old passengers. Even though she felt disgusted and angry she had to “*politely ignore*” that as that man was old and also people usually blame females whenever they are in situations like this. Asking to not share the details in my dissertation and publication (which I have abided by throughout my works), the other female participants also shared the verbal and sexual harassment they must endure even in schools. Burman (2009) argues this as the problem of cultural-historical emotionalization of everyday

life. Feminist researchers (Burman, 2009; Squire, 2001) call this the ‘public life of emotions’, which addresses the ambiguities of the difference of public and personal life of emotions and the need to be addressed when discussing emotional literacy. According to them, if not addressed cautiously, the emotional literacy programs will turn up superficial even if they are started with good intentions. Parker (2008) argues that the hegemonic practices of the self which are profoundly gendered are counted as normal and preferable threatening the psychological and psychotherapeutic modes in such a way that even our self-reflection needs to be in surveillance. Gordo Lopez (2002) bringing this argument into the surface highlights how the initiatives on emotional literacy and personal skill development can be mechanical and reductionist rather than being critical reflection about the self.

Further, fostering empathy is a must when we think about fostering emotional literacy. However, there is a misconception among educational leaders regarding the difference between empathy and powerlessness. Empathy, one of the important components of EI, means “recognizing others’ feelings and turning them into their verbal and non-verbal cues” (Basu & Mermillod, 2011, p. 183). Ashforth (1989) defines powerlessness as the lack of participation and autonomy where participation means the degree of input one can influence over in any given situation and autonomy means the freedom of the individual to master within their prescribed task. Suruchi reflected that most of the time, I do not express how I am actually feeling out of respect and empathy for the other person like for example whenever things do not turn out the way that she had planned she feels angry but she does not express that with her supervisor thinking that she is overreacting. Jyoti shared a similar pattern in her behavior: *"I do not express my anger and disgust when I am at work but I am quick to do that when I am with my family members and close ones. I do it out of empathy."*

However, when asked to critically reflect on whether they are not expressing their actual affect because of empathy or powerlessness, both chose the latter.

This invited me to critically reflect on how the narrative of empathy and even the emotions we feel at the given moment is coming from. Just as Poletti (2021) critiques the idea of empathy that humans have to assume a first-person perspective on others based on the observation of a father-son relationship in a village of Nepal, I realized the need to understand it in Nepali context. Though *sahanubhuti* (sympathy) is common in Nepal, *paramubhuti* (empathy) as a vocabulary is a less mentioned term for us, mostly because we associate sympathy with respecting others (Poletti, 2021). Gadamer (2013) argues that this labels one another in a ‘fusion of horizons’ (p. 306) making one another see themselves in terms of otherness. This otherness tends to slip easily threatening the authenticity of expression of emotions and hampering the stage of interactivity in emotional literacy leading to the denial of feelings especially in the context of family and gender interactions (Bump, 1995; Steiner, 2017).

Like Echoing Liao et al. (2003), I also feel sad to find out the despondencies among educational leaders due to the lack of emotional literacy and thus realize the need to develop more programs that address the rise of emotional literacy in the Asia-Pacific region. Just like the relationship with my mother unconsciously started surfacing around in each of our conversations and each emotion I felt in any particular incident, I could see other narratives of traumatic childhood circulating around. Dewey (1909) focuses on the need to understand the individual effort in execution and the challenges of everyday personal emotional responses. However, the dialogues we had shared the mismatch of educational objectives and individual aspirations that has been leaving the individuals in vacuum because of emotional illiteracy. We had never discussed about emotional literacy. For me to see that I was a living contradiction

focusing on the importance of self-awareness but had not sat through the depth of my emotions was empowering. The first action-reflection cycle with the research participants left me with a question: *How can I support educational leaders in their critical self-reflection to foster EI in everyday practice?* I have explored the answer of this question through my second action-reflection project and have addressed it in chapter V.

Chapter Summary

In chapter IV, I addressed the research question- *How can I support educational leaders to enhance our/their emotional literacy?* Here, I explained my own journey of understanding the importance of emotional literacy and then my gradual work on enhancing it. I also explained how I was a living contradiction during the journey. Then, I move towards sharing about promoting the importance of emotional literacy through different pedagogical practices and finally helping the educational leaders enhance their emotional literacy. Overall, in this chapter, I unpacked my journey of emotional literacy and how along with my research participants reflected on our basic emotions through our first action project.

CHAPTER V

EMBRACING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN EVERYDAY PRACTICE:
UNDERSTANDING THE GENDERED NOTION OF EMOTIONS**Shravana: Listening to my Emotions**

The need for deeper exploration of the emotions got further with the sudden increase in the anxiety attacks that I started getting, affecting my physical health. Although I used to have anxiety attacks before, the frequency suddenly started rising with the increase in the death tolls in the country during the lockdown. Rosenberg (2003) argues that managing anxiety and uncertainty can be linked with individuals' feelings, needs, and wishes and thus needs deeper insights for effective navigation. As one of the faculty members who was working in an institution that was exploring online teaching and learning opportunities and was not leaving any stones unturned in trying to pave the way to rethinking the prevalent education system during the difficult times, the added workloads were not serving well for me making me feel even more anxious. What I had associated with my metaphorical representation of the goddess Durga with multiple hands and identities as a woman (see chapter IV) was now difficult to manage or even imagine. Smears (2019) argue that though women in some context are seen as a special manifestation of the Goddess, sharing powers, their appearance has not benefitted women's position in the society. The ten hands that the Goddess is adorned with had been metaphorically associated with her superpower. However, slowly for me, it had started to feel like, I was the one who had to be juggling multiple workloads at the office and at home and thus was making me see

the complexities within the metaphor Durga. This was the phase of reflective learning (Pelteir et al., 2001) where I was listening to my needs as an individual. The disorientation led me to question my assumptions about myself, especially concerning my identity, which was important to meet my learning needs both as an educator and an individual. Dewey (1916) argues that qualities like the ability to question, reflect, grow, converse, and learn as a transformative dimension of adult education, especially in terms of the mental systems required to deal with the complex situation like the pandemic (as cited in Eschenbacher & Fleming, 2020).

Given that identity is fundamental to meaning-making and providing a frame of reference for social context, understanding my identity as an educator and the expression of gender and its relationship with that identity as an educator and its impact on my leadership journey was significant. Kasperova and Kitching (2014) explain identity as the way to explore an individual and their leadership phenomena where gender plays an important part of sense-making as an individual. Lewis (2015) defines this as performing gender in which an individual makes sense of their role in the society and the organization in the context of their society, culture, and history. My experiences during working from home that started on 29th March 2020 led me to explore the answers to the questions concerning my own emotions and my identity as an educator, especially regarding my gender. The need for the expression of the emotions that I felt particularly because I was a female, heightened as I felt limited and suppressed within the collective identity as an educator. Cole (2009) argues that intersectionality in relation to psychological study has been an area that needs attention given that often only certain groups or categories, usually the privileged, are represented. When the team reflection meeting used to go on during the zoom meetings, I used to find myself turning my camera off and cooking meals for the

family. Especially, when the male faculty thought of giving an extra hour for some musical sessions after the classes, I used to find myself still cleaning the dishes and craving an hour of rest during the break. Somehow, I had started seeing myself more as an outsider in the zoom meeting but not a part of it in any way, which slowly started turning out as a burden for me. The identity that was being framed by the collective discourses that educators who are working during these difficult times are trailblazers stood as a site of contradiction and conflict with my subjective identity leading to the knowledge creation through the act of questioning myself as a researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Working from home during the time of the pandemic offered me a unique opportunity to systematically observe the different educational landscapes that men educators and women educators were in. There were times when male faculty members were out of contact, nothing specific used to be mentioned, but for females nothing would be unnoticed. Also at times some male faculty members even shared taking pandemic as a holiday with nothing in their plate apart from watching movies in their home. The shift from feeling marginalized and silenced as a female educator to reconstructing my identity amid the gendered space through open discourses helped me reconfirm my presence and power. In eastern philosophy, power (*shakti*) is often connected to Hindu goddesses (Smears, 2019). When the goddess-like Durga is considered to sustain power the other goddesses like Kali as shown in the figure one are also seen as the destroyer. Especially as a child, daughters are considered the incarnation of goddess Laxmi and Saraswati, the image of calmness and poise with multiple responsibilities. The very notion had shaped my image of myself but the increasing complexity of seeing myself as the manifestation of the goddess who sustains power was slowly being shattered leading me to have a contradictory image about myself.

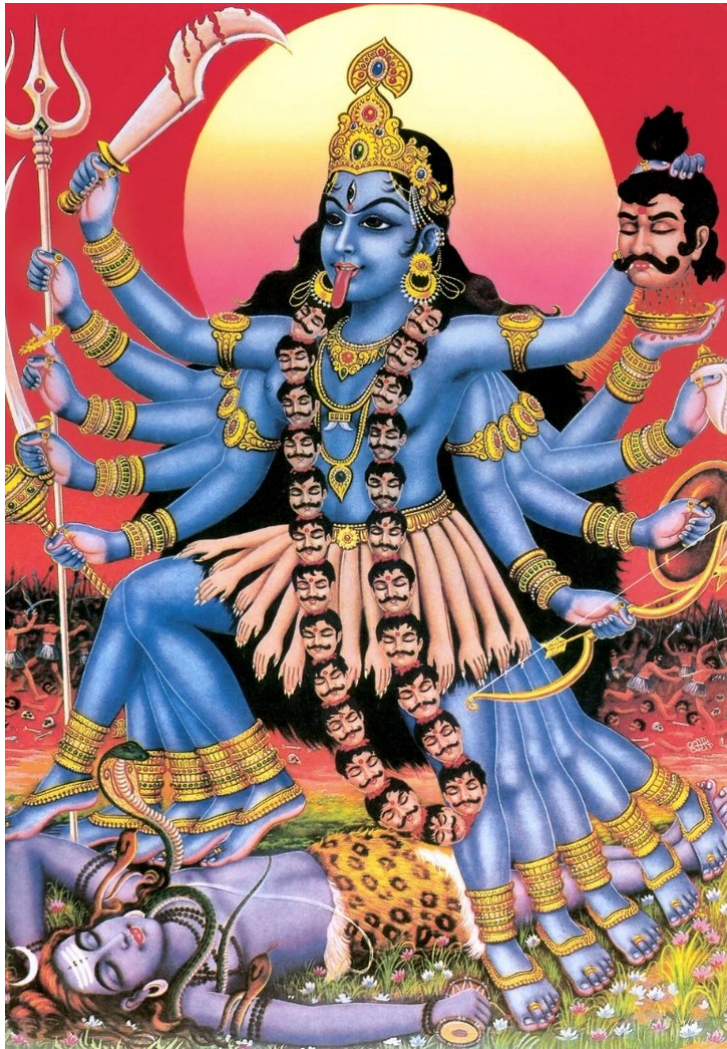


Figure 19 Goddess Kali whose mantra is ‘kream’ meaning the power of transformation behind the vast movement of life (Source: <https://www.kalicollective.com/blog/2018/5-ways-to-invoke-the-energy-of-the-goddess-kali>)

I could resonate with Dillabough’s (1999) polarized confusion on her identity as an educator when at times female teachers are represented as mothers while at other times they are to be seen as very professional and informational as a teacher. When the mother figure is considered emotional one, the professional teacher is expected to be rational. So at meetings, I experienced exclusion in decision-making when the other male teachers were asked for opinions on what to do next. While the students came struggling, I was the first person to be called to listen to them. Going through my own rollercoaster of emotions, the feeling of exclusion later turned into

the feeling of my labour being exploited as a woman who was highly involved in household works and classroom teachings. At this point, I remembered my mother for all the labor that she used to put as a teacher. It must have been daunting for her that she used to project her stress in the form of anger only to me. *“Taile dherai padhnu parcha natra manchey haru le hepcha”* (You need to achieve the highest degree to get respect from people), that’s what my mother kept me saying when I was not studying. I wonder if she too had felt like a Kali in her life and had felt always limited like Durga. I made a phone call to her after a long time and checked on her how she was doing during the lockdown. She shared her struggle of having to use Facebook to teach her students as her students were the primary level students who could not work themselves and had to depend on their parents. The parents did not know how to use zoom and thus were using Facebook. I could connect a lot with my mother. I used to be very disappointed with my mother for her lack of voice in asking for the right stipend from the school that she was teaching. Having been teaching for around two decades, I thought my mother deserved more of what she was receiving but she would always turn a deaf ear to me. I picked up on that conversation again, and she said, *“Ma mero aatma-samman ko lagi kaam garchu”* (I work to get that self-respect). That was another point of connection I felt with my mother. I wrote in my journal, *“Today, I saw a light, may be, a dim light, but there was a light in our relationship.”*

Reflective journal writings had been an engaging process for me as an educator to step back from the situation and to listen to my bodily sensations and emotions and had worked as a medium for learning and growth. Writing reflective journals helped me take a step back from the situations that I was in as a novice teacher and encouraged emotional discourses with myself first and then slowly with other colleagues later supporting my growth both inside and outside the classroom.

Heidgger (1996) argues that since there is a close connection between emotion and thinking, attunement and understanding are possible when one is a part of the discourse. To make the reflective process discursive by investigating thoughtful components associated with it helps acknowledge emotional life. Once we critically evaluate our intra-subjective and the social consequences of the emotions, the transformation occurs as we start comprehending ourselves through self-examination as suggested by phenomenology, that is to look inward and find the roots of our thoughts (Nussbaum, 2003). Bubnys (2019) argues that reflection is a conversation with oneself where an individual provides the answers to the questions for themselves, considers solutions by evaluating its results themselves, and makes an amendment in a way that fosters relationships even in the group settings. I took this step as the step to Listen from the LISTEN model in which I took information from my own emotional life and used dialogue, sometimes monologues, the other times conversation with the research participants and critical friends to interpret to get a comprehensive understanding of the new possibilities amid the crisis.

As a consequence of the lockdown, universities in Nepal were temporarily closed for nearly two months since March 24, 2020. Since the educational institution that I am currently working at is associated with the foreign University, it decided to shift to a completely online model right away on March 29, 2020, where teaching and learning were undertaken remotely. Although the abrupt transition was made possible through emergency training on e-learning strategies, the challenges were seen around the inevitable variations in the socio-economic backgrounds, and different gender roles of both the faculty and the students as they were not prepared mentally and technically (Gautam & Gautam, 2020).

Questions and concerns started to rise to support the vulnerable students through discussions and seminars (Chapagain & Neupane, 2020), however, not enough space was provided to address the vulnerability of the educators, mostly female educators even when the lockdown had shown a considerable rise in gender discrimination among working men and working women both as a subject and as a participant (Nepal & Aryal, 2020). As a part of one of the core committee members myself, who conducted an international virtual conference for educators based on rethinking education amid the crisis, I realized how difficult it was to find at least one female educator as a speaker and was feeling frustrated about it. It somehow reminded me of my mother who used to feel hesitant about sharing her experiences when asked to. There were several instances when I had asked to share her experience to other women, especially the educators but somehow she always used to get away saying “*faleko hago jahile nihurinu parcha*”, (the tree that bears fruit is always bowing), an old Nepali idiom. I wonder how my mother saw sharing experiences as a part of boasting rather than a part of learning. Meanwhile, it was also a part of me that valued inclusion in the teaching-learning space, again rooted to how my mother did not have a voice in her work. She used to come home frustrated and had lot of complains with the school management for not listening to her. Seeing the huge gap in the participation of women educators, on the one hand, was inducing anger within me while on the other hand, I being a woman, that too a married woman myself, I was facing the challenge of putting in an extra effort to bring the same outcome as my married male colleagues were triggering disgust within me. Disgust as an emotion serves the purpose of protecting us from something that we despise (Hendel, 2020), and thus, the need to change what was happening around me had arisen. The female educators were busy doing the household, caring for their babies, taking classes, and

grading assignments simultaneously. However, the male educators were busy with the meetings, seminars, and virtual conferences that had a major role in the decision-making. I was noticing our voices as female educators during the crisis were not being heard. We were not finding space to share what we were going through, our experiences, and most importantly, how we were feeling. One of the consequences of the lockdown was an increase in the workload for women in the household along with the extension of the office work hours making it a challenge for women, especially married women to maintain a work-life balance giving rise to emotional breakdown and mental health issues (Kolakakshapati et al., 2021). The added feedback sessions, that I was a part of were meant to enhance the skills for virtual teaching-learning had either no or few female educators. However, those were also filled with praises for the male educators while female educators had to endure shame and guilt for not even being able to turn on their video cameras while teaching. These social interactions were shaping my perception in a way that I had started seeing myself as an individual with low self-esteem who needs to prioritize her household chores more than her office work. On 10 April 2020, I had written,

I can understand how for so many female educators working from home and advocating for online education is a burden. I can understand how they are expected to be teaching while at the same time cooking meals for their family. I can sense why they are turning off their camera while talking to their students because, on the other side, they are patting their crying toddlers.

The expectation for women from the family members to perform a majority of the housework and childcare responsibilities was there despite the increment in full-time participation of women in paid employment. Vygotsky (2012) explains this as the outcome of understanding created by the social interaction where we depend on

society to create a perspective about our identity. In this context, while the home is considered a place for healing and recovery in general, it is recognized as a place for additional unpaid work for women. The extreme feeling of disgust that I was feeling was hinting that I wanted to be free from all of those expectations. However, I was not even being able to express them out in the open. So the outlet had to be in the form of a painting. Figure 20 shows my need for authentic expression of my emotions where I wanted to feel heard, and free of all social obligations. I sent this picture to my mother. She responded only with an smiling emoticon.

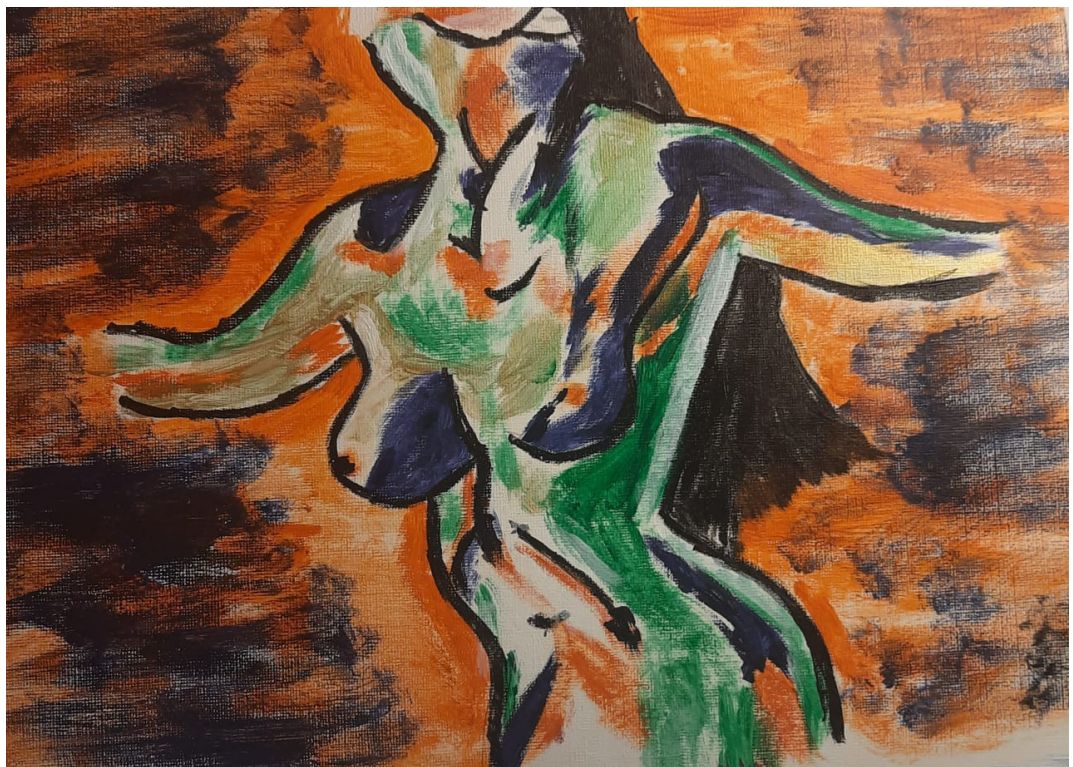


Figure 20 The picture that I had painted as a part of my expression of emotions

Manana: Understanding the Socio-Cultural Underpinnings of Emotions

COVID-19 induced a substantial global burden worldwide since its first diagnosis in Wuhan, China, highly affecting the world to cope with the pandemic and claiming that vulnerability and lack of coping capacity are the two major dimensions

relevant to it (Wong et al., 2020). The dimension of vulnerability meant the “susceptibility of populations to hazardous incidents” given the socioeconomic, political, and social features (Wong et al., 2020, p. 816) on the one hand, while on the other, it also meant “uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure” (Brown, 2012, p.34). As a married Nepali female educator who belonged to a middle-class family, I witnessed both the dimensions of vulnerability that I could find being expressed in my daily journals. Vygotsky (as cited in Nyongesa et al., 2017) argues that social interaction is crucial for an individual’s cognitive development in both the formal and the natural setting, and language is a tool that is important to bridge the understanding of the world and the particular context. Journaling served a similar purpose in helping me become a more independent learner in terms of acknowledging my vulnerability and shaping my identity as an educator.

The perceived identity of Nepali women is to fulfill the role of a caretaker of the family with utmost perfectionism relating that with the family and work-life balance that anything that is done for self-development either triggers the feeling of shame or the feeling of guilt within them (Bennett, 2002). Nepali (2018) claims that with the changing workplace dynamics it has grown more complex in the situation where the women are expected to work as equal as men in the office along with greater responsibilities at home and are expected to not fail in both places. The unexpressed but deeply engraved expectations for the working women by the society forces women faculties to not just outperform in the teaching but also in the household influencing their choices and consequences as an educator (Adhikari & Adhikari, 2021; Harvard Business Review, 2018). Formation of identity can be both a conscious as well as an unconscious process. With the unexpected events, the individual becomes more aware of their constructed nature of identity through

everyday interaction (Martin et al., 2019). The rising death tolls were triggering fear of losing our loved ones, and the increasing uncertainty was weakening my mental well-being, I felt helpless and vulnerable for not finding the reflective space to share whatever I was going through within the professional sphere making me share my feelings on my journals. This was the phase of *manana*, the stage of introspection and sharing from the LISTEN model of critical self-reflection. On 16 May 2020, I had expressed

We both (me and my husband) hear the murmur of our neighbors every evening as they break the inhuman silence of this city with their grocery visits and realize the running fear inside us. As we have become closer than ever, the terror has grown more with this increasing uncertainty.

The massive pressure and uncertainty concerning the workload expressed both officially and unofficially felt like we were gearing up for a war that needed acknowledgment of my emotions, acceptance of my vulnerabilities, and finding different coping mechanisms. I expressed that vulnerability through a poem on 22 May 2020. Some of the excerpts of which are

“Meandering on my thoughts,

I realized how vulnerable I was –

In a society that never let me express,

The stories that I had lived and felt

day and night.

My vulnerability haunted me in disguise –

Like a ghost that had no mercy on my wounds.”

The poem represented my struggle to maintain a balance between my work and family chores leading to serious implications on my emotional well-being. The increasing demand for the outcomes both inside and outside the classroom, at the administrative level of the institution as a faculty along with heightening expectations at home while working from home, left me feel bounded and stressed. Vygotsky (as cited in Chigondo, 2019) argues this scenario as the impact of socio-cultural setting that impacts an adult’s decision making, especially the women in leadership. The emotional manifestation of heightened stress and vulnerability demanded courage. Brown (2012) claims that vulnerability is the key to wholehearted living as courage goes hand in hand with vulnerability. Hemmingway (as cited in Lopez et al., 2003) defines courage as “grace under pressure” (p. 191). By default, being a human, we are not perfect, however, Buber (2014) argues that for humans in the darkness lies the light, in fear there is salvation and in callousness, there is great love. For me, courage meant the ability to recognize emotions and act in a meaningful manner regardless of the risks associated with them (Woodard, 2004). Being exposed to multiple social-emotional challenges, I was already feeling sad, when an insulting incident from one of the male students triggered rage, disgust, agony, and grief simultaneously. The student had sent an abusive and threatening message for not receiving his anticipated grades. On 28 October 2020, I wrote a long monologue and shared it through a blog after receiving a foul-mouthed abusive Viber message.

As I look back, my eyes fill up with tears; tears of joy for a few of my students are doing amazing with their lives who had given up on their lives at one time; tears of pain for a handful of my students didn't find meaning in the education system and left studying after their high school; tears of guilt for not meeting

up that mark of a perfect teacher that several of my students had expected; tears of disappointment for not meeting my own expectations and reacting on my impulse; tears of sadness for being helpless when how much I try to help them with their learning but they see their fewer grades and rather than putting an effort on their work, they keep on taunting, abusing, scolding, foul mouthing me.

The way the student crafted the message, I felt angry for being born a woman and then to be working as an educator during a difficult time. At this point, I realized how difficult it is to teach everyday and acknowledge my vulnerability (Palmer, 2017). It was even more difficult when it is online with its easy access to abuse. Cyber Crime Bureau of Nepal reported the increase in online harassment with three thousand and fifty applications in 2021, indicating the rise of violence from physical to online (Nepal News, 2022). Meanwhile, the blog that I shared helped me connect with another female faculty from another institution who had been through a similar situation. She called me back to share her story and that conversation made me realize that it was not only me who was facing online abuse from the male students during the pandemic. This is the stage of expression and trying in LISTEN model. It was also a moment when I started questioning my identity as Goddess Durga and argued her existence outwardly like some of the feminists (Bose, 2013; Rao, 2017) by finding the woman-as-goddess equation contextually shifting. The specific image of the idealized Nepali women educators as Durga and Saraswati had continued to isolate the image of women as only the ones who hold everything within her without questioning why the women were placed on an impossible pedestal making them feel vulnerable whenever they fall short on any tasks.

Few conversations with other female educators helped us understand the gravity of the situation but the shame and guilt that we had to go through when bringing these issues into the limelight, especially at times like the pandemic presented us in a negative light. Our sharing revealed that more than the victim, we were judged by society and the educational institutions that we were working for not being the torchbearers and helping our male students navigate the situation. Thus it is understandable why serious attention has not been given to the cases like these. This transparent self-disclosure among us formed a strong sense of courage and mutual trust, which Ilies, et al. (2005) describe as relational authenticity. However, teacher emotions are usually felt but not displayed as they are expected to avoid feeling anger, irritation or frustration. Most importantly, they are assumed to play the roles of a caring adult and show interest in the course and the students almost every time (Hoy, 2013). Campbell (1994) argues that the experiences and complaints of women are dismissed either considering them as an offense or stigmatizing women as being overly sensitive and claims that how the expression of authentic emotions can be considered a privilege. This makes the authentic expression of the emotions of female teachers even more challenging. I could relate to Smears (2019) when she shares that the representation of the Goddess in Hindu mythology has usually been benevolent rather than fearsome ones. Even though they had weapons, in their hands, they are shown symbolically of normative behavior and purity and nowhere seen on the battlefield apart from Goddess Kali who is seen dancing in her rage. My authentic display of emotions encouraged me to develop social and emotional competencies to regulate my emotions being true to myself which helped me build confidence and determination. On February 17, 2021, reflecting on that day's class where I had to stand up for a female student against a male student when he shunned her instead of

listening to her while she was sharing some probable solutions for growing rape issues in the country, I wrote

As an adult, every woman has the right to self-determination, but in a context where there are multiple structural problems just because of the patriarchal order of the society, it is important to support each other whenever we can and wherever we are.

Bennett (2002) argues about women threaten male solidarity when they come together. She gives the examples of the cultural rituals when women are together, they are not entirely excluded, but they are definitely peripheral and ritually inferior to the men who participate in any ceremonies” (p. 129). I could relate the board room meetings in a similar manner. This newfound courage where I allowed myself to feel and display my authentic emotions helped me improve my confidence, lower my anxiety levels, and engage in different programs where I could share my authentic emotions. Connor and Killian (2012) explain this process as using self-empathy to manage one’s emotions where we reflect on our own emotions and needs in order to acknowledge the emotions and needs of others. Gradually voicing my authentic emotions and taking the work loads that I could balance both at home and at office without being fearful of what the management or my in-laws or mother are going to say, I could see myself being courageous enough to focus on the aspects that I found meaningful rather than the ones that I was forced to do leading me to the stage of *nidhdhyasana*, practicing what I had introspected, the stage of nurturing in the LISTEN model.

Nidhdhyasana: Expressing Authentic Emotions with Courage

My reflection about my emotional experiences also led me on a journey of understanding the need for emotional education more and making me realize that using the right word to describe authentic emotions helped me manage my emotions as well as respond with empathy. Roulston (2020) argues that the COVID-19 pandemic came as an opportunity for educators to focus on their self-reflection as a part of ethical decision-making where they see themselves as human being affected by the non-human forces and seek to inspire actions that matter in the classrooms with students. Regular reflection on the emotional journey helped me see my strength but has also helped me figure out my limitations. On 30 January 2021, after facilitating a session related to self-awareness and authentic expression of emotions based on the LISTEN model itself for the facilitators and activists from different countries, I reflected

With my own experience as an activist, I had sometimes been thought of as a change-maker while the rest of the time, I have been termed as a troublemaker. By now, I have come to understand the importance of courage to be an activist, meanwhile, I have realized the importance of en-courage more.

Having been working on self-awareness and the authentic expression of emotions, with Covid, I was seeing a different side in myself that was hesitant to share. I, yet again, caught myself in a living contradiction where I was again trying to fit into a persona of a caring wife, and a caring mother-like teacher and not taking care of myself. I wanted to inculcate empathy within me but I found myself overburdening myself with works in the name of empathy which was not working for

my well-being. This heightened awareness of the complexity I faced in expressing my authentic self in the challenging times made me question if the skills I had were enough to encourage myself and others. I remembered a conversation that my mother had with one of my aunts when she shared that she would leave one of her sons at our place. My mother had disapproved of it and shared that with two children to look after, she has her hands full and will not be able to look after her son. At that point, I thought my mother was rude to say no and wondered if she had done the same if my uncle had asked for it. The conversation never happened and my cousin never came to live with us. Today, I see myself in her place and would want similar courage to say no to the things that do not serve me. This was another point where I wanted to talk to her. I asked her how did she get the courage to say no and she answered as she had no other option than to work on her hesitation and be courageous. She laughed saying, *“sabai kura sikdai janu parcha”* (You need to keep on learning these skills). With that I had this question what could I do to improve my learning and my practices to garnish my skills. I realized the need of a guidance and became a part of a course that would help me be better at it as a facilitator. Thus, I joined a empathic facilitation certification course.

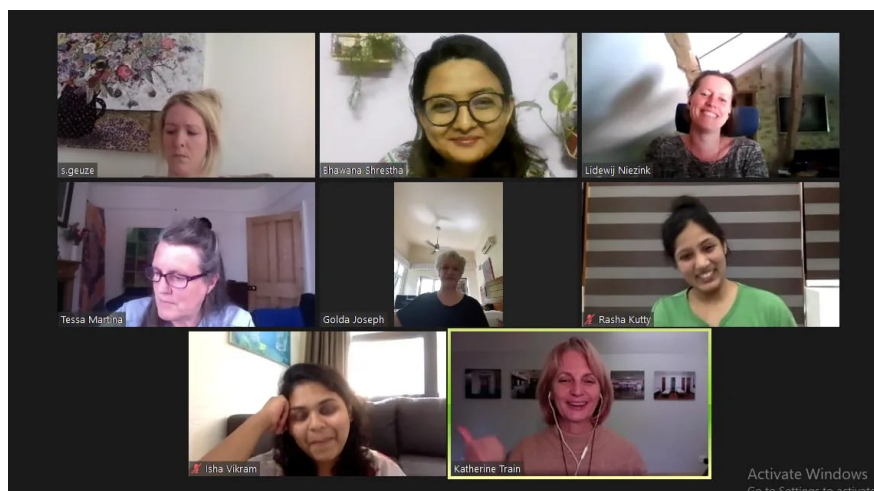


Figure 21 I, being a part of the one-year Empathic Intervention facilitation course with other educational leaders from five different countries

The one-year course helped me center around myself as an educator, see through my vulnerable side, and provided me with alternative ways to express my emotions by holding a space for myself. I could see the improvement in my interpersonal relationships as I could hold a space for others' authentic emotions within and beyond the classroom. Reflecting on the course, on 4 March 2021, I had written

Having a brief moment with myself; observing the inner self so that I can prepare for being able to see what is going inside of me to prepare to see what's going on inside of others is important while I create and hold space for the ones I am practicing empathy with.

Reflecting on my authentic emotions by acknowledging my vulnerabilities helped me develop self-compassion and be courageous to work on myself and see as well as listen to others which helped foster empathy for myself and others. Campbell (1994) argues that empathy does not come easy for everyone, especially for women as the feeling of shame is subtly encouraged by the ones who keep denying the feelings

of women and are held responsible for the unpredictable attitudes that women share especially concerning their individual accountability and their emotional wellbeing. The contextual perspective on the self and my emotional expressions helped me understand the idea of 'becoming' that Zembylas (2003) suggest as "the incompleteness of identity and a dynamic identity construction, one that involves a non-linear process by which an individual confirms or problematizes who she/he is/becomes" (p. 221). The journey of understanding the vulnerable side of me as an educational leader and holding that space for myself and my discourses continues fostering empathy within me and in my interpersonal relationships reshaping my identity as a reflective practitioner who keeps on working on improving her practices as an educational leader by exploring her authentic expressions. To understand context like these, Adler (1990) uses the phrase "educating the reflective practitioner" and describes this as an "image of reform, an image of change that educators can rally around to mask a great diversity of practice and intent" (p.3). This understanding led me to develop my second action project, a workshop related to understanding emotional identity for the research participants where they could reflect on their socio-cultural influences on their emotional identity by exploring their emotional biography and nurturing the habit of reflection beginning it with journaling their emotional life as their everyday practice.

Understanding Emotional Identity as Educational Leaders

The move from being emotionally literate to understanding my education self through the critical self- reflection on my emotions during the pandemic provided space for my transformation. Furthermore, the construction of my personal narratives through the journaling of my emotional life during the process of reflection helped me

reconstruct the dots of my personal life and my narrative by opening the conditions of possibilities for who and what I as an educational leader might be by highlighting my situatedness of self (Zembylas, 2003). Therefore, the journey from being vulnerable to finding the courage within the vulnerability to being empathic has become a continuous process for me through the reflection of my emotions and expression of emotions. This reflection provided an insight into how the critical reflection on emotions contributed to the transformation of my identity as an educator which helped me be more courageous in contributing to the larger discourse amid the pandemic to other educational leaders.

Shravana: Listening to their Narratives

It was July 23rd, 2021. I started my second action project with the activity emotion identity card and shared,

Emotions Identity Card

Hi, I am To give you a glimpse of who I am, I am (your profession/something you identify with) who gets angry There are times, I feel disgusted too if/when Meanwhile, gives me joy. I usually get surprised if..... . I fear while I am anticipating..... My sadness is usually triggered by/from Something/Someone that I trust are..... Please When I am around you, because usually I am feeling

Figure 4: One of the slides from my second action project

“Hi, I am Bhawana. To give you a glimpse of who I am, I am an educator who gets angry when someone plagiarizes. Recently, I’ve figured out that I really

don't like plagiarism. It makes me angry, especially when someone copies without doing their work. Sometimes I feel enraged even when that happens. There are times, I feel disgusted too when someone disrespects the other person. Meanwhile, reciting poems and listening to music gives me joy. Other things give me joy too, but I've recently discovered that listening to music gives me a lot of joy. I feel surprised when someone gifts me something, especially when I meet them. I fear losing my relationships, be it any kind of a relationship while I am anticipating teaching M.Phil students independently. In the last one and a half sessions, I was playing the role of a teaching assistant in my Ph.D. journey, but now I need to teach M.Phil students independently. It is something that I am looking forward to from August, which is the start of the new semester. Tears usually trigger my sadness. I find it difficult to look at someone crying. Something that I trust is my connection with my friends. Please don't fear when I am silent around you, because I feel calm but look angry most of the time."

Mortari (2012) argues that reflection should be a day to day practice and when the practitioners are given preparatory experiences through some structured guidelines, it enhances their reflective capacities. From that, they can learn what they are thinking and improve what they are doing. Writing autobiographically by inquiring into the critical incident and bringing that into dialogue to understand ourselves as practitioners is one of the important techniques for reflective learning (Brookfield, 1995). Suruchi, the research participant, after sharing her emotional identity card had shared, it was a good place to resume our second action project as we had ended our first project by discussing the basic emotions, and to put that into a guided framework made her feel more engaged within the conversation as well as feel

connected with other participants as well. However, context also plays a crucial role in what technique works best in learning critical self-reflection. The activity was an example of emancipatory learning where we pay attention to our emotions when we are going through certain experiences by reflecting on it. Mezirow (1991) provides different techniques like biographies, and journal writing and highlights the significance of taking an account of different learning programs like therapeutic learning programs responsive to the contexts as a medium for emancipatory learning. Considering these aspects, listening to the autobiographical narrative was taken into account in order to apply the phenomenological perspective in the learning environment. Husserl (1983) argues, that in phenomenology, reflection is a cognitive process that allows an individual to look into life with consciousness by seizing the unreflective mental experience and voice it so that they can understand the essence of what occurs in it. In short, meta-reflection of the actions, listening to our emotions for self-understanding, and describing the information authentically, which is what we are considering here as *shravana*. Aasha, the other participant, after listening to everyone's narrative about their emotional identity quickly asked a critical question, "*who am I without my work? Why is all my emotion associated with my professional activities?*" and was curious about understanding her identity beyond her work. Thus, we started by capturing our portraits of emotions as educators as a basic cognitive exercise.

If not reflected on our emotions, we live in an autopilot way in our daily life and react driven by external circumstances. Thus, understanding one's own emotional biography and being aware of emotional profile helps create our identity card of emotions. Mortari (2017) argues once written, the identity card of emotions gives a space to read and analyze the critical notes and provokes change. This reflective

exercise allowed us to not only think about our practice but perform a real reflection practice through a conscious look into their emotions. Something that we all reflected in common was how we keep our professional identity as education leaders first and the need behind our feelings are usually the needs that are either met or unmet in our professional setting. Descriptive psychology explains mental or emotional life as an ongoing process of interpretation determined by the citation of collective fact (Dilthey, 2012). Thus, each individual's understanding of their identity is their understanding of what is of crucial importance to them. Elsbach (1999) argues that since people spend a considerable amount of their lives at work or in work-related activities, the organizations or the roles they are in are crucial in shaping their identity and vice versa. Apart from Suruchi, all of us shared our identity in terms of our role as an educator.

Portrait of Aasha

Hi, I am Aasha. To give you a glimpse of who I am, I am a teacher and a writer who gets angry when I see someone disrespecting those who are weaker than them. There are times, I feel disgusted too when I get to know about child sexual abusers. Meanwhile, meeting an important task at hand gives me joy. I usually get surprised if someone has already done the chores that I was supposed to do. I fear not being able to do anything in my life while I am anticipating traveling to new places. Feelings of loneliness and rejection trigger my sadness. Someone/something I trust is myself and my family. Please feel free to communicate to me, I might seem somewhat cold when I am around you because that's the time I am usually hurt or annoyed.

Portrait of Gaule

Hi, I am Gaule, a facilitator and a researcher who gets angry when someone stops me from doing my work. There are times, I feel disgusted too if/when people are not cooperative or disrespectful. Meanwhile, when they offer help, it gives me joy. I usually get surprised if I get progressive feedback or gifts. I fear not making an impact while anticipating new learnings beyond my job. My sadness is usually triggered by learning stagnation. Something I trust is honesty. Please start the conversation when I am around you because I feel hesitant to approach you for the first conversation in person.

Portrait of Jyoti

Hi, I am Jyoti. To give you a glimpse of who I am, I am a freelance content writer who gets angry when someone criticizes my lifestyle or my job, so I like doing things in my own time and I don't like being rushed. There are times, I feel disgusted too when someone touches me or invalidates my own experiences, feelings, or that of someone else. Meanwhile, moments, when I try new things, bring me joy. I usually get surprised if I find someone who is not doing things that are not aligned with my values and are outside my culture or experiences. I fear the loss of my loved ones while I anticipate what kind of person I will become and what I will achieve in the future- the places I will see, the people I will meet, and even the new music I will discover. My sadness is triggered when I feel judged or misunderstood by my own family and friends. Someone/something I trust is two of my internet friends that I met in 2020. Please don't hesitate to talk to me when I am around you because usually, I feel like I will strike up a conversation with someone but I don't feel

like bothering them, and I may usually look a little gloomy, but I am usually quite calm.

Portrait of Kamal

Hi, I am Kamal. I am an educator who gets angry when one learner is put down or obstructed by another learner in any learning space. There are times, I feel disgusted too when I find that people who aren't as enthused about the subject are giving lessons and discouraging curious students in their explorations. Meanwhile, when I find students learn something by their own discovery and through thought exercises, it joys me. I usually get surprised when I see a teacher carry a judgment about a student, not similar to mine. I fear losing the battle to other distractions that the students face while I am anticipating the next class I'm preparing. My sadness is usually triggered by seeing diligent students unable to keep up due to issues beyond our control. I trust my ability to simplify ideas, connect with the students, and ensure no interested learner goes away without understanding any concepts we are discussing in any session. Please approach and speak if you wish to connect when I am around you because I am usually feeling shy but will look forward to connecting.

Portrait of Richa

Hi everyone, I am Richa. To give you a glimpse of who I am, I am a teacher who gets angry when people try to deceive or break the trust. There are times, I feel disgusted too when I see things going wrong around me but having no control over those happenings. Meanwhile, little children, music, and nature give me joy. I usually get surprised when people show multiple faces (in the

beginning they show duality and then gradually they show their multiple faces. I fear losing loved ones while I am anticipating good deeds. My sadness is triggered by illnesses, distrust, and disrespect. Someone/something I trust is myself and my family. Please feel free to talk to me about anything you feel like when I am around you because I'm usually feeling rushed but I can take time for you as needed.

Portrait of Suruchi

Hi, I am Suruchi. To give you a glimpse of who I am, I am a staunch feminist who gets angry about basically everything that stems from sexism, racism, classism, casteism, misogyny, and patriarchal values. There are times, I feel disgusted too when the society at large upholds these values collectively. Meanwhile, puppies, old couples, and reading give me joy. I usually get surprised when I see women tearing women down. I fear being limited, restricted, and not growing while I am anticipating the addition of a great new cohort at my workplace. My sadness is usually triggered by knowing that I have a limited time on earth for people that I love and death is inevitable. It really makes me sad sometimes. Something that I trust is my gut feeling and intuition. Please make the first move when I am around you because I usually look confident but do not feel very confident.

Upon my curiosity about how Suruchi could do so, she answered that she had done a similar activity two years back. That was when she saw the distinction between identity and identification and how her identification can be different from the work that she is associated with. Miscenko and Day (2015) argue that “an individual’s identity at work is derived from membership in a collectivity, through a

process of identification, as people define themselves and enable others to define them based on the groups to which they belong” (p.3). Therefore, having an identity can mean knowing where we stand in the collective setting, but there is a threat of depersonalization (Brinkmann, 2008).

Mortari (2012) explains two kinds of reflective practice in educational research. The first one is directed towards understanding the phenomenon that develops in the educative environment also called as observing-noticing while the second one is directed towards introducing a new phenomenon into the educative environment to bolster the educative potentialities also called as experiential-transformative. Another observation we were curious about was finding why we choose a particular trigger to mention when there can be multiple triggers to feel the same emotion as an individual. Brinkmann (2008) highlights the significance of being able “to verbalize, give accounts, and answer for oneself” to focus on the psychological process related to identity (p. 405). *Shravana* is more of observing and noticing in which we try to understand the phenomenon of our emotions in our educational environment. However, to address the research question of how can I support the educational leaders in their critical reflection in their everyday practice, with these emerging curiosities *Shravana* only seemed insufficient leading me to *Manana*, the experiential-transformative approach through which we would not only notice our emotions and label them but also critically reflect on them and understand the underlying reasons for feeling them.

Manana: Introspecting Emotions through Autobiographical Narratives

To begin an introspective journey towards cultivating critical reflection of emotions, I created an exercise ‘Map of Emotions’ by putting great attention to self-

reflexivity and mindfulness, an adaptive version of affective self-understanding that addresses the limitations of eidetic phenomenological perspective developed by Mortari (2012). Eidetic essences is the necessary and universal quality of a given phenomenon. The intention was to create an environment for the educational leaders develop their reflective practice in a phenomenological way where they would first participate in an introspective activity followed by a writing activity as adult learners. At first, the participants had to reflect on their emotional life through their emotional biography and then introspect into the cognitive dynamics of their emotional experiences and try to understand their relationship now. An extract from Aasha's emotional biography which helped her connect to why she was feeling anxious in the present moment.

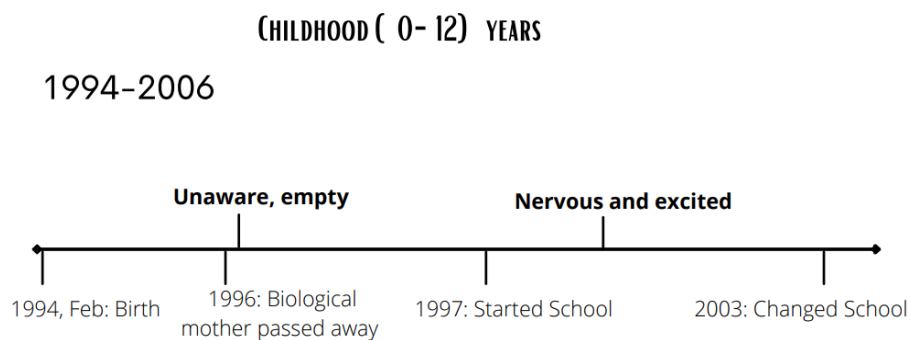


Figure 22 One of the slides when Aasha was sharing her emotional biography through a PowerPoint presentation

From 1994 to 2006 when I was 0-12 years, I had an enjoyable childhood overall. My biological mother passed away in 1996 when I was 2.5 years old. I was not aware of this. My family didn't tell me about it because they thought it would psychologically impact me. I knew she was in the hospital. I was always searching for her. I didn't know she was gone. I felt an emptiness

within. I always asked for her, but I was unaware of the reality. Around that time, since I was a child it didn't bother me so much, but as I grew up, I realized that it impacted me, especially the day when I figured out that I was pregnant and going to be a mother myself.

Gallagher and Zahavi (2012) argue that bringing in the subjective experience is important to help individuals reflect on their emotional and mental events in a mindful manner. That was the first time Aasha had revealed her pregnancy to us. She further shared that as she was preparing for her emotional biography that was when she realized that her anxiety was being triggered by the fear that she would feel lost and empty as a mother since for a long time she was not told why her biological mother was absent in her life during her childhood. Perry (2002) explains that every child has important needs and will impact them in the long term if those needs are not met. Richa's emotional biography shows similar evidence. In her emotional identity card, she had shared that her anger is triggered when someone breaks the trust. Her emotional biography shares an incident of her childhood that made her angry.

"I am the first child of my parents. In my maternal family, I was the first female grandchild because of this, they were more joyful. My maternal grandfather was the one who gave me my name. My mother had to go for an operation when I was very young. So everyone was busy helping her leaving me at home trusting a person to look after me. Since I used to cry a lot, the person felt irritated and started giving me sleeping pills which made me sleep for days. I was very young to remember all this but I have heard this story so many times all my childhood with rage from my relatives and that makes me so angry."

Here, the goal was also to explore the structure of human experiences and how it has affected the emotions and our identity by focusing on the singular accounts and to introspect on why we verbalize certain situations only as our triggers.

Kelchtermans et al. (2009) argue that educators are meaning makers who interpret their experiences to find a purpose in their practice to improve it. For meaning-making, learning is important and the act of learning itself is an emotional practice evoked by diverse emotions. Gaule's emotion of anticipation can be seen as evidence here. For Gaule, looking forward to something beyond his job is something he looks forward to; for him, growth matters a lot, rooted in the idea of independence. In his emotional biography, Gaule shares how he had looked forward to becoming independent during his childhood as his parents kept on sharing about not having enough money and how that impacted him a lot regarding how he started picking multiple objects as a hobby just to ensure that they might be helpful for him to become independent. He still remembers an incident afresh that happened when he was five years old,

"I had fallen sick and for me being independent being able to do everything myself. I came out of my mosquito nest, something common as a terai inhabitant, fetched water for myself, drank it, and went back to bed myself. I didn't bother waking up my parents because I thought they were already tired. I can relate this with my practice as an educator as well that to become independent, I tend to not ask for help and overstretch myself. Also, I find myself continuously looking forward to opportunities that are beyond my job so that I know everything that's needed."

Yoo and Carter (2017) argue that an educator's identity is constructed through their relationship with their students, colleagues, a broader school community, and how they view educational and teaching reform. Mezirow and Taylor (2009) explain this as the stage where the educators are involved in critical dialogues with themselves and with others by challenging their deeply held assumptions about how they relate to the world around them. Jyoti in agreement with the fellow participants shared how her sadness even today gets triggered by the incident that triggered sadness in her as a child.

“In 2007, I met an accident while I was playing with my friend and broke my front tooth. It made me feel confused and insecure because it got everyone's attention. People used to tell me, ‘Oh, so you went through this!’ I was sad when my family member kept talking about it. Friends used to talk about it too, even when I was a teenager, so it made me feel more insecure and confused. More than insecurity and confusion, I was feeling sad for being judged about my appearance. Though I was good at other activities, everyone focused on my broken teeth.”

The experience of not-knowing during the times of crisis and the disorienting dilemma is usually accompanied with the feeling of fear, shame, loss, and guilt needs a fundamental reordering and redescription of how one thinks feels, and acts. Kamal shares his traumatic experiences as a student and I could understand why the the stimulus that disgusts him in his emotional identity card was when someone discourage curious students.

“I was a very curious child. Since I was good at studies, I was promoted to the senior classes early by skipping two to three junior classes. But as soon as I

was promoted, I started getting bullied, and that continued for a long time. Since I was unknown and unprepared about what to expect out of the school, I started feeling lost, fearful, helpless, and confused. I started seeing myself as a fool as slowly my grades started deteriorating. That has continued even now when I have turned as an educator.”

Nussbaum (2003) argues that emotions are infused by thoughts about an object which is based on how we perceive them and thus can be associated with one's wellbeing. For a very long time, emotions have been seen only from a physical lens, leaving the mental aspect aside, making the education about emotional life impossible (Mortari, 2015). EI, similarly gradually is being seen as a skill set that can be measured and thus has been looked from several metrics to figure out its relationship with other components like academic achievement, subjective wellbeing, stress level of individual etc. (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Schutte & Malouff, 2011; Schneider et al., 2013) and less has been studied about supporting the people to comprehend their emotional life. Thus, to understand why they feel what they are feeling for their learning, they were asked to reflect using methods like journaling, having conversation, painting or whatever they were comfortable with. All of them used reflective journal entry of their emotions and also look into the multiple aspects of their emotions. The reflection of the emotions was done through describing the activity and then writing the emotions they were feeling and putting that into words by analyzing the cognitive experience of it, which is always underlying but we are unaware of it (Oatley, 1992). Mezirow (2000) brings the reference of Bruner (1996) and adds critical reflection as an important addition in meaning making along with their four modes of making meaning: (i) establishing and maintaining intersubjectivity; (ii) relating to the previously held event; (iii) constructing meaning

usually in relation to obligations and standards, conformities, and deviations; and (iv) making propositions. Writing journal entries helped them critically analyze the meaning making of the emotions even after they experience it by activating their retrospective reflection in order to understand their educational learning experiences. The process continued for two months with a reflective discussion each week where we explained the educative meaning of our reflective practice. The need to understand the cognitive aspect of emotions emerged from the regular discussions. Jyoti, reflecting on her journaling shared,

“When I journal my emotions my head feels clear and I seem to drop the weight of my shoulders. Even if I don’t interact with others, there are so many things that run inside my head, whether that comes from watching movies, or even if I observe someone going through something from the outside, I have a lot of things going on and as a result, I feel a lot of emotions. A lot of times, those are ambivalent emotions. Previously, I got reactions like I was sensitive and the emotions I feel are not valid so I got a clarity from this emotional journaling regarding what I was feeling, what event triggered me to feel that emotion. I was able to process these very things and emotions journaling helped me a lot in doing so.”

Mezirow (1991) sees the overall process as necessary process of transformative learning involving cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions through meaning perspectives. According to Brookfield et al. (1990), meaning perspectives refer “to the structure of assumptions within which new experience is assimilated and transformed by one’s past experience during the process of interpretation” (p. 2). When we started this action project, we had this thought that

whatever we are reacting at is a part of the context or is based on other people's reaction. However, after this, we were able to see how our gendered childhood had played a role in the feelings that we feel and based on which we were reacting. Reflection is synonymous with higher-order thinking and thus engages intellectual, affective, and conotive inferences like generalizations, analogies. With the emotional biography shared in autobiographical narratives, the participants create a critical awareness of the perspectives and their guiding assumptions that had been limiting their worldview (Mortari, 2015). Some participants considered this experiences as thinking-remembering-imagining exercise for themselves and were using drawing and photographs to share their narrative. Suruchi expressed her emotional journal as a part of her nostalgia.

"I still remember all of the moments of my childhood really fondly. So, my mom is from Kawasuti, which is if you all know Bharatpur, it's 30 mins away from there. Chitwan is further 30 minutes away from there when you cross the bridge from there. In Chitwan, my dad is from Khairani and my mom is from Kawasuti that is why my maternal home was nearby. In the first three years, I was obviously a kid so I don't remember a lot. What I do remember are a few things like my dad teaching me how to write numbers before I even joined school formally. I remember that very well. Although I had not joined school formally, there used to be a school across our house and my mom had made this dress for me, which I used to wear and go to study there just like that. Even now I remember one or two things like how my dad used to give me numbers to write from 1-10 and 10-20. I used to finish and share that with excitement, which I have little remembrances of. I read somewhere that people

with the sun sign Cancer remember a lot of things vividly so, maybe I remember a lot of things because of that.”

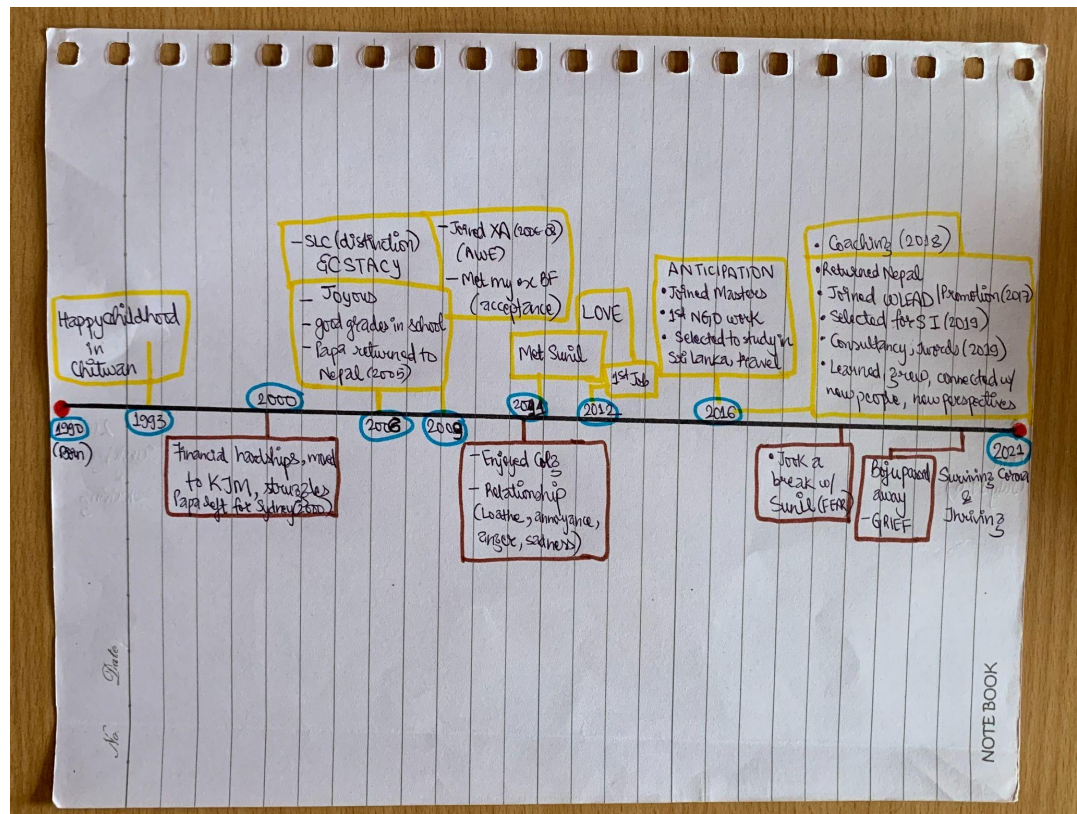


Figure 23 Suruchi preparing her emotional journal on her notebook

For some participants it was like playing movie of their own life in their mind. While some found journaling extremely helpful for them to be mindful of their educational context and were making detailed notes in way that was most suitable for them. Richa shared, “I had made a life map a long ago. Back then, I didn't even know about emotions at this level. I guess I just knew how to say ‘I am happy,’ ‘I am angry,’ ‘I am sad.’ I didn't have much knowledge about this topic, nor did I think about it. It was more mechanical. I used to only plan for my life regarding what I would do. But, when I connected my emotions with the events, I came to realize my growth, learning, and insight about how I can live my life better. It showed me a

perspective about how I can easily face different situations and how I have become more mature.”

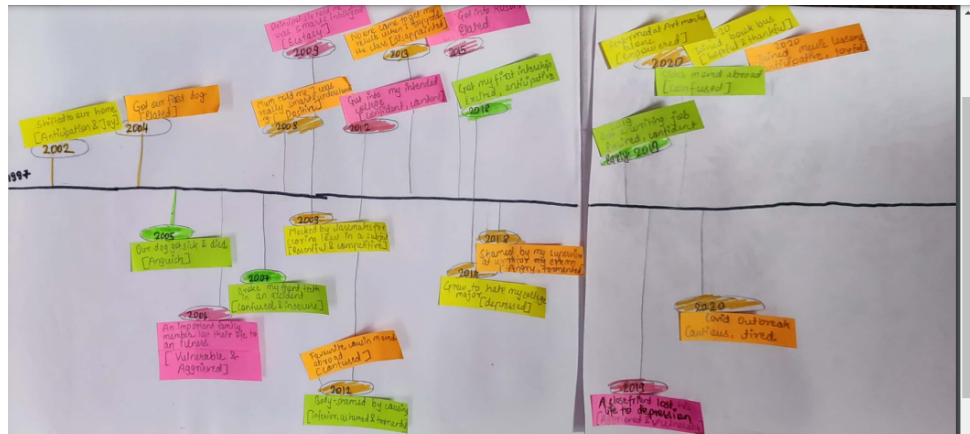


Figure 24 Jyoti preparing the emotional journal on the walls of her hostel room

The other participants were facing difficulties caught up in meta reflections and were being more analytical about the process and were being evaluative of their reflective process and were wondering if they were practicing it correctly. Aasha on our third week reflected on her pattern of reflection and expressed her discomfort as she kept on evaluating herself and also thought it might be because of her pregnancy, *“I’m going through some big changes in my life and in my body and everything is shifting, and so I feel very emotional and vulnerable. In so many things, I do feel powerful, but there are times I feel very emotional. I have turned out moody, and think this is happening probably because I am not drinking enough water, having the right food, or I am just sitting in my room.”*

Manana is a phenomenological approach that considered first-person perspective to know and understand as a phenomenon where the participants’ lived experiences was the important aspect for introspection. The reflection would take the shape of reflection-in-emotion when we perceive the emotional state taking a pause

from our autopilot mode and describe it and it would also take the shape of reflection-on-emotion when we relax and reflect for the educative experience. Both of them were analyzed by identifying and labeling the emotions based on what we had learned in our first action reflection cycle and identifying the cognitive content of the emotion and trying to figure out if the externalization of the emotion was ‘ideal affect’ or an ‘actual affect’. The research participants slowly started sharing the difference between how they used to be aware of only their physical sensations when they were feeling certain emotions but after regular reflection after the workshops and journaling, they were slowly starting to ask questions related to the origination of their emotion and if they were authentically expressing themselves. Regarding the journaling, the participants felt the whole process of writing journal empowering while two of the participants found it joyful.

The reflection after experience had intersubjective corroboration practiced between the participants and I as a practitioner researcher. The reflective exercise provided us further evidence about our own self. During the conversation, the participants used to rate themselves higher in self-awareness but were lower in self-management, particularly in their interpersonal relationships. The process of introspection provided a way for the educational leaders to observe their approach to their daily effectiveness in their self-management and monitor the changes. One of the participants noticed that trying to be aware of the cognitive act is tiring and sometimes distracting. Suruchi, on our third week expressed expressed the process as an anxious effort,

“Emotions come and they go. In one day itself, we experience so many emotions, but when I was noting down, it was a little taxing as well thinking

about how I was feeling even though it was a good exercise. Will I continue doing this? I am not very sure. But did I enjoy the process last week? I think I did, but I would also say that it was a bit taxing for me going back to the emotions again and again”

Brookfield (1990) argue this process as psychologically and politically dangerous risking the psychological stability as it involves risks to uncovering the unconscious emotions associated with structural injustices. To add on to what Suruchi was sharing, Gaule also expressed,

“It was happening with me as well. I was confused about where to place my emotions and how to label it. I know the vocabularies now. I know there are multiple emotions but I was feeling multiple emotions at the same time. To write those exactly in words was a problem for me. I generally observed that throughout the day we have different emotions. At the end of the day, when I was journal the recent incidents and emotions that I felt and how I felt when experiencing those emotions, I really struggled to become authentic.”

The educators were opening up to explain their meaning-making by interpreting their experiences and also questioning and conversing about their experiences. These kind of engagement in a critically reflective conversation provide a framework to cope with ambiguity by helping the educators become more open as they allow to make sense of challenging new experiences (Mezirow, 1991). Landis (2008) calls this as ‘difficut dialogues’ in which the participants encounter and engage with the intention to humanize through personal narratives and create mutual vulnerability. With these critical questions among us and the struggle for authentic expressions, we moved ahead with *nidhdyasana* to address the same.

Nidhdhyasana: To Care for Oneself through the Authentic Expression of Emotions

Journal of emotional life was a part of everyday practice of nidhdhyasana that required a continuous and regular time to practice whatever we had been discussing as a part of our reflection process. However with the difficulty in expressing authentically and the increasing complexity of noting down every moment, we moved ahead with art based journaling of emotions. I learned about this methodology after being part of 17th International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry in May 2021. After attending the research conference, I had written in my diary on May 21st 2021.

We keep on hearing that we live in our own bubble and think that whatever we are doing and however we are doing are the only ways to do so. As a researcher, I too was doing the same. I was fixated on my research methodology and had narrowed down my perspective though I knew qualitative research is broad. Learning about arts-based research has been eye-opening for me as to see how art can help us express our complex emotions.

Deaver and McAuliffe (2009) argue that art based emotions journaling has focused art making combined with reflective expression and is based on two premises that the art reveals authentic emotions while the reflective expression is to make the cognitive sense of those emotions. This also became a dimension where the individual and the social intersected and the educators became aware of how the public sphere breaks into their private sphere. Kamal expressing how his personal life gets affected by his friends circle or his interaction with the public shares first through picture and explains it.

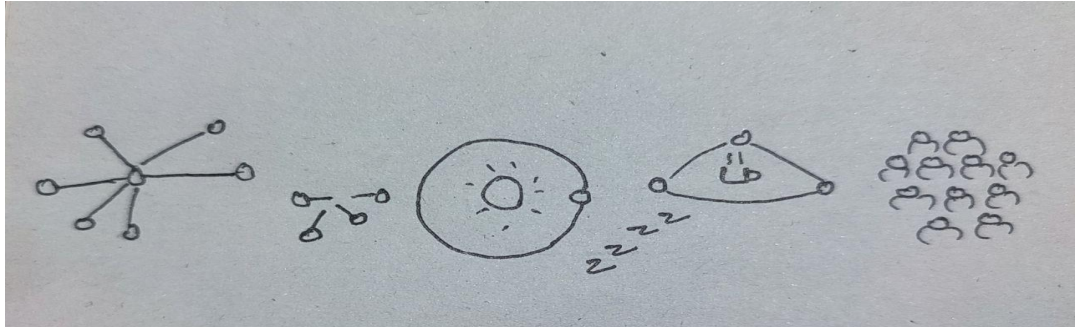


Figure 25 Kamal expressing his journey of reflective journaling through illustration about how he is practicing authentic emotions through emotions journal

“While I was expressing on my emotional journal, I felt a little cryptic. At first, my week started off by mostly meeting my friends. I was socializing at that time and was meeting close friends. So my journal has an indication of time and it shows how everyone’s connected. Moving on, on Sunday I was feeling disconnected with my colleagues, so the second one is showing that disconnection. After that, I drew a Sun and a revolution around the sun. So, it shows that I completed one revolution around the sun, which is an indication for my birthday. That was also one of the highlights in my week. The other diagram that shows “Zzzz” is basically representing how I was sleepy the next day and indicates why I slept a lot. The other one shows chiya guff [tea conversations] of us three people. I kept the reminiscence of that here. The next one shows that in the evenings we usually have some form of community events with a lot of people to sit and learn, which is what I’m trying to show.

Finnegan (2019) argues that transformative learning does not happen in isolation, thus the need for communication to support each other is important in every day life. Through regular journaling of emotions the educators were being able to identify their individuals ways of coping the ambiguousness and the disorientation while at the same time with group discussions and sharing they were being able to

find the mutuality and reframe the synthesis. Suruchi, sharing her week's reflections of emotions shares,

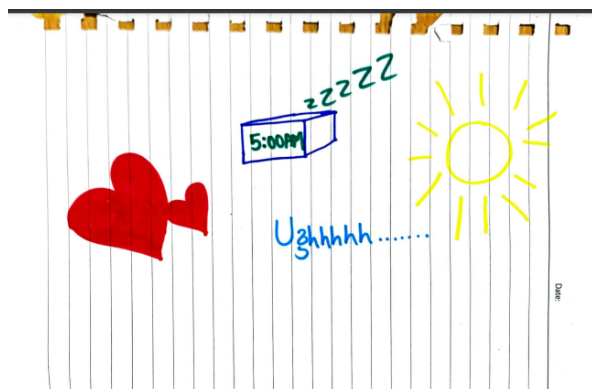


Figure 26 Suruchi explaining her journal of emotions through pictures

“Throughout the week at various points, I had this feeling of ‘Ughhh!’” At times I was questioning what was happening and I had the thought that I’m done. And on this side it’s full of sun, I don’t know if you can see but basically I am a very positive person. I always look out for good things in everything unless it’s really shitty and there is nothing good at all. But in most things I try to find good things in anyone, individuals or situations. Despite a long week and despite knowing that the whole month will be very long, I always look at the brighter side of things. And also just very excited because we selected our other course participants, so they are starting their course this Saturday. No, on Monday for which I am very excited. I am just looking forward to new things, new adventures, new opportunities, which is why I put Sun there. So this is what my week looked like.”

For Mezirow (2012), the importance of this practice is to hold positions that are contradictory to their identity and value in the situation of crisis in their everyday practices. For Socrates, it means to care for oneself, which is the ultimate goal of

education, implied as self-awareness for Plato. Malkki and Green (2018) argue that emotions operate in two ways: (i) alerts us to potential existential threats in an ontological matter and to help us inform about our meaning perspectives in an epistemological manner. In this process, we experience edge-emotions, the emotions that arise at the edge of our comfort zones. According to Malkki (2019) refers to the feeling of uncertainty in which even though the individuals are trying to get back to the comfort zones, the context does not seem to let them go back and challenges them to embrace it as an invitation to navigate the contextual crisis. Aasha, through her art based emotion journaling navigates these edge emotions.

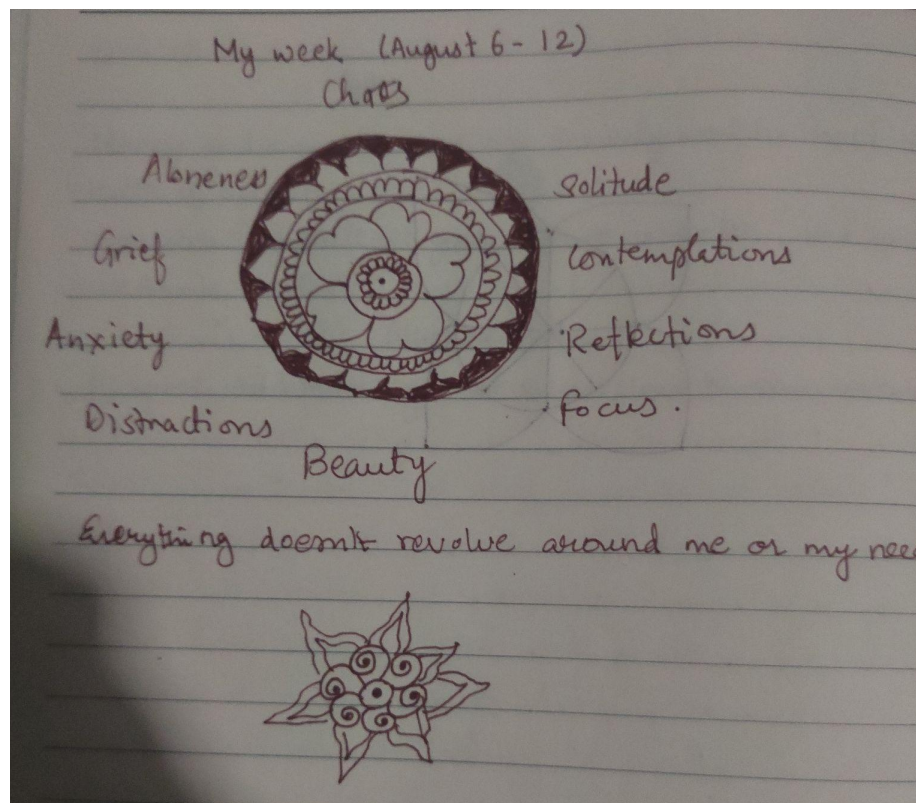


Figure 27 Aasha expressing her edge emotions through mandala to learn more about herself

"I made a Mandala. I wrote a few words in it. It's a symbol of enlightenment and that's why I was wanting to make it. I made it and wrote words like

alenessness and solitude because I was finding this whole week very contradictory. I wanted to be alone but I don't like being alone sometimes. So, that was a contradiction. I'm also feeling a little grief and sadness and to reflect and contemplate on it is also a chance. So, there are anxieties on one side and there's also reflection on the other side. There's also a lot of distractions just like even in Mandala there are so many intricacies and details. So that's a lot of distraction there but at the same time you need a lot of focus to make that. I have written beauty below and above it, I have written chaos. So, I felt like chaos, beauty, and everything else came together. One realization that I had is, everything doesn't revolve around me or my needs".

With this we are able to acknowledge and accept what we are going through (Berinato, 2020). *Nidhdhyasana*, here is the educational process where the educators learn how to navigate the uncomfortable ontological truth by being authentic to their emotions through regular rational dialogue. For Alvarez (2016), it is 'open communication in which the diversity of the individuals is respected and is utilized to make a safe space for empathic engagement.

Adult critical reflection is tested during the times when they are in a critical edge in their daily life, so rediscovering and being authentic and asking how should I live my life becomes crucial to not become a living contradiction (Rorty, 1991). With regular journaling of emotions, we experienced the limitations of our vocabulary and gradually expanded our vocabulary in the form of art to broaden our meaning perspectives. Here, the vocabularies does not only mean the words or the way we describe ourselves but the authenticity with which we live our lives that provides the words for our deepest self-doubts. This can also be associated with Rosenberg's

(2003) nonviolent communication technique used for giving empathy to oneself or another by asking about or expressing feelings and needs with the assumption that all human beings can relate to each other's yearnings and naming the feelings authentically will help bring mutual understanding in our day to day lives.

Reflections and Realizations

Educational leadership, by its nature, has been considered as an interventionist position to be in where the leaders are expected to have social-emotional strengths (Bryer&Grimbeek, 2005). Yet, with the uncertainty and stress that are dominant in the every day interactions of the educators the ability and motivation of education leadership practitioners in relation to their emotions and its management have become complex and uncertain highlighting the need for critical reflection among educational leaders with response to their emotions and their social-emotional competencies has been increasing. Even when they consider themselves competent in curriculum and pedagogy, they find themselves struggling when it comes to self-awareness and reflection regarding their professional effectiveness. Getting in touch with their own feelings, thoughts, and attitudes in order to respond to, especially during the times of crisis needs to be effective where they are understanding their own emotional triggers and know how to manage them to achieve the learning outcomes. Without critical self-reflection, the educators are bound to their routine way of thinking "drawn from their cognitive schemes developed over time and personal biases acquired through prior experiences" (Bryer &Grimbeek, 2005, p. 101).

Critical reflection consists of reflection as well as meta-reflection that is the reflection about the act of reflection itself. During this phase, we were able to identify

why the same stimulus could trigger different emotions to different individuals and also understand the role of our autoethnographic narrative in helping us understand our emotions. Similarly, we were also able to understand the importance of reflecting on our emotions every day and how interrogating on our reflective activity can help us gain more awareness about ourselves enhancing our self-awareness. The intersubjective corroboration after journaling was another way to potentiate the analytic capabilities when it comes to emotional literacy. The detailed examination of the educators on how they feel about their practice, why do they feel the way they feel, and what impact do they have on their personal and professional areas of their lives helped them identify the positive and regulated emotions.

The educational leaders of Nepal begin their journey of leadership without much social-emotional support and skill (see chapter II). Many of them begin the journey only when they start going through severe stress and realize their limitations. Even though there are a few settings and spaces where they can share these concerns, the need for a better space that ensures safety understanding the sensitivity of the issue is important (Bryer&Grimbek, 2005). Eschanbacher and Fleming (2020) argue that during the crisis like covid-19 educators experience disorientation and question their previously held assumptions to seek pedagogical response in order to meet the learning needs both in terms of information and regulation of their emotions. Camus (1960) sees this as the imagined search for identity among the leaders during the times of crisis which seems unattainable and absurd leaving them struggling to make sense of the context by questioning their assumptions and moving forward in search of transformation. Here, the search is not the objective truth but the authentic way to live a life that strengthens the potential of the individual to cope with the challenges and improves the quality of personal and relational life (Mortari, 2017; Rorty, 1991).

Thus, the need for a safe space to foster this learning and critically reflect from time to time whenever someone needs it emerged. As we approached towards the end of our second action reflection cycle, a general concern among the participants started to emerge as to how can we form a community where we could continue reflection and learn by ourselves was brought upon. Aasha shared, “I think for us the first action cycle was like a warm up in which we learned about emotions and now in the second action cycle we’re comfortable sharing our authentic emotions, so now I realize the importance of community where I could simply keep on rebrushing my skills.” Others too expressed on the same lines. Here, emerged another research question for me: *How can I create a safe space for critical self-reflection amid the unsafe times to promote and nurture emotional intelligence among educational leaders?* I have addressed the answer in chapter 6.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I explore the answer to the question that emerged in the process of inquiry- *How can I support educational leaders in their critical self-reflection to foster emotional intelligence in everyday practice?* For that, I unpack the (i) gendered notion of emotions and its relationship with my identity as an educator (ii) understand the socio-cultural aspect of emotions through personal narratives, and (iii) the importance of maintaining a journal of our emotional life for critical self-reflection. Here, I also share how emotional biography helped us reflect better by letting us express our emotions better and empathize which became crucial for our professional development. I share this by connecting that with *shravana*, *manana*, and *nidhdhyasana* paradigm and relating with LISTEN model. this chapter has brought the stories of such distinctive people. In this chapter, I also discuss how I see some connecting dots that I have with my mother.

CHAPTER VI

CREATING A SAFE SPACE FOR CRITICAL SELF-REFLECTION DURING THE
UNSAFE TIMES

With the rise in the use of technology in education, even though full online instruction had not been a common practice in education, the educational institutions had already been practicing online education. Since work from home started, after pandemic teachers were forced to adapt their teaching practice and put on more time for preparation. With educational institutions being fully closed during the lockdown educators were obligated to learn online facilitation by hook or by crook and deliver their teaching online. With the rising obligation, the demand for a “safe learning environment” increased for both the pedagogical and methodological aspects for both the students and the teachers (Lauret & Bayram-Jacobs, 2021, p.3). For some adaptation to this uncharted territory was quick, for many educators, the transition was challenging and concerning in terms of accessibility to necessary resources, increased stress because of isolation, and mental/physical health concerns. Raskin (2008) argued that though the need for safe learning spaces was increasing, the exact replica of what was considered a safe in-person teaching-learning process before the pandemic was difficult to translate in the online platform as the personal, psychological, and logistical concerns of students as well as educators were different in the online setting, especially when there was physical isolation going on. Thus, the challenging times called for an intentional creation of safe space for reflection as well that was relevant to the changed context. Chapagain and Neupane (2020) pointed out something similar for Nepal. It is important to recognize that not all family have

similar context, comfort, and care and therefore, the need for individualized and adaptive care is important to foster learning with the opportunity of decentralization and autonomy in the process of learning. Similar need was seen even in my Ph.D. research journey.

Developing a Virtual Learning Community for Critical Self-Reflection

Engaging education leaders in meaningful reflective spaces play an important role in their professional development. These reflective spaces provide the educators an opportunity to be open about their personal perceptions and their biases based on their prior knowledge and context (Miller et al., 2021). Odeku (2021) argues that with the challenges due to Covid-19, a plethora of online technological tools emerged interchangeably called online education e-learning, blended learning, or virtual learning. Regardless of the pandemic, the idea was to meet the critical needs of learning and reflection through technological intervention and make an impact. Mimirins and Bhattacharya (2007) considered virtual learning and reflection communities better in order to reflect and conceptualize thinking while at the same time to explore online resources on their own for collective understanding. Tzanavaris et al. (2021) consider Virtual Learning Communities (VLEs) Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) with larger systems, larger learning management systems, and content management and has specialized features focusing on the use of asynchronous or synchronous design and delivery of learning experiences. These spaces allow the participants to have effective discourse, dialogue, and collaboration by providing publicly viewable reflective and collaborative learning tools like discussion boards, blogs, and social networking sites.

VLCs are carefully developed as the intersection of reflective practice and dialogical interactions and are driven by four dimensions - the stimuli for reflection, the content of reflection, the process of reflection, and the outcomes of reflection (Miller et al., 2021). Caronia (2011) brings the concept of co-beingness and intersubjective construction of social reality involving the phenomenological perspective that acknowledges the process of reflecting to make sense of the experience itself in their respective context. Context is crucial for the development of VLCs as the construction of VLCs must have at least three elements: the model of educational intervention chosen, the type of virtual learning community, and the characteristics of the learning environment. The specific context for VLCs also means proposed topics and the contents that need to be appropriate for the members and their needs (Gamboa-Gonzalez & Mateus, 2021). I could relate this to *Basudeva Kutumbakam* mindset in Hindu philosophy. This means that the world is a family and no expression should be plucked out of context (Debroy, 2021).

With the advent of digital tools and technologies, an online commonplace has been emerging as a community of practice ensuring emotional safety for the members (Haas et al., 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic brought with it the necessities of social distancing and working from home, but along with that it also brought anxiety and workloads as the work-life balance started to become blurry (Shrestha, 2021). Here VLCs worked as a space to reflect by optimizing autonomy on time that made reflection less burdensome as they were not obligated to do it when they were not willing to.

Berry (2019) argues community is the feeling of membership and closeness within a social group that has academic and social benefits. Academic benefits here

mean engagement and participation and social benefit means the increased ability to manage stress and nurture overall emotional wellbeing. Even though cultivating a sense of community might be difficult through virtual platforms, Koslow and Pina (2015) argue that the opportunities should not be underestimated as well. Facilitating reflective sessions online was new to me. But with bond that we were able to foster within the first two action-reflection cycle, the journey of *shravana*, *manana*, and *nidhdhyasana* went hand in hand even when I was planning for the third action project for the research participants which we all wanted to focus on building as strong community for critical self-reflection. Aasha had shared that after our second action project,

I have slowly realized the importance of community. The first action cycle was a warm-up and with the second action cycle we're comfortable sharing our views and opinions, so I realized the importance of community. Another thing I've realized is writing is the best form of communication with myself and also with others. I like writing letters as well. If people respond, I receive it well thinking that they reciprocated. Even when people don't really respond to those letters and just accept them as well, I still feel good about writing to people. So, I am wondering if we can do something that helps other educators do the same on their own but feel a larger part of a community.

When the participants were feeling the need to create resources for a larger community, I was mindful that my role as a practitioner-researcher was crucial in cultivating that community with the feeling of safety and belonging that was the value that we wanted to foster throughout the action-reflection cycles (see chapter III). To ensure this, I revisited the notion of LISTEN and engaged in listenening to the

emerging need for emotional wellbeing, help them introspect on that, create a safe space to share, try using that space, express how it went for them, and then nurture what we found useful over the period or develop the platform further if the other problems would arise. Since I was using the virtual platform for teaching and learning for the first time, the process was unique to me as well as a learning experience. Garrison et al. (2010) explain three independent elements; social presence, teaching presence, and cognitive presence as important elements in fostering community through online platforms. Social presence meant ensuring the authenticity of the participants in the real environment. Since we had already spent around nine months together, we had already been able to express our vulnerable selves among each other and were able to be our authentic selves without any fear of judgment. Berry (2019) highlights the significance of peer sharing when we are trying to foster online connections, thus discussion-based strategy was chosen as a part of reflection as per the need of the participants. This is the essence of teaching presence. My growing attitude towards acceptance of my authentic self without hesitating to accept even the points when I could be a 'living contradiction', had helped me become more open and present among the research participants (See chapter IV and V). Garrison (2011) explains cognitive presence as the educator's ability to provoke dialogue and help the participants become more curious, reflective, and critical to meet the shared goal of learning. The use of the online platform and the self-assessment question helped me achieve this presence. Garrison et al. (2010) calls this as the Community of Inquiry (CoI) that is essential to foster a sense of community in online classrooms. Once these components were assured, we continued our educational journey of creating a safe learning space through *shravana*, *manana*, and *nidhdhyasana* together.

Shravana: Listening to the Untold

As my action research started with the upsurge of COVID-19 and when the virus had started to make many people incredibly ill. Both I and my research participants always had these anxious pockets in our minds that held the apocalyptic disaster of COVID-19 within it which reflected in our reflective journals and check-ins that we used to have in the beginning of our workshops. As we continued our daily life and focused on critical self-reflection, there were always thoughts that were looming around finding a safe space for ourselves. At that point, a safe space meant, a physical space where the virus would not infect us and it also meant a space where we could feel secure enough to share our feelings of anxiety and fear. By August 2021, we were already familiar that the pandemic meant different to different people, thus safe space also meant different to different people. However, the concept of 'safe space' is derived from the 1970s women's and LGBT movement (Flenser & Lippi, 2019). It then meant the physical meeting space where like-minded people could meet and share their experiences without the fear of discrimination, harassment, hatred, and threats. As the concept slowly transferred into educational settings, safe space became the precondition to exploring diversity. However, with the pandemic, the precondition was threatened (Siepmann & Perez Canado, 2022)..

The days of isolation that my husband and I had when the rest of our family members got infected with the virus, made us continue with the uncertainty leaving us only certain of the contagious virus. Meanwhile, when I got terribly ill and got limited to a hospital bed myself in September 2021 not knowing what disease I had been infected with, reflection was hard to come by. I was listening to my emotions, my bodily sensations. It was a mixture of fear, anxiety, hopelessness, and apprehension.

My body constantly used to shake and my head would feel as if it was going to burst. I felt irritated almost all the time and projected that as anger in front of people. I knew introspection was needed and I was introspecting on it as well. But I did not want to share with others what I was feeling and what I was dealing with. It felt as if the same process that I had been working on for the last few months for my Ph.D. was not making sense at that point. However, not sharing the thoughts and feelings of helplessness had started to suffocate me and I felt like running away again. It was another moment when I could visibly see that I was a living contradiction. Yet, thinking deeper, I realized that I was not looking for a specific person to share with but just wanted a space to put through my thoughts. So, in the hospital bed, I asked for a laptop and started writing in the form of a blog and shared it.



Figure 28 Expressing through a write-up from the hospital

As soon as I shared the blog, I started receiving messages expressing that the readers could resonate with the thoughts and emotions that I was going through. It was a reminder that we are dealing with the same crisis. What I was going through reminded me of Schon's (1995) explanation about reflection-in-action, which meant thinking back on what we have done so that we know how we can contribute to our expected outcome where the practitioner-researcher simultaneously recalls interactive thinking combined with reflection on that interactive thinking. I recalled the exhaustion my research participants shared as the teaching-learning process continued online with the growing number of COVID-19 cases. I remembered one conversation we had at the beginning of one of our workshops where I and the participants were exhausted.

Bhawana: *Hello, everyone! How are you guys doing? How are you feeling? Let's start from there. As I have been informed Gaule is still in an urgent meeting, so he will be joining a little late. To begin with, I am feeling is that I'm a little exhausted and sleepy. I didn't sleep well yesterday night, so maybe it's because of that. How are you feeling?*

Suruchi: *Hi, everyone! I'm a bit exhausted too. It's been a few long weeks because we started with the recruitment at the office lately, so there have been some late nights and I'm also picking up on someone else's work right now because the person got sick. So, I had to do their share of work too to some extent. So, yeah, a bit exhausted but definitely looking forward to today's session.*

With so much to my plate already and amid that added fear of my health, an added workshop that too virtual on that hospital bed was pressurizing. Yet moving forward to nurture EI and practice what we had learned through the workshops and had built as a habit was important to sustain. Eberhard et al. (2019) highlight the importance of routine where learning gradually happens over time and the actions work best when reinforced as a routine through continuous adaptation and learning. I felt an extreme need to do what was in my power to build a space that was safe yet accessible to learn more on an asynchronous basis to process what was happening and communicate if needed and find resources that might be relevant whenever the participants needed. Mezirow (1991) highlights the need for a safe and accepting learning environment for critical reflection. For that Malkki and Green (2016) look into the relational and phenomenological viewpoint of the feeling of safety and acceptance with the argument that there is an in-between zone between theory and practice when we are reflecting. Going back to Mezirow (1991), at this point, I also

sensed the need for individual space for critical reflection where the notion of a safe and accepting learning environment did not only refer to the objective characteristics of the environment but rather an individual experience of feeling oneself accepted and safe. Here, the challenge was that the feeling of safety cannot be the same for every participant.

Merinyo and Willemsen (2021) assert that the intentional cultivation of caring relationships is very important while conducting research for that to build on the relationships it is better to turn off the recorder. I was listening to and trying to understand myself and the research participants. For that I started thinking of the answers to three critical questions Malkki and Green (2016) asked to ensure a safe learning environment. Their first question was to explicate the challenges. For me, the challenge was that the need for organized facilitation and acceptance as a learning community was important for the participants on the one hand while on the other the need for autonomy and an individual space was also crucial. The second question was on analyzing how the safe learning environment addresses that challenge through the understanding of resistance to motivating the participants for reflection. For that, I moved ahead with creating a VLE where the participants can choose the time they want to reflect on themselves, answer some of the questions, and read the resources needed for their reflection. The third question was to reflect on and analyze the challenge associated with the solution. Since it was difficult to get into perspectives by ourselves, we decided to move ahead with the facilitated group discussion and sharing on demand if needed and here I made sure that if the participants felt uncomfortable when recorded, most of the time the recording was kept off and also I assured them that I would not make notes of the discussion as well. Addressing these questions in relation to the ongoing pandemic provided me a new insight into how I

can ensure a safe space for myself and the research participants for our critical self-reflection.

Kember et al. (2008) argue that critical reflection is a reflection of a deeper kind that examines and develops awareness of the practices to make positive changes and thus can be done on both the individual basis and group discussion basis if that has the component of critical thinking. The increasing uncertainty with the increasing number of lockdown days and the changing life scenarios among the research participants as well as my own life had started to disrupt the status quo and my own thought process causing anxiety and uncertainty. The feeling of disorientation with the increasing responsibilities even for my female participants started to seem evident in our conversations. We needed frequent check-ins even for our critical reflection, but that did not have to be one another burden. So I wanted to make it flexible for the participants. Odeku (2021) argues flexibility as the choice of the educational environment for the learners to meet their individual needs. Though our workshops were going well as we were able to provide support and guidance to each other as a group, the need for long-term independent support was emerging where not only the participants but also others could reflect on their own pace with additional support. However, it was difficult for me to achieve the goal because of my limited knowledge of technology, and thus shared my concern with my critical friends as well as the research participants.

Kamal, one of the research participants who belonged to an IT college forwarded to help, and thus with his support working for around

Emotional Intelligence Self-Assessment Tool

(Adapted from Emily A. Starrett, Ph. D., in: The Manager's Pocket Guide to Emotional Intelligence, 2000, HRD Press: Amherst, MA and from The Handbook of Emotionally Intelligent Leadership by Daniel E. Feldman, 1999, Leadership Performance Solutions)

Answer the following questions honestly:

I am aware of the physical reactions (twinges, aches, sudden changes) that signal a "gut reaction."

Never Rarely Sometimes Usually Always

I readily admit mistakes and apologize.

Never Rarely Sometimes Usually Always

When I feel angry I can still stay composed.

Never Rarely Sometimes Usually Always

Figure 29 Self-Assessment tool inbuilt in the website to make the reflection process accessible

three months from September 2021 to November 2021, we built an online platform as a section of my organization's website where the participants can use a self-assessment tool to reflect on their EI. It was responsive to all modern mobile and computer devices.

The assessment was an adapted version of the assessment by Sterrett (2020) and Feldman (1999) and made simple. The workflow of the online assessment process looked like the following figure.

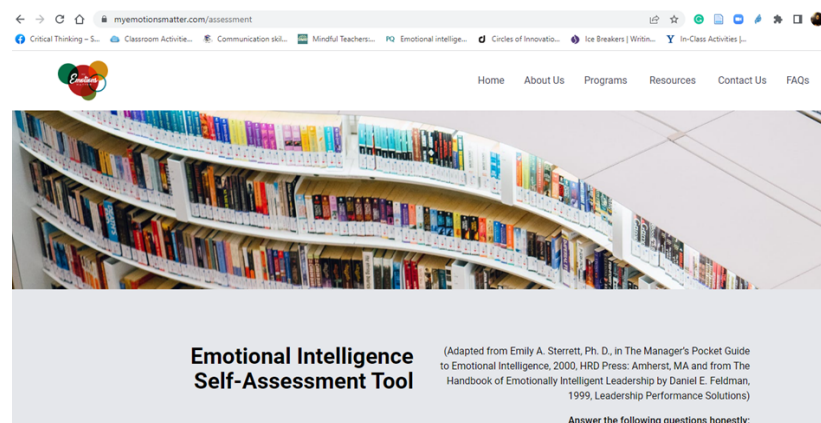


Figure 30 Self-Assessment landing page

↓

I am aware of the physical reactions (twinges, aches, sudden changes) that signal a "gut reaction."

Never Rarely Sometimes Usually Always

I readily admit mistakes and apologize.

Never Rarely Sometimes Usually Always

When I feel angry I can still stay composed.


Never Rarely Sometimes Usually Always

Figure 31 Self-Assessment questionnaire





Figure 32 Components of EI based on which the participants will get their assessment




Want to grow in these areas?

We have developed some useful resources for you to grow your Emotional Intelligence. Give us your email and we will share the resource list with you.

Your email address

bsbhawana830@gmail.com

Submit



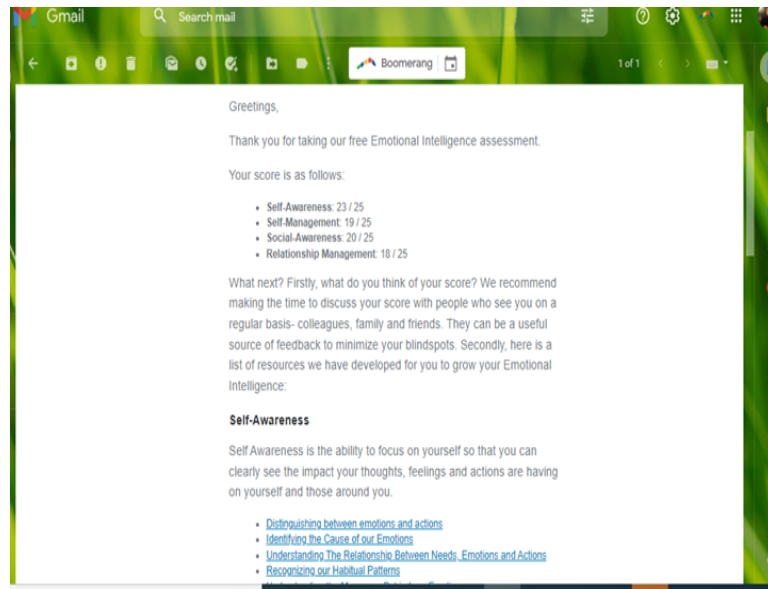


Figure 33 Email the participants receive after submission of their reflection

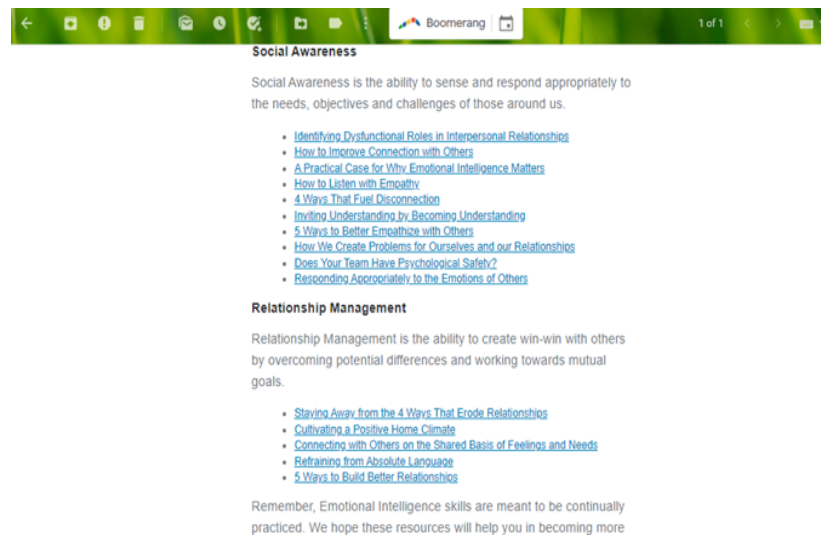


Figure 34 Resources they can explore further for their reflection in any of the areas they want to improve on

Self-assessment was important as it would trigger some acute internal and external personal crises, also termed as disorienting dilemmas (Roberts, 2013). Keller and Weller (2007) argue self-assessment is an important component for the

transformation of the learners as it allows them to identify areas of difficulty and problem-solve so they can engage themselves fully and make a meaningful conversation out of it in the larger discussion process. The ideal moral self-identity that we have within us based on our social conditioning wants us to rank ourselves at the higher spectrum in each category of the question however the actual self in the real world at multiple times is not actually at the higher spectrum while in practice leading the search for something that is missing in our lives and fostering critical reflection and transformation. Thus, self-assessment encourages the learners to take ownership of their voice and their direction of learning which help them become more reflective (Keller & Weller, 2007). Goleman (2006) also brings a similar notion about EI that recognizing oneself in unpleasant emotion means the need to get out of it. Thus, when individuals are aware of the irregularities in their practices, they feel the need to transform them (Boznou, 2016). With the realization of the disorienting dilemma through their self-assessment, the participants are accompanied by multiple unpleasant emotions like fear, anxiety, and anger that ask them to nurture critical reflection in order to answer their deeply held personal beliefs and values and their underlying assumptions leading to further self-dialogues and narratives.

Manana: Introspecting and Sharing the Assessment

When the participants returned after their self-assessment, we gathered together for a group session to share if there were any problems or concerns and how the assessment had turned out. Beyond that, we also noted how the resources provided have been helpful for the participants. The participants shared it to be helpful and also mentioned how some improvements like adding the questions in the Nepali language might be helpful if we are building a community. Suruchi expressed her delight as she

scored the highest in relationship management and the lowest in self-awareness, as she thought that she was the opposite. However, an honest assessment helped her see where she needs to work on. She added, *“As I went through the resources on self-awareness, I found them extremely helpful and I could see it being helpful for other educators like me. We are definitely building a community where we learn about EI.”* Gaule who filled the questionnaire in two different times in intervals of the months further added, *“I figured sometimes, we might not be correct about our own evaluation about ourselves. We might fill up the questionnaire in a certain situation, but it forces us to become conscious about the factors included and think about it when we go through some other situation. So having the assessment there in the public platform, I can go through it whenever needed. For example, ‘Am I this kind of person?’ ‘Have I changed?’ Or, ‘Has this situation changed me?’ So, it helps us to ask the right questions as well.*

We gradually expanded the community to learn more about EI and how one can nurture it in them to other educators beyond the research participants. With the expansion of the information about the platform-based community, I started getting messages and questions from different educators worldwide for collaboration on how we can work together in nurturing EI among the leaders.

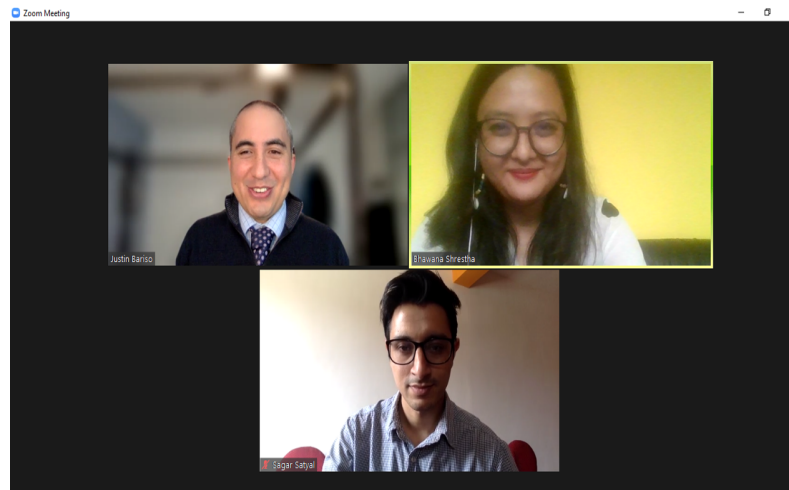


Figure 35 Founder of the organization EQ, Applied and author of the book EQ, Applied: Real-World Guide to EI Justin Bariso on the top left having a conversation regarding the potential collaboration with me and my team mate.

The theme of listening to ourselves continuously amid the different circumstances was an important factor that continued even when the participants were working independently on their EI. The participants had the shared feeling that with the assessment questions they are forced to think about the certain aspect of their lives that they might have overlooked and got the opportunity to do it on their own helped them not be fearful of the judgments however the pressures to get good score in each of the components remained. Jyoti shared, *“I’m really curious about how context must appear different based on gender, sex when it comes to social awareness and relationship management. I look forward to understanding the same as I move ahead in life as a community”*. As a group, we introspected how the virtual platform was helpful in creating the feeling of safety as a community during the unsafe time through connectedness and the acknowledgment of our vulnerability.

Connectedness

Even though the participants did the assessment individually and took their time to reflect on the results and find the relevant resources for them, I could find

them connecting and keeping track of the topics and issues that the other participants were interested in through our regular sharing in the VLC that we had created through Whatsapp. After two mandatory group discussions in which the participants were provided information about the assessment and the necessary direction for navigation, the group sessions were optional, connecting all of us via Whatsapp group. I was surprised to figure that they were interested in arranging dates for the discussion and reflection taking into account each other's schedules and considering what the other person was going through. Participants were also actively remembering each other's goals as educational leaders, asking critical questions, and continuously checking on each others' emotional states, which made the feeling of community stronger.

Acknowledging Vulnerability

The virtual community quickly helped establish the culture of acknowledging our vulnerability. For example, the participants used to share about their day in the group and then help each other navigate through the problems if the other participant is going through any. There were times when they did not want to meet and there were also times when they would be present but chose not to speak. The participants also shared that they got different results when they did the assessment at different times and accepted that they might not have been true to themselves. They reported about themselves as their need for perfection was intense. They were also okay expressing that they were sad or frustrated or angry or feel like crying reflecting in our group sessions. They would ask me to stop taking notes or recording whenever they felt like they just wanted to share and introspect and not want me to make it a part of my dissertation. Something that was quite different in these group discussions was that each time they would come, they had something to share from their

assessment or the resource they had read and the conversation started becoming candid. For me, it was another component of a safe community where the participants can candidly reflect on their vulnerability.

The introspection was mainly about how emotions have rarely been acknowledged in our pedagogical encounters while it also included conscious engagement of the research participants at the affective level regarding their learning and how they are using that in their virtual classrooms. The discourse reminded me of Mortiboys' (2012) argument that so many educational institutions function as if they are an emotion-free zone, which in reality would be a disturbing idea by bringing the reference of some educators who regard emotions as inappropriate territory. For a longer period of time, the pedagogy that we worked around with both the students and as the educators denied that emotions can be a part of pedagogy and had to be taken into account. The rational-emotional dilemma still continues, but with resources that can be gathered and accessed virtually, there also has been a renewed interest in power, gender relations, and social control, which has started to help us see the role of affective dimensions. Beard et al. (2007) refers to Boler's (1999) that the women's exclusion from the idea of intellectual domain is mostly rested on their association with emotion and passive subordination and argues that the association is there because we, as students had got fewer spaces to express, resist or even challenge dominant emotional politics. Emotions have been seen as taboo and rather than managing emotions, emotional engineering, especially for girls can be seen. Girls are taught patience, self-denial, love, and silence, and largely to be inexpressive under the dominance of male-paternal hegemony. Bennett (2002) brings a reference to a Nepali village and her conversation with one of the villagers who shares " a bad woman can do what she likes and say what she wants to say. But a good woman will always fear

what others will say". This took me back to my mother's childhood days when she was denied to go to school until her younger brother was of school-going age. Then she was asked to go to school with her brother and take care of him by staying with him and fulfilling his demands as his sister. Earlier when she had demanded to go to school, she was termed as a bad daughter but later when she stayed all day doing nothing waiting outside of the school, she was called a good daughter who looks after her brother. Mother had learned to have patience all her childhood days and when she got married right after her brother failed his SLC, she had to get married as her role was no longer needed. Her repressed anger then used to surface whenever I was given the opportunity to study with the books I needed but did not use to study. Going to my mother and asking about this narrative was not easy, but with the understanding of the affective underpinnings of teaching and learning, I have slowly come to understand the role of understanding the narratives when we are introspecting.

EI and the role of emotions in practical life are more of learning from engagement rather than transmission. Osika et al. (2022) elaborate this by explaining how positive learning emotions that include interest, wonder, passion, creativity, engagement, and joy activate the experience of desire and help them to focus by enabling their perspective and by motivating them. Meanwhile, the negative emotional states like anxiety, stress, worry, fear, or sadness can affect the learning and motivation and makes them feel disconnected from other learners and teachers. So when a student feels demotivated, it does not directly the feeling of demotivation or sadness to the other learners. Rather the disengagement builds in disconnection which then affects the other learners affecting the whole learning environment. Mortiboy (2012) points out the importance of a learning climate for EI while Marton et al. (1993) consider this a transformation process. For Archer (2000) the emergence of

emotions is in orders natural, practical, and discursive with their own emergent powers. At this stage, we were somewhere in between the practical order and the discursive order. We were both having analytical distinctions about our emotions that happen in practical order while at the same time we were also able to sustain and account for our emotional elaboration that happens in discursive order. The practical and discursive introspection helped us examine the role of socio-emotional climate and its role in enhancing our teaching-learning practices further. Similarly, the resources, guidance, and conceptual framework LISTEN that we had been practicing extensively supported us to enhance our learning experience and made us prepared for the uncertainty of the context that we were in. The discussion was quite similar in nature to what Beard et al. (2007) had when mapping first-year university students' emotional journey. It had shown that the way an individual does any action is central to their personal lives and even their aspirations as leaders rest in their lives, are dependent on the time, the geography and context, and the discourse that they can have about their experiences.

Nidhdhyasana: Mindful Practice of Critical Reflection through Self Dialogue

It was important for us to continue our critical self-reflection while maintaining our 'duty of care' towards our fellow research participants along with our fellow teachers and students that we were working with. While it seemed experimental in the beginning, we gradually managed to find time for ourselves. Something that was crucial was writing a reflective journal every week even if the assessment was done in an asynchronous manner on their feasible timing. That kept us regularly on our journey of reflection. Malkki and Green (2016) explain reflection as a method to find coherence and continuity of one's self-understanding even in

changing contexts as it has two intertwined directions; the first one towards a more truthful understanding of the world and knowledge, the second toward the truthful understanding of one's being and experience. The reflection of the first one is by being aware of the critical review of one's assumptions about the general knowledge. The reflection of the second one is more directed towards the learning that one has acquired even before the process of reflection through multiple events of life. Critical reflection is important to understand both and acquire further knowledge from it. The use of virtual platforms and bringing self-assessment forms came as a creative and critical action for a transformative learning experience for the participants to enhance their critical reflection that they could achieve through dialogues.

I could associate *Nidhdhyasana* in this phase with Jarvis's (2020) notion of Empathic-Reflective-Dialogical-Restorying (ERDR) as they had similarities in their practices. Both of them were focused on promoting increased awareness of the self and others by taking an empathetic approach to understanding and responding to each other. Some of the research participants expressed that with the asynchronous mode of critical self-reflection through virtual platforms during the phase of the pandemic they engaged themselves in the process of self-dialogue as they integrated themselves with some new understandings and experiences. Self-dialogue and self-narrative have been considered important when approaching the lived experience of gender inequality. Hermans (2011) in their theory of Dialogical Self Theory argues that the dialogical self is multi-voiced and private but also collective. The transformation of one's identity can result from the dialogical self in action which happens when the individual moves from one voice to another by gaining an understanding of their relationship with the world. Their self-narrative again informs this. Dirkx (1997) had the concept of the inner community of the self to explain one's conscious thoughts,

beliefs, and values while at times becoming surprised with what emerges as a part of our self that was unconscious before. Thus, I could relate to inner dialogue with self-dialogue and self-narrative where I and my participants got involved in a dialogue through multiple symbols and images that we had learned through art-based models and were able to influence our self through the assessment and interpretation of it.

Emotional awareness is a crucial component for nurturing EI; that is how we started in our action-reflection cycles. We started with emotional literacy through which we could label our emotions and understand ourselves and our context better. Goleman (2005) proposes inner dialogue as a way to cope with challenges and for us at this stage, I could resonate with him. Inner-dialogue was our *Nidhdhyasana* to our route for critical reflection. Here, I and the research participants were in the dialogue between conscious and unconscious beliefs, thoughts, and feelings, especially during the pandemic. McAdams (2011) argues that self-narrative plays an important role in identity formation as the individuals construct their own meaning through the stories they create and tell about themselves. When they were narrating their experience to themselves, the research participants found themselves engaging in a dialogic experience that brought forth a multitude of discourses where they started telling their stories that were untold before, reclaiming themselves, and identifying themselves as who they are and why. Once they were able to re-interpret themselves, the educators started engaging in open conversations in the light of new understandings about themselves taking them into a community in conversation. For us, the virtual platform worked as our community in a conversation where the participants could feel secure to share their self-narratives after going through critical self-dialogue through the self-assessment and reading. McCormack and Kennelly (2011) argue that community in conversation can be both formal and informal, physical and virtual. This fosters trust,

respect, and understanding where the participants can find multiple ways of thinking and speaking when reflecting on their change in perspectives.

Romano et al. (2016) argue that the development of critical reflection and emotional regulation is possible only through the mindful practice of the inner dialogues. Freire (1977) though argues the importance of dialogue as the essence of pedagogy in seeking emancipation, he cautions about monologues that subdue and transforms an individual into rather a spineless mass. Therefore, regular mindfulness practice is crucial to not letting inner dialogues become meaningless monologues. Kabt-Zinn (2003) explain mindfulness practice as the awareness through which one pays attention to the purpose in the present moment by suspending their judgment of the unfolding of the experiences. It involves taking a pause and paying attention to the present moment and not labeling the experience as good or bad but feeling the emotions and labeling the emotions. Mezirow (1991) argues this as a transformative learning process as the individual becomes conscious of the disharmony between the biological experience and their reality.

Reflections and Realizations

Reaching here, I was more convinced that how the emotions that I experience as a practitioner-researcher and the reflections that I explored navigating the emotional challenges could impact the overall research process. Pham et al. (2012) indicated that the greater trust the individuals have in their emotions, the greater the prediction of the outcomes of the future becomes helping them to make better decisions in their professional life. Thus, being mindful of my emotions moment to moment and using the awareness to promote my research agenda and for the well-being of my research participants is crucial. My own growth and professional

development as an educator and researcher also augmented my awareness of emotions. I could see my alignment with the feminist approach toward researcher emotions. When the traditional approach emphasizes the disassociation between cognition and emotion and instructs the researchers to maintain objectivity with the research object and the research participants, the feminist approach acknowledges the emotional labor associated with the research process as they experience a wide range of emotions (Gilbert, 2010). One of my diary entries showed something similar.

The doctors haven't been able to diagnose what I am suffering from. But my body feels drowsy even after sleeping for two days continuously. In my head, I had the research participants whom I couldn't even inform that I am in the hospital now. But the images of what we did is still vivid even in the unconscious. I feel the joy, the pain, the excitement, the confusion, the happiness, and the sadness all at the same time. I am worried if what we are doing is being helpful or not or is it coming out as a burden to them. I am concerned what if I am being selfish and asking a lot out of them during such a difficult time (Journal entry 27th September, 2021).

Rather than being shocked or surprised with what I was feeling, it was important for me to suspend my judgment, record them carefully, and understand the roots of my emotions. As I identified that the I was feeling sad and concerned was stemming from my value of empathy, both to self and others that I had been developing gradually through the acceptance of my vulnerability. Rather than making an assumption, I decided to ask my participants and triangulate if what I was feeling could resonate with the research participants (Emerald & Carpenter, 2015). With the space we had created over the course of time with the agreement that we would be

authentic with each other, I decided to inquire how they are dealing with and managing their time. I realized that my empathic guessing was accurate as the research participants had struggled to manage time with other problems in their lives. The connection that we felt after sharing our problems and concerns we were going through and the alternative approach that I shared to navigate the concern helped me understand the legitimacy of incorporating subjective experiences into the research for the productivity of the research. This helped me shape the validity and reliability of my research by contributing to its transparency. I consider this as my professional development (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002).

Exploring educators' emotional identities in relation to their work along with their technical skills is an important aspect of professional development (Yoo & Carter, 2017). With what we have been able to nurture so far with the emotional literacy workshop and understanding our emotional identity and now connecting that with regular critical reflection, the research participants must develop this in their everyday lives. The powerful engagement of the practitioners of the emotions for effective professional development by overcoming the emotional exhaustion to reach their goals as educational leaders are crucial. Thus, it was important to reflect on how the research participants had seen the importance of what they had been able to gather so far through the multiple action cycles and find its significance in their everyday practice by nurturing their emotional understanding. Were they able to foster greater connections with themselves, their goals, and their practice by becoming present and attentive to their emotions in the moment at hand? With this question in mind, I thought of moving ahead to the other phase of my dissertation where I explore and reflect on: *How did we reflect on the functionality of the LISTEN model for critical*

self-reflection in nurturing EI; and how did the action projects that we did to nurture EI help our professional development as educational leaders?

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I address *How did I create a safe space for critical self-reflection amid the unsafe times to promote and nurture emotional intelligence among educational leaders?* Here, I explore how the need for a community of practice of LISTEN model for critical self-reflection emerged through VLCs and VLEs. I also discussed the role of trust and co-operation among the researcher and the research participants helped navigate the to ensure a safe space for critical self-reflection during the time of crisis through the use of emerging virtual platforms as a new form of community for education leaders. Here, I also unpack some of the narratives of my mother, understanding of which, helped me understand her better.

PHASE III: REFLECTION PHASE

I presented my reflections based on the three action-reflection cycles and conclusions in this reflection phase. I have divided this phase into three chapters: VII, VIII, and IX. The three chapters are the emergent themes generated on our reflection process. We worked on the conceptual framework of critical self-reflection. These reflections are the insights based on the critical conversation with the research participants, critical friends, other educators, and my Ph.D. supervisors. In chapter VII, I explore the notion of functionality in terms of practicing critical self-reflection and connect it with the notion of '*dharma*'. In chapter VIII, I bring the notion of '*dharma*' and how blending the everyday rituals can help us understand and implement the concepts of EI further in Nepal. Finally, in chapter IX, I put across my concluding thoughts, bringing everything together and trying to see how I have come so far in addressing my research question.

CHAPTER VII

EXPLORING THE FUNCTIONALITY AS LISTEN (श्रवण) MODEL: EI as a
'DHARMA'

ॐजयजगदीशहरे (Jai Jagdish Hare)

स्वामीजयजगदीशहरे (Lord jai Jagdish Hare)

भक्तजनोंकेसंकटदासजनोंकेसंकट (Troubles of the devotees, crisis of the slaves)

क्षणमेंदूरकरे (Put away in a moment)

ॐजयजगदीशहरे (Jai Jagdish Hare)

ॐजयजगदीशहरे (Lord jai Jagdish Hare)

The *bhajan* (prayer) I knew by heart from my childhood to the present day, is something my mother made me do every day with *ghanta* (prayer bell) on my right hands and *dhoopbaati* (incense sticks) on my left hands. She mentioned this as an important ritual that we need to do every morning as a part of our *dharma*. Creel (1975) argued that *Dharma* in Hindu tradition pointed to duty or specified duties that are supplied with rationale for them and were understood to be grounded in the social regulation of processes and structures of existence. My mother, though, could not provide me a proper justification of why we did what we did, but the concept of *dharma* was so embedded in her heart and mind that each morning we did that

without missing. Even today though there are times, I feel dislocated between the theory of Hindu philosophy and the practice, I remember the prayer and how to sing the prayer. But I could not connect to it much, which had created a sort of tension in how I identified myself, my agnostic thoughts towards religion, and my relationship with my mother. I had the feeling that we could never agree on this aspects of our life where she is highly ritualist (only on the grounds of Hinduism) and I am not. Koefoed's (2012) insights related to Hindu rituals as highly subjective even though they were related to the inherited practices was relevant. Since I was cast into an environment where these Hindu rituals were part of my normal behavior, even if I could not relate to it, I found it fascinating through social institutions. But the tension that was within me wanted a reexamination.

As Creel (1975) quotes Mahadevan who had written emphasizing the reexamination of dharma that, "it is true that ultimate reality is eternal and changeless. But there can be no ultimacy about socio-religious institutions and customs. The latter will have necessarily to change when the conditions of life and climate of thought change"(p. 161). Similar to what Radhakrishnan (1989) had argued, Gaule, in one of our conversations expressed that *dharma* in the past imagined a static society but as the new order has been devised, what would our new *dharma* look like. That's when I thought of *dharma* as a principled behavior in order to achieve self-realization or *Brahma*, a gateway to *Moksha* (liberation) and can be seen against *adharma* (misbehavior). Here, I could relate EI with the right behavior at the right time with honesty and authenticity in human exchanges premised upon the idea of self-awareness in order to achieve emotional liberation (Hughes, 2010). With this association, another curiosity arose, is it possible to imagine this model as a part of

everyday practice for critical self-reflection? Is it a sustainable practice for which the practitioner can take ownership?

Curiosity about the Sustainability and Ownership

The curiosity associated with the LISTEN (श्रवण) model has been within my thought process for about two years now and I have thus, make it a part of my critical self-reflection. After sharing and working together with the research participants, I was further curious about how it has been for them. With our regular workshops and discussion sessions, the idea of its connection to what my mother used to do with her *bhajan mandalis* started to come across. Talking about God and being a part of *bhajan* groups was something she used to do regularly with the community members, making the group so intact. With this, I started comprehending more about the ritualistic side of Hinduism which I had been overlooking focusing only on the spiritualistic side (see Chapter II and Chapter III).

Erikson (2010) sees rituals as highly ambiguous but as something that fulfills the function of the society. If able to focus on the centrality of the symbols of the rituals, one can create solidarity even from the subjectivity and multivocal interpretations. Here the best part of not only Hindu but any rituals is that they are a part of one's everyday life even without them constantly acknowledging that they are there. Hancock (2010) explains three types of rituals: life cycle ritual, calendric rituals, and domestic rituals. *Samskaras* or the life cycle rituals are associated with the temporality of the human cycle; calendric rituals are the ones performed in certain events performed in certain interval of time that are performed according to the context, and domestic rituals are about fulfilling the duties and responsibilities to the Gods or ancestors which are mostly *bhakti* (personal devotion). As I was going

through this, I remember my conversation with Dr. Rayamajhi (see Chapter II) in which he shared how EI practices in Nepal is based more fromon perspective of *bhakti*. This was the point where I was curious what would it mean if we started seeing EI practices not as a part of our bhakti, but more of it as a schedule where reflection become an unconscious part of a regular practice. Here, I realized that the workshops and the intervention projects that we did over the year with the research participants were also built over the conceptual framework also was trying to focus on the other two rituals other than bhakti, to make the practice of self-reflection regular and also in-built it as a habit.

Curiosity led me to explore it further which led me to interact with more people regarding the validation of the process that we had adapted and if it has a sustainable impact just like the rituals. After my paper presentation regarding the same at the 18th International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry,Dr. Alfredo Ortiz Aragon, the associate professor in the Ph.D. program in the Dreeben School of Education helped look into it further to understand its effectiveness from the perspective of self-in-field action research, an eight-step model that can be used to help people reflect on and change as he noticed a connected between these two models (Kurland et al., 2021).

Burnes and Cooke (2012) argue that field theory was a revolutionary approach to social science based on Lewin's (1967) action research but later on got largely abandoned by the social practitioners who built on the

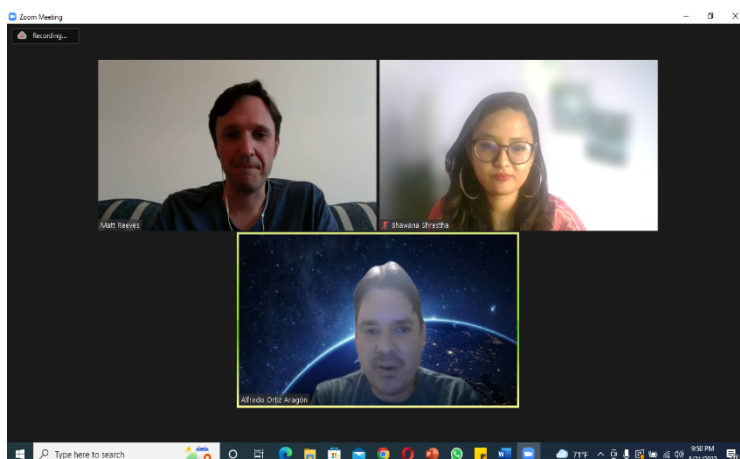


Figure 36 Discussing about the functionality and effectiveness of LISTEN model and the action projects with other action researchers in 18th ICQI conference 2022

same framework. Also known as the 'self-in-field inquiry method' fields theory of critical reflection has been considered useful for shaping thinking, feeling, and action in terms of practice.

Field theory, borrowed from Lewin (1998) considers a (life) space as the order of co-existing facts of psychological or social situations. Here the central part is allowing the individual and their associates to understand the forces that sustain the undesired behavior and to identify the forces that strengthen or weaken the growth of the desired behavior (Burnes & Cooke, 2012). Relating the LISTEN model with that of the self-in-inquiry method made sense as both of them were developed under the umbrella of adult learning. Mezirow (2000) argues that critical reflection would have a desired effect of the future action that is based on both the conscious as well as incidental learning and claims that learning occurs with the elaboration of the existing knowledge with that of the new knowledge. Thus comparing these two models in terms of their impact was important for my own understanding as a researcher.

The self-in-inquiry method, based on the field theory has the eight steps of self-inquiry: (i) Check-in, (ii) Presenting a case (zooming out), (iii) Mapping the fields, (iv) Identifying the implicit frame in a person's interaction with the external field, (v) Generating and exploring an alternative frame, (vi) From insight to action, (vii) Check-out, (viii) Taking new action. When compared, I could find the similarities between the LISTEN model and the self-in-inquiry method, the step one where one checks in is similar to 'listening' in which the individual is enabled to collect themselves to enter into the space where they 'check in' or listen to the feelings or thoughts they have at the given moment. The second step zooming out and the third step in combination are similar to our second step 'introspect' in which we

try to understand and reflect on our thoughts and feelings by taking a step back and answering the underlying story behind them and understanding unnoticed complexities or unconscious frames of reference. The fourth step is similar to our third step 'share' in which we speak to the external field and share and try to make sense of the reality. The combination of the fifth and sixth steps of the self-in-field inquiry is similar to that of our fourth step 'try' in which the individual tries to find alternative ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. Then eventually from the insight tries to craft an action plan or even calls for action. The seventh step is similar to our fifth step in which we 'express' openly about the process, take away from it, and how the individual felt about it. Finally, the eighth step is similar to our sixth step, 'nurture', in which the individual reinforces the action that helps them achieve their desired goal or behavior. The comparison has been shown in Figure 36. Kurland et al. (2021) argue that the self-in-field inquiry process generates knowledge with and for the people and focuses on fostering a connection with both the internal and the external space by emphasizing both the cognitive and the emotional aspects of the self. Thus, with its similarities with the model, the same can be achieved with the LISTEN model of critical self-reflection as well. Gaule in one of his reflections about the LISTEN model shared,

"I used the LISTEN model to evaluate my own practice as an educator and realized that for me it all goes in a cycle. For example, Listen, Introspect, Share, Try, Express, and Nurture. I figured that there are phases when I just listen and introspect. Followed by that, then I usually plan for self-commitment, and self-care with the intention to grow. This is the point when I share that within myself or if I trust my external group, I share with them as well. Given the sense of urgency and the prepared plan, I start working out the

alternatives and then evaluate whether it is helping me achieve my goals. Again I express that either in my notes or with someone with whom I feel safe and then nurture that. Eventually, with this listening and introspection, I foster connection with myself, and with sharing and expressing, I foster connection with others.”

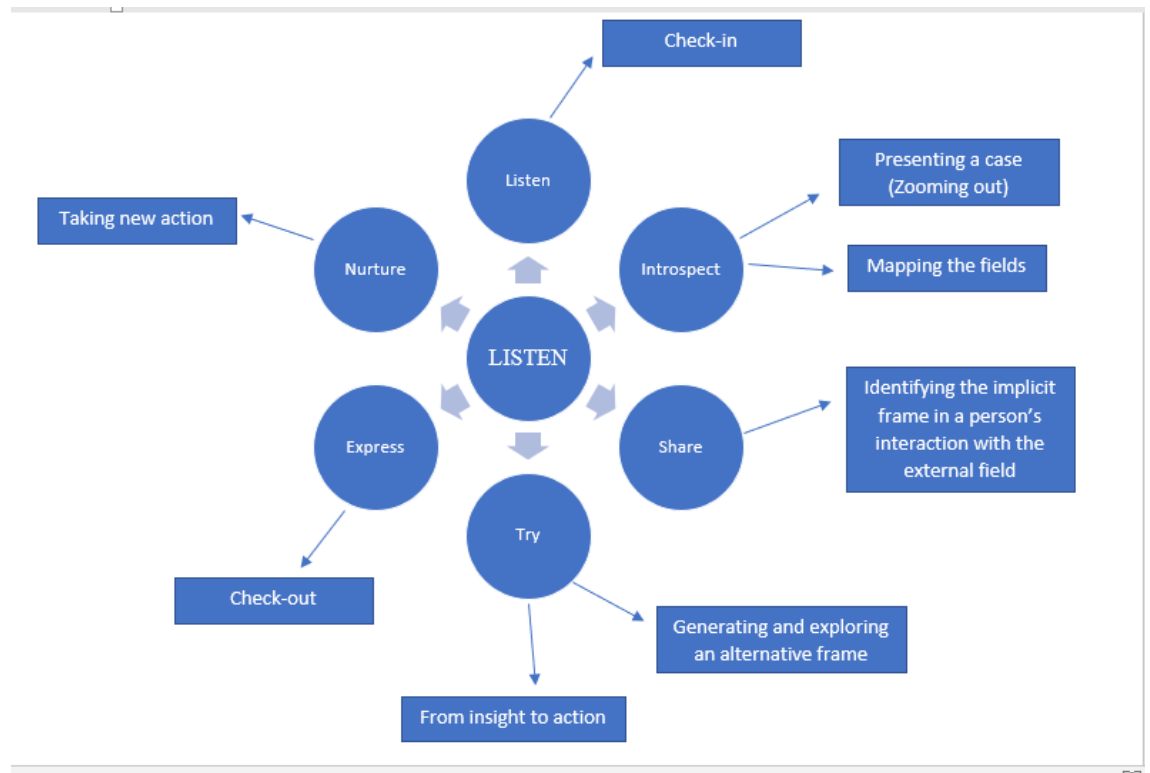


Figure 37 Comparison between LISTEN model and self-in field inquiry method

Friedman (2011) considers this circular, reflexive process as powerful as it focuses on either individual or collective unit independently and emphasizes fostering interaction and reconstruction of meanings. Understanding this inquiry method and relating this with the present context as we reflect on the effectiveness of the LISTEN model, I further realized the importance of connecting it and reflecting from the ritualistic perspective because as much as the theoretical underpinnings were

important, it was important to have the practical implications for the educational leaders to connect with the process and implement it in their daily lives just like the rituals. Reflecting about the LISTEN model Jyoti had shared that it can be used in multiple contexts and can be owned. Jyoti had shared,

“ Listening meant being self-awareness for me in different contexts, from moment to moment. I introspect and I also try to hold an empathic safe space for myself and others during those moments. I am still learning to communicate and share when I and prepare myself. If I find the space with trust, I have expressed my vulnerable self. Then I figure out multiple alternatives for my actions and nurture them gradually. During the process, I have explored more. Though I am new to this whole process, I could see this helping me in my relationship management. Earlier rather than resolving the situation by having a conversation with someone, I used to instead adjust my own expectations and try to feel content. However, with listening and introspecting first, I am more aware and this has helped me share and express my needs with clarity which has been helpful.”

Thus, it was important to look at it from the perspective of rituals, which means I had to explore the tension that I had with what my mother followed as rituals. Piepora et al. (2022) refer religious rituals as an established form of symbolic activity that consists rites, practice, or celebration that has frequent repetition in such a way that it creates habit. For some it is also a way to find a relief from everyday problems and worries. My mother’s regular *bhajan* meant her being able to continue her dream of singing and playing a musical instrument which she was not allowed to do as a woman while growing up other than the times while she was praying for the God. For

her, it also meant hope. Her *bhakals* meant the same to her, finding hope (see Prologue). To set a goal in her life, to work on it, and then reflect on it if they had been fulfilled or not and then to pay a tribute to God was what she was doing in the form of her *bhakals*. At this point, I had started seeing further connection with her. I could connect it to LISTEN in a way that she was listening to her needs, introspecting on that, because she could not share that with anyone else, she had chosen God to share her needs, tried to fulfill that and then expressed it in the form of her celebration and then moved on in her life nurturing what she had achieved. Therefore, what Friedman (2011) had shared about the objective of critical self-reflection to understand it as a set of formalized action in order to achieve a desired result was what the functions of the rituals that my mother was performing (Piepora et al., 2022). Since the idea of the LISTEN model was also to help the individuals reflect on their feeling of guilt, shame and regret, the conditioned emotions in the Nepali context (see Chapter II), highly influenced by the gendered notion, my mother using rituals to do the same made sense to me. To be able to sense the physical sensation of anger or fear, or disappointment and to go to God to seek help and to sense joy or happiness and to celebrate that with God was what my mother was doing. My mother with her rituals and I with the LISTEN model were trying to do the same. We were helping ourselves to introspect on the needs that we have while at the same time also seek for the conscious choices regarding our thinking, feeling, and action by expanding the possibilities. Though the model is designed to be executed independently, sometimes it might require formal facilitation and reframing, especially in the contexts where putting themselves in the field, either internal or external, and recognizing the complexities might not be enough to discover the possibilities. This is something that

I did through discussions with my critical friends which my mother did through her *bhajan mandali*.

Kriel's (1993) understanding of action research is the engagement of the participants in the "critical process of deconstructing the values, assumptions, and interest underlying social practice to uncover different understandings of reality and existing power relations" (p. 33). As the uncovering process is subjective, the participants were starting to feel connected to it. It was evident in LISTEN model as well where I could see the participants coming up with their own interpretation and understanding and implementation strategies when they were reflecting on their practices. One of the examples is the interpretation provided by Kamal.

"Last week, I had multiple tasks that required me to think and plan. Lately, I had been thinking a lot about LISTEN model, and last week I was trying to do the same. Actually, when I thought of filling in the questionnaire and reflecting, I wanted to have this model in mind. But when I was actually answering the questions, I forgot about the model. But as I completed it and reflected back, I realized that unconsciously it was part of my reflection process already. The answering the question for reflection was 'L' part in LISTEN. Besides that during the listening process, I was also 'introspecting' through the questionnaire. Since I was feeling conflicted about my answers, I had to introspect even after that and as I am sharing this in this group discussion, authentically, I am now on the 'sharing' part. With more work pressure, I have realized that the other steps need more time. I need to figure out more time for myself to actually think of actions that I am willing to try

and then carry on with the other steps. But unconsciously it has been now in my practices.”

With Kamal’s reflection about how he has unconsciously owned the model, I could resonate with Kriel (1993) further in terms of sustainability among the participants that for action research it is important to develop equal power relations and interpersonal trust so that they find the courage to express about their false consciousness, the unfree existence of delusion and frustration that is self-imposed which the individual is not aware of. As much as connecting to something or even forming a habit is dependent on the subjective experience, we over time realized that it is increasingly effective when we draw this approach from a contextual basis. Just like there are different ways a society looks into its rituals, there are multiple ways any model of reflection can be looked at. Barmola (2013) argues that the Hindu rituals are grounded in the doctrines of *samsara* (the cycle of rebirth and karma), and thus holds the actions to be analyzed on the basis of that the past, the current life, and the future life. So I was also wondering if it can be seen as a connection to what we know already, what new information do we have regarding the content and the context now, and what action do we want to take further. I did have a disconnection with the idea of whether God exists or not but I could relate the cycle with that of how the previous knowledge can be connected with the new knowledge for future actions even in the reflective practices.

Through our reflection process, the values that the educators embodied got identified and questioned during the practice, and the multiple ways for improvement also developed. Robinson (1993) argues the importance of the involvement of society to consistently link the approach or action with that of the emancipatory claims it makes. Thus, unless the enthusiasm of the educators is high in helping each other

reflect on using the reflection model consciously, as an everyday practice as a ritual, it is doomed to fail in the midst of everyday hustle and bustle of the school system when quick decisions are to be made and actions are to be evaluated immediately. Suruchi brings a similar perspective here,

By default, I'm like a team leader, a lot of people have come to me as their space. And, when I found that in these sessions as well, it just felt so nice in that I can share anything and people will respond empathetically... But I wonder how would that look like when we are in the education system where we are not supposed to talk about emotions, especially the challenges as an educator... Even when I have conversations with people, which could also possibly be because of age, I find it difficult to express but then, it is important to bring them and reflect collectively for this model to work. This is something that I would like to nurture too.

Thus, the LISTEN approach in itself does not shift the educator's practical concerns to critical reflection right away rather it helps them understand themselves, and works as a process of inquiry to help them develop the skills for critical reflection as a guideline. It is a starting point that focuses on the process in helping the leaders aware of their goals, needs, and values and can be a measure to achieve them through a critical understanding of their own self and the context they are working in by looking for the right resources. Thus, the model is in itself, neither a revolutionary model nor a model that liberates the educational leaders from the daily mundane with a guarantee. But this can stimulate a sense of ownership when it comes to critical reflection by helping the educators understand themselves and evaluate their practices by focusing on their values and improving on them in case they find themselves as a living contradiction or help them see the reiteration of their values and provide them a

framework to interpret. Thus, the need for critical friends and a collaborative reflective group is another important aspect for this model to be sustainable where the individual who is reflecting can get enough support to make it a sustainable approach for them to embody. But *how can one do so*, was a question that emerged. The following section addresses that concern.

Community of Dialogue and Practice

Reaching here, I examined the functionality of the model, especially to ensure the ownership and sustainability among the educational leaders when they are in their practice. Serious observations in order to address the concerns among the educational leaders and discourses with the interested stakeholders, especially working on mental health and socio-emotional learning led me to the understanding that as an educator a community is important where the feeling of safety is crucial. Goodman et al. (2016) opine that “as a teacher we do not teach in a social vacuum” (p. 43). As the purpose of education has been told to help children and individuals find jobs for themselves, it is easy for the educators to lose sight of nurturing a critically reflective space and also focusing on self-reflection to a large extent, it is important that we understand the social and historical context and enact a fresh in every generation bringing in the society for anything to be a sustainable approach (Dewey, 1940).

As much as critical self-reflection is an individual process, it is also a social process where the effort for critical reflection is situated within a broader cultural context will help focus on it more. Thus, critical self-reflection is more than a learning activity and needs a favorable climate to ensure care, trust, and belonging. When critical self-reflection becomes an ongoing part of our lives, it becomes a ritual that one comes back to even in chaos. With this whenever one feels confused, they receive

collective support as a part of the ritual just as Ferrance (2000) argues that action research is a starting point when the researcher changes the way of interacting with the setting and the context by recognizing their participation in the planned process. As a result, collaboration turned out to be the key to the approach for it to work effectively even when an individual is working on themselves on their own. This got reinforced after a roundtable discussion with other researchers working on mental health and social-emotional learning in Nepal. Here, I got familiar with a framework specially designed for children and adolescents who have been through some traumatic experiences that they have been working on that is Listen, Protect, and Connect (LPC), the model developed by Wong (2008). The model starts with listening to the experiences by creating spaces for open dialogues and asking questions, the second step then is to protect as the discussion goes on, concerns and worries surface especially with regard to the community, school, and the family that they are associated with. Thus, the need for the third step emerges where it is important to connect them with the important resources, community, or activities that they enjoy being a part of. This procedure has since then been working as a psychological first aid that can be delivered by school leaders as a promising response strategy as a part of school-based mental health practices. With the utilization of a community then, a safe environment can thus be ensured (Ramirez et al., 2013). I could see LISTEN on a



Figure 38 Roundtable discussion

similar lens. With enough dialogue among the community members, if considered as a guiding framework that is practiced regularly, by humbly and actively listening to one another critical self-reflection can be fostered. Frerie (2014) emphasizes the importance of the same in order to challenge the existing structure. Thus, the need for a community that accepts and connects with each other even in terms of critical reflection by supporting each other emotionally and cognitively by following some sort of regular guiding framework that has the component of listening, questioning, empathy, and courage is important (Nosich, 2013).

Brookfield (2008) argues that critical reflection is more than thinking deeply about assumptions but it is more about making a tradition and bringing it into strategizing and fostering democracy, it is important for the individual to relate to and connect to the society that they are a part of when they are critically reflecting about themselves. In this regard, Kelly et al. (2018) highlight the significance of exploring how the one who is reflecting on themselves feels that they are seen, heard, and felt and connects that with the role of educators to create that space to develop critical and complex thinking. With LISTEN model, we reached a similar conclusion. Kamal reflected,

“Being a part of this whole process and after critically reflecting on myself, I now can share what I am nurturing and what I want to nurture further. It’s interpersonal relationships. How I feel in my community and how they see me when I am reflecting on myself is significant, thus working to build a connection with them is important if I want to keep on learning and reflecting.

Here, as we started pondering about understanding and connecting, we gradually started thinking about the importance of routine, a daily intimately familiar

behavior that is important for anything to unfold as a practice. This was reinforced when we had a reflective session on the Empathic Intervention certification course, which I had started after I realized the need for a greater connection as well (see Chapter IV). As the year-long certification course ended with the participants graduating, we realized that regular practice along with the practice group is important and thus decided of meeting at least once every three months and sharing our reflections and practice and get help from each other. Here we talked about how coming to this community of practice is like going to a church or a temple for it can be considered both a holy activity and an important ritual that want to turn into our habit. Then, there emerged a connection to what I had already started to think about and needed to further reflect critically on - how EI can be practiced as a ritual? Can Listen model of critical self-reflection be just as effective as a ritual?

Lessons Learned for Sustainability of LISTEN Model: EI as *Dharma*

Feldman et al. (2020) argue the significance of the community of practice when it comes to critical thinking given that the exchange of routinized thoughts turns out to be an enriching understanding as those routinized thoughts and actions find an ongoing blend and mix with the everyday practice. Huang (2021) brings the reference to diverse routines that we are familiar with to highlight the importance of making critical self-reflection a habit. Just like brushing teeth, and going to school, and argues that even if we are bored or tired of replicating the identical actions every day even when we are having a toothache or even when we are tired of going to school, we still manage to do it with certain adaptations, deepening our habitual thoughts and patterns with a conscious adaptation of ritual even when we fail to accomplish it once or twice is important. With rituals, we engage within both our individual as well as collective

practice that makes us feel phenomenologically connected and help us live through meaning and purpose (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2020). The major components of EI, along with critical self-reflection when practiced in a routinized manner help build interest towards it by also helping the individuals navigate the complexities associated with the everyday reflection practice. Bayat (2013) explains that as the ongoing work to everyday smaller actions to bring the desired positive outcomes. Here, I could further associate how my mother wanted to transfer the rituals as a part of her *dharma*.

Growing up in a Hindu household, for me, *dharma* is more than morality, which it is usually thought of. My mother considered what Hacker (2006) considers as one part of *dharma* by definition as the dharma of caste and life stages, especially by distinguishing it as the dharma to be performed by *brahmins*, *khetriyas*, *vaisyas*, and *sudras*, the caste groups of Nepal and dividing life into four stages as well: the *brahmacarin* or the student life, the *grahastha* or married life, the *vanaprastha* or hermit life, and the *parivrajaka* or the life of wandering ascetic. Acculturation and assimilation in social groups other than mine, I gradually started realizing that there are more castes other than those four and there are more stages in life other than the four orders of life. The way I was seen as a Newar in the terai was different than how I was seen in the Kathmandu Valley. The assumptions that people made just by hearing my surname and my caste made me feel disoriented to what I had learned as a child and I started questioning if what I had been taught as a member of my caste group as *dharma* even made sense. When I was living in terai I was seen and behaved as other fellow *vaishyas* but when I shifted to Kathmandu, I could see myself being categorized as one group within the caste group and behaved differently. So the need to broaden my horizon was significant making me skeptical about what my mother

taught me as *dharma*. Then, I explored the other aspect of *dharma*, the system that goes beyond the framework of four castes and four orders of life the accepted legitimate regularly produced codifications called the external ritual or the ceremonies and customs that are connected to the concept of liberation in human life that is innate (Hacker, 2006). So *dharma*, even when does not provide external benefits, it still remains undiminished. Just like me remembering the *bhajan* that my mother helped me recite with is something I do not remember quite often. But I have found it relating to, even sometimes going back to during crisis as a part of my innate nature. I could relate EI as or should be something similar.

When practiced as a ritual, it involves a relationship characterized by listening to each other fostering joint reflection and learning resulting in democratic dialogue (Gustavsen, 1992). Rituals are practice-driven and guided by values and are usually performed to reach a joint understanding of the situation or the problem that is in need of a solution. To be a part of any ritual is to get an experience of it through guided participation unless one can fully take charge of it. Similarly, another significant feature of a ritual is that the task must be taken from time to time on a regular basis in which even if one doesn't understand the theory behind it, they are part of a practice, popularly known as 'projektstudium' in German (Fricke, 2006). It is a teaching-learning process that is centered around practice which enables the learners to discover and understand any concept of a practice-driven theory beyond the academic understanding of the theory. This can be related to the principle of *atmatusti* in *dharma* that an individual needs to apply and follow their heart, and their own inner feeling and is driven by it in case of doubt (Hacker, 2006). Radhakrishnan's (1922) explanation regarding *dharma* that, "the dharma is an inspiration from within; for

others, it is an external command, what custom and public opinion demand” also is relatable here.

The idea of considering EI as *dharma* in the public spaces is also significant in terms of gender as the role of affect and emotion is a part of everyday life. However, feelings are negotiated in public spheres (Askins, 2009). By embedding EI and critical self-reflection by design in the public spaces like the educational institutions, and/or family institutions is significant. Hammelman et al. (2019) describe this as ‘praxis of affect’ in which the affective experiences are paid attention to by creating space for reflection on and theorizing affective experiences to improve engagement in social activism for social transformation. Researchers (Bosco, 2007; Clough, 2012; Maguire, 1996) have highlighted the importance of participation to be instrumental in affective capacity building as with intentional participation the production of knowledge and social action can be ensured through core human interaction and by nurturing relationships and fostering the feeling of solidarity.

Raelin (2002) questions the notion when one says ‘I don’t have time to think’ over the art of reflective practice and argues reflective practice as “a periodic stepping back to ponder the meaning to self and to others in one’s immediate environment about what has recently transpired” (p. 3). Recognizing the value of private reflection and periodic sharing of the reflection to public scrutiny and interpretation is important if an individual wants growth for themselves. The ritual of critical reflection for Raelin (2002) can be in the form of regular journaling, post-event meetings, reflective note-taking, and several other forms. With this learning, I also kept on reverting back to how EI as *bhakti* is different than EI as *dharma*. The earlier conversation that I had for my literature review had highlighted the idea that Nepalese people have been seeing EI from the *bhakti* perspective, the morals that they should abide by to show

their devotion to Hindu deities (See chapter III). Radhakrishnan (1922) argues that *dharma* in this sense has complex significance. It goes beyond religion and the love of God and stands for the ideal and purposes one needs to live a meaningful life as a member of society that helps them follow the rituals, foster connection among their friends and families, and develop their interpersonal growth.

Creel (1972) argues that the treatment of *dharma* in the contemporary world is outside our scope given the various social modifications and intellectual reformulations that Hindu thoughts have gone through. However, a common threshold that binds us is when we look *dharma* as a comprehensive concept of social regulation in relation to the patterns of rituals in Hindu tradition. Since our activities are impelled by our needs, the regulation of it is a part of EI (Rosenberg, 2003).

Radhakrishnan (1922) explains the same as *dharma* in Hindu thoughts that is the regulation of our needs and desires is a part of our dharma where humans are asked to be mindful of not merely satisfying their animal impulses but rather should be directed in a way that fosters interpersonal and social relationships. This reminds us of advocates of EI like Hughes (2010) who also explain EI as the understanding of the degree and pattern of management of emotions that can be learned, developed, and enhanced for personal growth and development. Morrison (2006) explain EI as two intra-personal (self awareness and self management) domains and two inter-personal (awareness of others/empathy and relationship management) domains that have interconnected relationship and if these domains are to be practiced regularly, one can foster EI in their everyday lives.

Morrison (2007) further explains that the capacity to first be aware of an individual's own feelings is related to how they are going to acknowledge them and manage them. Then they can understand the power of emotions in their life which will

help them understand the other person's emotions, empathize with them and foster a relationship with them. LISTEN model too follows a similar pattern and for it to be a regular practice, there must be a personal commitment to their work with support from the people around them (Yoo, 2002). Here, I could see how the notion of dharma has been binding people to follow a ritual and I see a connection even in terms of critical self-reflection.

Reflections and Realizations

Reaching here, I could see the significance of *karma* (action) even in terms of the sustainability of any practice, even for critical self-reflection. Ghaye (2014) argue that reflection is often seen as separate from action, however it is there even when one is acting (reflection-in-action) or after the action (reflection-on-action), and also there is mindful reflection keeping improvement in mind (reflection-for action). Thus the ownership and the co-production of approaches like LISTEN model are important by bringing together the community and acknowledging their way of knowing and creating new knowledge into it for the transformation in their regular practice (Wyborn, 2019).

The deliberate co-production of the knowledge by adding on to what we already know and then acting on it as if it is a ritual helps explore the impact of reflective practice by lessening the feeling of alienation who are involved in the process. In this process, we situate ourselves in the context of knowledge, culture, and language based on the intersection of ethnicity, gender, and other social categories (Hickson, 2011). This leads to collaborative reflective practice and helps maintain trust, intercultural competence, and a shared understanding even in terms of self-

reflection making it easy for others to support whenever needed. This is what Habermas (1985) terms ‘collective action’, the way to bring change by co-constructing and negotiating through various knowledge and value system for sustainable action. So as much as it was important for me to move ahead from the western philosophy from which I had first heard about EI and critical self-reflection, it was equally important for me to go back to my roots and understand what I had learned from my mother and feel connected and dig deeper into why my mother did what she did. The metaphor of *lachhadori* still held significance here (see chapter II) as I was blending my current knowledge with that of the unprocessed previous knowledge. So what would LISTEN model look like when it blends with the context? How would my mother see it as a ritual if it had to be incorporated into her everyday practice?

When I was thinking over these questions over and over, I got an opportunity to bring this concept to around 50 head teachers of *Paanchkhal* Municipality, Nepal. All the headteachers followed the LISTEN model where they started by listening to their emotions, introspection on why they were feeling those emotions, sharing it in small groups, and then trying to see the concept as small doable action, expressing the expected outcome and what they can nurture next.

The overall conversation was new to the headteachers. But the discussion helped me see the idea more in terms of grass-root level and realize what challenges the educational leaders might face in terms of sustainability or the regularity of the



Figure 39 Headteachers from Paanchkhal reflecting on themselves using LISTEN model

approach. Though the model in itself and the activity in itself was not that complex for them to understand but it also wasn't an easy method for them to remember only followed by two hours of community dialogue. That was when I scooped back to my mother's *bhajan mandali* (community prayers) that I used to accompany her. The songs and prayers with simple everyday language were easy to relate to, especially immersive with the surroundings around us. One of the examples of which is given below.

aatma hamro amar chha (our soul is immortal)

dibyadham puryauda chha (liberation is achieved)

aatma lai santosh parera hamilai jiban bituanu cha

(when you live with a happy soul)

hridhaya ma krishna ko photo chha

(There is the photo of lord krishna in my heart)

Jiwan hamro chhoto cha (life is short)

Hasera bhaye pani royera bhayepani (even if you laugh or even if you cry)

Jiwan bitaunu chha (life needs to be lived by)

Then, I could metaphorically relate LISTEN ((श्रवण) with the flower Orchid (सुनगाभा) flower which is known for its diversity. Associated with multiple pleasant emotions like joy and celebration in Hindu philosophy, it is also symbolically represented as the symbol of non-attachment and new beginnings. Upon



Figure 40 God Vishnu with the flower Lotus in his hands (source <https://vedicfeed.com/symbols-of-lord-vishnu/>)

exploration, I also figured in the depiction of the Hindu God Vishnu who is known as the symbol of *karma* (action) holding the lotus flower, which is known as the twin brother of the orchid flower.

This metaphorical representation helped me connect this model further with Orchid flower also because as a plant when it grows they attach itself to the bark of trees or the surface of other plants. Thus helping me see its connection to the significance of the need for community as seen in the LISTEN. Thus, I could now see LISTEN model as an acronym सुनगाभाकोबुट्यान (Garden of Orchids) where सुन represents सुत्रे (Listen), गा represents गुत्रे (Introspect), भा (भत्रे), बु represents बुत्रे (Try/Plan), ट्या represents कथे (Express), and न represents 'us' in sanskrit meaning the bonding which I connotated with nurture in our model.



Figure 41 Orchid plants (Source: <https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/ornamental/flowers/orchids/growing-foxtail-orchid-plants.htm>)

Though I am yet to explore further how this association with the local language amplifies the functionality of the model, the instant feedback that I received was it was easy for people to connect with as it helped them connect their prior knowledge which is something that they find in their everyday life and can remember life long. With this knowledge, I realized my action research so far has paved a route for something further that I would love to explore further. But how has my journey so far influenced me? How did it impact me as a researcher? From where and how I had started how far have I arrived? These are some of the questions that I am exploring in my upcoming chapter.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I seek to address the question, how was the functionality of the LISTEN (श्रवण) model for critical reflection among educational leaders of Nepal. I also explored how the regular practice of LISTEN (श्रवण) model help the educational leaders in their journey of critical self-reflection. Here I establish the connection of this model with the idea of *dharma* that my mother had tried to inculcate within me through her rituals and how connecting these two helps in fostering a community of dialogue that is essential for the sustainability of the practice. Then I explain how the practice of EI can be like *dharma*, an unconscious but a regular practice just like the rituals in our eastern notion and how the use of local language can make this practice easy to understand and sustainable

CHAPTER VIII

LISTEN (श्रवण): A STEP TOWARDS NURTURING CRITICAL SELF
REFLECTION

सत्त्वं रजस्तम इति गुणाः प्रकृतिसम्भवाः ।

निबध्नन्ति महाबाहो देहे देहिनमव्ययम् ॥ 5॥

(O mighty-armed Arjuna, the material energy consists of three *gunas* (modes) - *sattva* (goodness), *rajas* (passion), and *tamas* (ignorance) generated from *Prakriti*, bind the indestructible *atman* in the body) (Bhagavad Gita Chapter 14, Verse 5).

In this verse, Krishna cautions Arjuna about how an individual can get entrapped in these three *gunas*, if they are not reflective of themselves. While *sattva* makes excellence in action and contributes to our growth and happiness, *rajas* is the mistakes due to lack of focus, and *tamas* is the ignorance about our own potential leading to disconnection with our own selves. At its core, with critical self-reflection, one becomes aware of themselves and starts having a relationship with their *atman* (soul in an imperfect translation) (Debroy, 2020). Stepping on to the journey of critical self-awareness (*gyana*) and mindfully exploring it through emotional literacy using the LISTEN model was in itself a challenging process. But with collaborative efforts, we came this far and are reflecting further on our one-year journey of nurturing EI through critical self-reflection. There were times when we found ourselves as a ‘living contradiction’ but to have each other as critical friends and to receive feedback from them through collaborative reflection was helpful. Thus, even

to explore the answer to how were we able to nurture critical self-reflection, I took the support of collaborative reflection, which Mezirow (1990) also terms as ‘communicative learning’ with the research participants and critical friends.

Our collaborative reflection on critical self-reflection itself was a long process that we carried on throughout our research in the form of observation, writing reflections, sharing and expressing it, working on the critical feedback provided, adaptive and combined with both individuals as well group reflection. Marcu et al. (2014) explain collaborative reflection as an unstructured, mobile, reciprocally interdependent, and long-term process. Because of the pandemic, the use of online tools like zoom, google document, and chat rooms were also a part of our co-reflection mediums other than group interactions different than the traditional ones where commenting and posting on the peer’s reflection helped us foster connection and hope that we are together in this journey (Huang et al., 2022). Archana, Mahi, and Silly were part of all of our workshops as observers and helped us with designing the workshops to help in our reflection process by sharing their personal observation reports after each session. As a community of learners and inquirers, for our critical professional development, we were responsible for our own learning and wanted to make sure we had trusted people who based on their qualities of knowledge, experience and skills provided their critical lens as we practiced critical self-reflection (Matnoor & Shafee, 2020).

With collaborative reflection, we addressed the challenge of tracking our progress as we learned and practiced critical self-reflection using LISTEN model over the year, and through observation, our critical friends provided their assistance (Beauchamp, 2015). Critical self-reflection has sometimes been understood as the

connection of practice with the theory while other times have been understood as the ethical, moral, and political connection with the practice, and sometimes it is related to identifying and understanding the dilemmas and tensions that arise in the situation of practice and figuring out the ways of improving it (Clara et al., 2019). For us, our collaborative reflection was more based on understanding our tensions associated with critical self-reflection and addressing our inquiry question- how did we nurture critical self-reflection through LISTEN model to foster EI for our professional development, and how did the actions generated by the researcher help in the process of nurturance. The answer has been addressed in the following section.

The Onion of Self-Awareness

In general, nurturing critical self-awareness was like peeling an onion where we learned about ourselves as well as about the ways of reflecting critically by degrees (Mansion, 2017). The

nurturance could be specially divided into three layers: the first layer where we learned to reflect on how we feel; the second layer where we learned to reflect on why we feel; and the third layer learning to reflect and manage our emotions in order to meet our

Self-awareness Onion

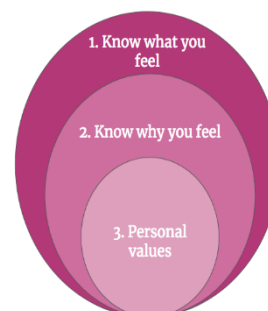


Figure 42 Onion of Self-Awareness (Source: <https://medium.com/@WilliamStefan/book-summary-1d-the-subtle-art-of-not-giving-a-fuck-64284b797b9>)

educational goal as leaders. This can be connected to the concept of *Manas* in *Ayurveda* that to function a *Sarir* (human body) effectively, the combination of three layers; *indriya*, *satva*, and *aatma* are important (Chobhe & Ande, 2021)

Indriya: Know What We Feel

The first layer of nurturing critical self-awareness for us was to understand and label our own emotions. That is what we did by developing our vocabularies of emotions. It was more about active listening to our emotions. When connected with the *Manas* concept, it means to understand the various *Sattvaj Bhavas* (emotional states) which helps us understand our likings, dislikings, attachment, detachment, anger, enthusiasm, joy, etc. This can be understood through our *Indriyas* (Sensory Organ) as emotions can not only be listened to and affect not only our psyche but also our physical processes. For this, we reframed and broadened our goal in each action reflection cycles and developed a professional community through our action project that helped us hold our conversations centered around emotions and vocabularies associated with it (Spinner et al., 2021). To nurture this, it was important to nurture hope and a safe space where we could center ourselves around common vocabularies of emotions and the challenges associated with its execution in professional practice was important. This allowed us to reconsider what we had already learned through our socialization process and what we need to learn further. Reflecting on this, Gaule had reflected,

“Creating space was important even to help us identify your emotions. Usually, I used to be ambivalent about only being able to say pleasant or unpleasant, and with space, we were able to develop our vocabularies together, and sometimes even helped each other identify their emotions. One significant way of nurturing critical self-awareness is to come up with a list of vocabularies that are contextual because there are multiple emotions that we as Nepali only express and understand and not seeing that in the list of

vocabularies created in the global north will limit our learning process. So, there can be multiple shades of emotions as they go on to evolve “

Creating a safe space where one can be authentic towards their *indriyas* through daily interactions and engaging activities that helps them understand their identity and emotions helps get reciprocal support and contribution in order to make the learning process more contextual. Rubin et al. (2020) brings similar understanding about making the learning process contextual for more authenticity of expression. Adding on to his idea of making the list of vocabularies contextual Gaule bring the Nepali term “कस्तो कस्तो लग्यो “ (*kasto kasto laygo*) as a vocabulary of emotion if given collective meaning can help us develop trust and connection to be more authentic when they are learning from their *indiriyas*.

Satva: Know Why We Feel

The second layer of nurturing critical self-awareness was peeling into the satva and asking why we feel that emotion. *Satva* is the analysis of the emotions that are perceived through *indiriyas*. When we feel or perceive something, as we start asking why we feel the way we feel, it would take time for us to introspect but once we do that we are able to gain more understanding and clarity. Introspection can be through the understanding of cultural metaphors. Khunyakari (2021) explains metaphor as the representation of the assimilated cultural experiences passed on across time and space as the knowledge that embodies abstractions and experiences providing insights into our thoughts and feelings. Jyoti, metaphorically represents the process of introspection with the light bulb and explains,

“As I started labeling, articulating, and communicating my emotions, I could see my family and friends were not enough for the process of comprehension of these emotions. Connecting my thoughts and feelings with metaphors and discussing it in a safe space was like a light bulb, an aha moment for me.”

When those metaphors were interpreted, they helped us connect with our language and context. The values and virtues of society are shared and transmitted through a variety of experiences and enculturation as the child is growing up. Representing the perceived messages from the *indriyas* if interpreted through metaphors helps us develop critical discourse, interpret them and learn (Macagno & Zavatta, 2014). For introspection and self-reflexivity, Fitzgerald and Hurst (2017) bring the significance of embracing cross-cultural encounters to foster interpersonal growth as it helps uncover implicit biasness that is deeply engrained because of the learned cultural stereotypes. Kaihlanen et al. (2019) argue that the acknowledgment of culture in understanding the layers of emotions helps reduce misunderstandings and conflicts by encouraging them to be open and respectful. Suruchi brings in a similar reflection,

“ I, as a team leader, have to deal with multiple team members from diverse backgrounds and cultures,s and to be able to respond empathetically by understanding our cultural differences in multiple work scenarios has become useful when it comes to managing my own emotions. For that nurturing safe space where one can share out their enculturation and upbringing is important when I want both myself and my team members to reflect on their practices.”

This layer of self-awareness cannot be achieved unless the individuals experience feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Ryan and Deci (2017) explain autonomy as the ability to self-regulate experiences, competence as the ability to challenge themselves, and relatedness as the feeling of being a part of the community. Suruchi brings the significance of deeper conversations for that and provides an example of how it is difficult for her to connect with people who do not want to involve in deeper conversations and nurture the environment and relationship where deeper conversations associated with emotions is crucial when we think of critical self-reflection. To nurture that into the school climate, it is important for the school leaders to blend creativity and innovation with the context. Bennett and Yarwood (2021), thus consider the need for psychologically safe space for the ones who are learning to nurture critical self-awareness. Jyoti saw this more like a space in a school or a community where the learner can share their shortcomings and weaknesses and can get guidance when they feel stuck. In her initiation, she started a group discussion session in which she shared something similar.

While Gaule was more involved in workshops and strategic planning in creating a psychologically safe space, Jyoti and Richa were more into journaling their emotions. Aasha used her social media community to share her everyday emotions and got involved in the process of dialogue to help her understand more about herself and her context, especially her pregnancy. Apart from that, the collaborative discussions among the research participants helped further where we had a critical-appreciative engagement. The continuous question of our belief systems, our values, and practices where we discussed our strengths and weaknesses as educational leaders through the cultural perspective helped us see the interplay between our thoughts and

emotions and how synergetic it can be. Dhungana (2021) brings the Nepali word विवेक (*bibek*) to explain this and shares that socio-cultural awareness leads to a “condensed, authentic form of knowledge or consciousness” (p. 159). One example of this approach can be reflected in one of Kamal’s reflections after filling up the self-assessment form.

I was mostly confused about how my state was last week- that I was taking some time to actually figure out which state I am in. I was a little stretched. I had multiple tasks that required me to think and plan. But, because I was involved in the process, the way I wanted the LISTEN process to be marinated in my mind, it couldn't happen as much. Even before I started to fill out the questionnaire, I was wondering how I could connect the LISTEN model with this. But, as I started to fill out the questionnaire, I forgot the model. I just went on it. But, when I was doing that, I could check in with myself really well. I could Listen to myself.e., the 'L' part in LISTEN as you had emphasized earlier. Besides that, I could also 'Introspect' through the questionnaire. I haven't been able to reflect on the other parts, frankly. I'd like to share that as it is. Perhaps also because of a lack of time commitment, I could not reflect on the LISTEN model properly. Other than that, as I was filling out the questionnaire, I was wondering how many times is too often and how many times is always. For example, I was hesitating to mark 'always' in many questions because do I always do something? No, because I messed up something earlier so many times, or even now. But, even when I was considering 'often' in a question, I also thought perhaps I do it more than just often. I felt conflicted time and again. When I received the result, it was very interesting for me as well because it was like looking into a mirror. I scored

more in the parts I exercised well and I scored less in the parts I hadn't worked as much in.

This is simply a representation of how we were throughout the journey. We started with confusion, then reflected on our context, then tried to understand both our strengths and weaknesses associated with it (Chapter IV, V, and VI). The journey from disconnection to connection needed a critical lens but at the same time, it also needed the appreciative lens to come to an acceptance of our vulnerable self. With the scaffolding of emotional literacy and the exposure to the vocabularies of emotions, there was a gradual shift from only looking at the extremes and trying to find that blend.

The blend was also through art in the process. For many of us, vlogging as a medium was helpful for both the reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. With the widespread access and use of smartphones and computers, critical reflection became easier through recorded monologues, interactive conversation, and viewable visual behaviors which can be rewatched to get the perspective better (Aran et al., 2014). Whitehead (2018) explains the significance of videos to communicate the explanation of educational influences of own learning and a deeper understanding of the social formations where we live and work through empathic resonance, the communication of the energy that one can immediately feel when communicating their values. It helps in the construction of shared values through the transmission of the emotional dispositions of people towards each other. Just as Pamela (2020) argues, for us as well, vlogging as a medium of art helped us go through the time-lapse record of change, and the change process that provided helped us see the growth in our own reflective process and revealed how what we have learned helped shape

our professional identity. Halawi et al. (2009) connected the reflection process of vlogging in relation to the revised framework of Bloom's taxonomy through six cognitive processes that are: remembering that is by going through the relevant information again, understanding the context better, applying the best use of the procedure of the given context, analyzing by breaking the video into parts and relating it to one another, evaluating the context based on what is learned, and creating the new pattern of understanding or structure.

Aatma: Integrating Emotions with Personal Values

The third layer of nurturing critical self-awareness then was to go even deeper into it and nurture it in the *aatma* (आत्मा) as a personal value. It was the nurturing of the garden of orchids (सुनगाभाको बुट्यान) in our *aatma*. In this stage, we start connecting it more with our personal values and needs and question and access ourselves based on the metrics of our personal values. Here the concept of *dharma* plays in. What falls on our *dharma*? Does our idea of *dharma* consider this as our success or failure? What do I consider my growth and where does that feeling signifying about my value? Chobhe and Ande (2021) argue that this stage takes more effort to get into where courage and authenticity are essential for one to determine the nature of our problems that determines the quality of our lives. Thus, the need for critical hope is important. Critical hope is different than hope as it not only wishes for the nurturance of practice but also helps “critically engages in the past and present while simultaneously thinking about how we can collectively impact our communities through praxis, a continuous and cyclical process of reflection and action” (Bishundat et al., 2018).

The wellness paradigm of being (See Chapter III) has been our guiding philosophy and the balance of *indriya*, *satva*, and *aatma* is essential for a balanced state of wellbeing and critical awareness. For that, it is important to ‘look back’ and reflect and draw implications from the actions, the *dharma*, or the guiding principles that we have been following so far (Gun, 2011). In this process, an individual self reflects on the recent practices, and the emerging everyday thoughts, and being critical of them by connecting them with the awareness of the emotions to figure out what roles our personal values play in the emotions that we are feeling and where did those values come from. Mennin and Fresco (2009) argue this as the generative function of emotion. The generative function of emotion is to purposefully promote action towards survival to be relevant to the personal and social values in the given context. Here, survival means being aware of the difficulties one might create by not being aware enough about their personal values in their work as well as in family settings leading to challenges that hinder them from utilizing their full potential in their leadership journey (Starrenburg, 2018).

What we consider personal value, in Ayurveda is important to understand any object as it has the component of *Adhyata Dravya Guna Samghraya* (*mano*, *Mano- artha*, *buddhi*, *aatma*) which leads to the good and the bad deed (Gaur et al., 2018). Thus personal value has two major characteristics the atomicity and the oneness, which requires continuous consideration, attention, determination, and management if an individual wants to flourish intellect. However, with three *Gunas*- *satva*, *raja*, and *tamas*, the journey to the intellect is challenging and thus the journey of critical self-reflection is in itself rewarding.

Reflections and Realizations

Nurturing critical self-awareness has not been an easy journey in itself. Listening and introspecting on my personal values and how it had can or have linkage with my family origin and the relation with my socio-cultural/economic setting took me on an emotional roller coaster ride. From being angry and sad at myself for not being able to connect with the culture and even with my parents, especially my mother for their choices to being disgusted about my own decisions that were far from how I would see myself as a feminist educator was difficult to take for myself. The dilemma that I had even over the last year as I was deconstructing my own emotions and the emotions of the research participants made it difficult to share what I was going through to even to my critical friends or even supervisors which delayed the iteration of the actions that I had to do for my own growth further delaying my expression of emotions and nurturing of my values. Thus, sometimes not going in this linearity of LISTEN but bringing the expression of emotions and the reflection of the values and only thinking of some actionable had been helpful. Growing the garden of orchids, as easy as it seemed in description (see chapter VII), thus was a difficult process in itself. To help that flower of orchid bloom, I had to find my seed of orchid, that was my voice, then find the place to sow that seed, that sometimes was a personal space but then quickly shifted to local or contextual space, and then again would shift to the global space and making me further disoriented. Thus nurturing meant sustaining the knowledge. Here, I could relate to Dhungana (2022) as she explains the process of learning in relation to the Vedic philosophy and shares that nurturing contains some *satva*-like attributes like inquisitiveness, discernment, and joyfulness through art-based and dialogic approaches leading to common good and

emancipation. However, the journey in itself is not free of challenges as there occur conflicting attributes while we are making the journey toward harmony like to reach the state of inclusion, there are times when we feel excluded. Thus, nurturing critical self-reflection is a journey we travel through the combination of all the modes like *tamas-like* attributes, *rajas-like* attributes, and *satva-like* attributes. For me as well, along with the research participants as I progressed on this journey of critical self-reflection, finding the connection with myself by fostering connection with my mother was the most significant part.

Peeling the onion of self-awareness through LISTEN model was sometimes linear, the other times iterative, and most of the times circular leading me to go deeper from understanding *indriya*, *satva*, and *aatma* through *shravana*, *manana*, and *nidhdhyasana*. But in all these context, what I understood about critical self-reflection is what Jung (1981) described when explaining about the ‘collective unconscious’ that our repressed feelings, memories, ego-states, sub-personalities, and archetypal forces can be hidden in energy blocks and motivates us to act in a certain way creating a pattern (as cited in Adamski, 2011). The recognition of these patterns is not an easy process.

This can be further related to the concept of Ayurveda in eastern philosophy which entails the notion that an individual is composed of two inseparable and interdependent constituents *saris* (body) and *manas* (heart/spirit). Nurturing critical self-reflection is thus, only possible through the understanding of both. Gaur et al. (2018) explain that the emergence of *buddhi* (intelligence) is possible only with the

combination of the understanding of both, if overlooked one or the other can be the cause of even death or disease.

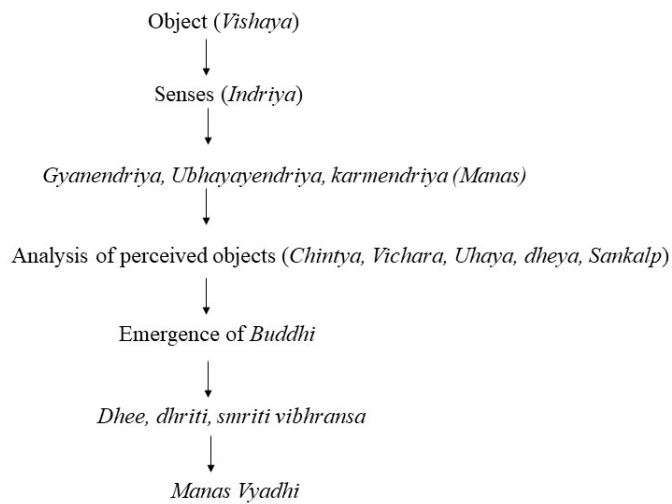


Figure 43 Visual representation of the concept of Ayurveda

This is similar to the stages of reaching emotional literacy shared by Steiner (see Chapter III). As I reach here, I understand that the *dharma* which my mother had helped me nurture so far is not the dead shells but a “living power full of strength and suggestiveness” that helps an individual stand for all the ideals, values, influences, and purposes one shapes both as an individual and as a society (Radhakrisnan, 1922, p. 2). Without reflecting on them, I would not have been able to find that connection and harmony within myself. Without finding the connection with the self, it is difficult to connect with others. This is what it takes to nurture EI, awareness as an individual, and foster empathy for society (Steiner, 2011). This realization was possible only through the deeper critical self-reflection. Thus, *dharma* in the eastern perspective is less about the faith in God and more about the characteristic of the comprehensive concept of social regulation that requires continuous social modifications and intellectual reformations. From the western perspective, this is seen as an ethical category relating to freedom and responsibility, the underlying goal of fostering EI (Creel, 1972). This understanding helps me explore connectedness within

myself and my surroundings and led me to experience joy which reflected in the works that I did and that is an improvement of my practice that I nurtured with the research participants. With this understanding I move ahead to conclude with final thoughts and reflections in chapter IX.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I along with the research participants reflect on our one-year-long research experiences. We involve ourselves in the collaborative reflection process as critical friends who had been observing our actions by being part of our workshops and reflection process. We explore what it means to be critically self-reflective and how the journey has been so far. Based on our collaborative reflection, I explore the answer: How did we nurture critical self-reflection through the LISTEN model? Here, I also explain how the process helped me understand my practices and improve them to foster EI for the professional development of educational leaders in Nepal. Then I reflect on how the journey that I started with disconnection with myself and others has gradually started to find the missing pieces and has started to feel connected through the educational process of *shravana*, *manana*, and *nidhdhyasana*.

CHAPTER IX

CONNECTING THE DOTS: FINAL REFLECTION AND CONCLUSION

The journey of the research went in parallel with the journey of my life; from trying to find the connection with myself, to trying to connect to the research studies. The line that intersected these parallel lines was the connection that I built with my mother throughout the journey of my Ph.D. The journey that started with the question - how to foster EI through critical self-reflection would not have been complete without critically reflecting myself. As I reach here through self-study, I see life as a cycle of action and reflection and how the cycles of actions of an individual's life form like an overlapping set with that of the cycles of actions of another individual's life. After I brought my research participants in this study of action research that was going hand in hand with my self-study during the action phase, I could see how the overlap affects our educational leadership journey. The beginning of the research started with disconnection with myself, with my mother, and trying to seek that connection through the chapters of the books, journal articles, and conversations with friends and critical friends. Then it progressed into a more challenging route to try to seek that connection by nurturing empathy for myself and for others. When trying to figure out the right methodology, as I look back, during that phase I was also trying to figure out a sense of connection through the works that I was doing. As I progressed towards the action phase of my research, it was the journey of action and also the outlet of my authentic expression. The action reflection cycle that was based on the LISTEN model was not a new concept for critical reflection but to reflect with utmost consciousness was a new habit I along with the research participants built throughout

this journey. The journey was challenging. To be able to not only reflect and connect with myself and my relationships but to bring the research participants into my journey and embrace their journey of finding a connection with themselves was a daunting task. To be asked another set of critical questions by the critical friends and the supervisors was mind boggling at times. Yet gratifying to have come to this stage of final reflection now. But is this the end of critical self-reflection, the phase that I had planned and played hundredth of times on my mind as I had step out for this journey? I think I have come to the same point again where I do not feel like and end but as a beginning of something afresh and new. It feels like a journey that has made the full circle of life. Have I found the connection I was seeking as I set on this journey to improve my actions, the answer is definitely not direct yet, but I feel like I have found answer to some missing pieces.

In this concluding chapter, I address those connecting dots that I have been able to figure out so far as a part of my reflective journey. This chapter addresses how I along with the research participants, nurtured EI through critical self-reflection navigating the journey through LISTEN when we felt connected at times and at times not. Here I also respond to my research questions and discuss how we could do and could not do within the research limitation of this study and conclude my final reflections as a conclusion followed by implication.

A Full Circle

I had planned to follow a conventional research process, which I thought would be a linear one, when I was on set for my Ph.D. I had thought it would be a research question, the literature review, then figuring out the methodology, data collection, analysis, and conclusion. I was prepared for the hard work but something that I was not prepared for was the hard work amid the uncertainty, the demotivation

that circled around now and then throughout the journey, the struggle to manage time while balancing for the work, the family, and my personal space. The more I started reading, the more I started panicking. Multiple times, I went through the thought that I do not know how to read, or I do not know about my culture or the context. There were also times when I questioned if I was the right person to even be conducting this action research set out to answer the question of nurturing EI when I myself have not found a connection with myself or have not worked through the disconnection that I have with my mother. But gradually I started adapting through the uncertainties by acknowledging my vulnerabilities, being authentic about my emotions, and asking for help now and then with my supervisors and critical friends and other faculties and researchers both locally and globally.

My decision to utilize living theory action research blending that with self-study culminated into having a group of critical friends who were there to help me navigate through the highs and lows throughout the journey. They were also there to observe me and plan the action projects together with me. While Byrne-Armstrong et al. (2001) discuss research degrees as complex, chaotic, and messy, Moore (2004) considers the Ph.d. process as a paradigmatic battle that asks the students to challenge the hierarchical structures. For me who was also using action research as a methodology, I found myself situated in both positions along with my complication in relation to time management as it needed more time. The process of action-reflection in action research was not a linear path with a definite ending that I could shorten amid the limited timeframe that I had for my PhD and also with the pandemic circulating around our lives. Here, my supervisors played a crucial role in helping me see what is doable and how can the journey be deconstructed in a way that the objective of the research would be achievable. As I write this paragraph, I recount

my experiences of navigating these challenges and also have a sense of encouragement and accomplishment of coming this far.

Being aware of my subjectivities and biases (as a hindu, newar, middle-class researcher who already has an organization working on EI), I found myself going back and forth to my ethichal guidelines as well as questioning my assumptions in every step I was taking. Also, there were multiple times when I thought of not being able to come to full circle within the expected timeframe of KUSOED as the thesis that I was/am writing is not even neat in my hand with messy thoughts, some yet to be explored further. But gradually I realized that there were things that were outside of my control and just like the action-reflection cycle, a new cycle of my continued engagement in the field will begin even after the submission of this thesis. To someone who found it difficult to get beyond the comfort zone of introverted personal space, to get out of that zone and build a connection with the research participants helped me to become more open and accepting. Navigating this rollercoaster ride of thoughts, emotions, and actions, I embraced the *shanti, shanti, shanti* just like the Upanishad and moved ahead to writing this concluding chapter meaning many things are born every day and many things dissolve every day and both the manifest and the unmanifest are complete. Here, I being to share my reflections and learnings that I have been able to gather so far.

Addressing the Research Questions

I started the research journey with an overarching research question to explore – *How could I develop a living model of critical self-reflection to promote and nurture emotional intelligence among educational leaders working in multiple social contexts in order to garnish my/our professional learning experiences?* I had three supportive

research questions: (1) *How can I support educational leaders to enhance their emotional literacy?* (2) *How can I support educational leaders in their critical self-reflection to foster EI in everyday practice* (3) *How can I create a safe space for critical self-reflection amid the unsafe times to promote and nurture EI among educational leaders?*

As I began exploring the answers to my research question, something that was on the back of my head was the question of quality and validity. My supervisors played a huge role in helping me think in this direction right from the start asking me questions related to my prejudices and biasness and challenging my rigor. Throughout the journey, it was important for me to be reflective with my actions and academic with my reasons. Thus, to address my first research question and to come up with an action plan, the rigorous literature review was what kept me hooked into the topic.

When I first met my supervisors, I shared how chaotic I feel inside as if I am disconnected with the self and the others around me. It felt as if I was disoriented with the identity of a Nepali woman, especially with the relationship related with my mother. So trying to figure out the connecting point of the real self and the moral ideal self, along with the literature review, I started having conversation with more people if they have ever felt the same or how have they seen the confusion and dilemma in their life. With these conversations, I was able to find the points where I felt disconnected, that is the disconnection with my daughter self, disconnection with the colorful self, disconnection with expressive self, disconnection with critical self, and disconnection with empowered self. Understanding these points of disconnection, the literature review, and the critical discussions led me to the understanding of the importance of continuous self-reflection and with a conceptual framework श्रवण (LISTEN)- Listen,

Introspect, Share, Try, Express, Nurture, a living model to nurture EI among educational leaders in Nepal. This was an attempt to connect the eastern notion that I had grown up with along with the western thoughts that the world is moving into. The exploration has been discussed in chapter I, II, and III. Since then, the journey has been an intentional to find a connection within self, relationships, and the context as an educational leader. With that the journey of addressing the overarching research question began with figuring out the answer to the supporting research questions in steps and addressing them in chapter IV, V, and VI. As the journey progressed, the importance of acknowledging vulnerability, being open, and inclusive started emerging along with the concerns related to sustainability in practice and its impact and questioning if LISTEN can serve as the living model of critical self-reflection for Nepali educational leaders. This has been addressed in chapter VII, and VIII. Overall the research journey provided me with insights related to fostering connection through emotional literacy, travelling knowledge, and the perseverant regular practice of critical self-reflection.

Fostering Connection through Emotional Literacy

One of the major things I learned from my Ph.D. journey was that connection occurs through informal pathways that rely on the individual's self-reflective process loosely guided by dialogues and conversations (Nelsen, 2022). An individual's autonomy and independence sit well alongside only when they understand their emotional experiences and are aware of their socio-cultural underpinnings. It is in a lot of ways just like connecting the dots between how we see ourselves and the world around us and also between the knowledge that we have gathered so far about our emotions. While we established a connection through our conversations within the

limited group of educational leaders through this research, it did provide an insight that the connection gets stronger with self as well as with others with a stronger understanding of the identity. As much as we recognize pleasant emotions like joy and happiness, we are scared of the emotions like anger and fear that do not conform to those of the society where we live and thus feel vulnerable about the sides of our own selves. With difficulty to express the gradual shying away from the actual emotions will start building up as disconnection with self and with others. Reflection and dialogue are the essential components of educational process (Matthews, 2006). So the idea of learning-within-relationship started making sense to me as I could see the importance of affective aspects of life and how our emotional journey and its understanding has shaped our identity as we see through learning in a social and emotional context. The meaningful engagement in dialogue, and to think critically, it is important to be self-reflective and for that the understanding of identity with understanding of the emotions is important.

This reflective journey of PhD helped me analytically consider the impact of emotions upon myself as a researcher and how it had consequences over the research. I started looking into the relationship with my mother with critical lens and coming into this conclusive chapter, I feel like that I have not completely but in someways understood her and her context and these three years our mother-daughter relationship has flourished. To accept the vulnerability of my weak relationship with my mother for a very long time I did felt disconnection with her and her love for god to her conservative thoughts around the responsibilities as a woman was in itself a daunting journey. But to understand the emotional journey we traveled keeping the socio-cultural lens in mind, improved our relationship with gradually heightening connection between our narratives. I embrace my mother and her narrative within me

everytime as I explore gender and gender norms in my everyday life in all of my roles, both personally and professionally.

The documentation of emotions and the reflection of them contributed to the understanding of one's identity as an educational leader. Affective self-understanding as a reflective practice helps an individual understand their own emotions to heighten the awareness about themselves (Mortari, 2015). As Slaby and Stephan (2008) have pointed out, affective self-understanding is *Sui generis*, meaning significantly different from other ways of referring to the world where meanings cannot be derived purely from cognitive intentional states. Given that this is the form of self-understanding where humans face both inward and outward to generate an evaluative awareness of both, the existential situation, and the affective process in that while experiencing the situation, it brings the implicit awareness to the forefront and helps in understanding and reconstructing the identity. The thesis explored my journey of affective self-understanding where I navigated my emotions as an educator working in the field of EI amid the pandemic and identified my vulnerability which slowly helped me find courage amid the crisis and foster empathy.

Regular Practice of Critical Self-Reflection and the Importance of Safe Inclusive Spaces

Virtual learning is now a new phenomenon after Covid-19 pandemic. When the primary concern has been in and around mastering technological skills, it also became important for the educational leaders to create a safe space for themselves where they could reflect on themselves during the difficult times. As much as the delivery was important, the critical discourse too was important. However, without the moral, political, and social awareness, critical self-reflection remains obsolete. For which, the ownership of the context along with enough space for personal self is

necessary where they can engage in continuous dialogue and critical reflection. Furthermore, the emotions are a valuable mechanism through which we understand the changing context, therefore with critical self-reflection as a habit must have a safe space to practice as an integral part of the reflection process. The complexity of critical self-reflection is such that our life and emotions is influenced by what we generate and how we interpret based on our socio-cultural context.

Studying emotions is difficult and that to writing a dissertation on critical self-reflection of emotions is difficult. The impending question related to if I had been able to do the right job kept on haunting through out the process. So to deliberately acknowledge this as a researcher by creating this dissertation as a safe space was important for me by reflecting everyday and writing everyday through gradually.

Traveling Knowledge

As the journey progressed, something that surfaced when we started addressing the ideas related to connection and inclusive spaces is the notion of traveling knowledge. Siemens and Matheos (2012) describing the how learning occurs in the twenty-first century explain that it is distributed across a network of connections and therefore has the ability to construct and travel through networks. As the knowledge travels, the learners are connected into networks with each other and are the active participants in creating knowledge. Understanding how it is implausible for a researcher to have a distance from the roots of her culture was significant. Through my Ph.D journey I also understood that it is fundamentally impossible to not get influenced by the study, culture, knowledge, and discussion that is going in and around the world in the related topic. What I started in the beginning of my journey whether EI in itself is a western or an eastern notion, the idea of traveling knowledge was the answer for me. Throughout the action projects, the research participants along

with me brought in the reference of multiple evidence and resources that were relateable to both the east and the west. The emotions that were described in *Natryasastra* did have its resonance with that of the emotions described as Pluchik's basic emotions.

As an active researcher, I utilized this journey of my PhD not to follow any prescribed framework of critical self-reflection, rather tried to look into the possibility of context-responsive approach (Kincheloes, 2005). Thus decided to go back to the roots while at the same time also brought the references of my educational influences from the west while growing up. That is how I landed up with LISTEN framework to support the meaningful engagement of the research participants in a safe a respectful environment amid the context of pandemic.

With the three supporting question being addressed, I was confident enough to explore whether LISTEN (श्रवण) can be developed as a living model of critical self-reflection to nurture EI in educational leaders? As I think about the answer of this question, LISTEN model, as in itself is not a grand model rather an inclusive everyday practice that we we have been doing from quite some years but had not thought about it consciously. As we blended the concept of EI that was popularized in the west with our eastern notion of reflection and learning and started appreciating it, then we were able to create and practice it and see the significance of it. Though there was nothing quantitative to test whether there the model was effective or not but what we could observe was the connection it brought through conversations and dialogues, the care and concern during the time of pandemic, the flourishing relationships. For me, the living model of critical self-reflection LISTEN is like a *lachhadori* that includes the parts of my life that is influenced from the west and a part of it still deep-

rooted in the values that I have received from my mother. That's how I have found a connection with my self and with others, which is an important component of EI.

Key Insights into the Research

The journey into PhD has been insightful. Trying to answer the overarching questions by finding the answers to the supportive question was a part of it. Apart from that my understanding related to gender has been widened, especially in terms of gender as a social phenomenon and how gendered emotions can be. When trying to explore emotions, some how in the present day context, we only tend to look into it from the modern worldview but my PhD helped me see from the space of how deeply rooted cultural perspective, particularly in relation to gender affects how one feels and acts. The search for empowerment that had led to disconnection within me was only one way of looking into gender and emotions as an educator, but going back into the roots and reviewing the story from the lens of critical appreciation helped me understand my sense of disassociation and disconnection better. From trying to understand my understanding of gender through the Nataraja's image, I have started to see everything from the lens of traveling knowledge and how the acculturation plays crucial role in transmitting ideas and notions from one to the next. My metaphorical use of *lachhadori*, helped me find a connection between the east and the west, generate better perspectives on gender equity as the mutualaity and independency from the context-responsive perspective. This understanding was instrumental for me to work further on nurturing EI among educational leaders because the idea was not to figure out the one right answer for whether EI is an eastern or a western concept rather it was to respect our deeply rooted cultural values and understand what matters to us and why does it matter to us. Thus, a context-

responsive framework even for critical self-reflection is important in order to foster EI.

The development of living model of critical self-reflection for the educational leaders through LISTEN model is not the one and only answer to the overarching research question. It also does not have a definitive answer of a 'yes' or a 'no' like a quantitative research. However, the outcome is embedded in the action (Schon, 1984), and how and when we reflect on those actions. What contextual circumstances we were in and what emotions we were feeling. What we did as an iterative and cyclical process over the period was an inclusive, integrated, and context-responsive approach of action but at times, the disconnection one has within self takes a while for the educational leaders to see this as a living model of critical self-reflection. Thus, another key insight for me was the inclusion of emotions in the research as well as the reflective process. The concepts of objectivity and subjectivity are fundamentally unworkable standards for critical self-reflection because of the complexity associated with the frames of reference. Emotions, however, being a fundamental part of humanness provides us information about how we see ourselves, how we interpret, how we community, and how we negotiate our reality. Thus the idea of objectivity as well as subjectivity as an independent phenomenon dissolves somewhere giving birth to the idea of shifting our attention to reflexivity and the relationship between authenticity and vulnerability with the incorporation of emotions just like Lakooff and Johnson (2008) understand and appreciate our complex subjectivity as 'inter-subjectivity'. Being an emotional creature, we cannot be wholly subjective or objective even when we are critically reflecting as we are "inherently flawed, prone to mistakes, and completely unique" (Woodthrope, 2007, p. 8). During this journey, recognizing and integrating emotions while reflecting on my relationship with my self and others,

especially my mother was as risky as it was but the acknowledgement of it helped me foster deeper sense of connection within myself and embracing the vulnerability helped me foster empathy not only with my mother but with others too.

Another significant insight that I gathered from my research is related to how emotion and EI is viewed from eastern and western perspective. Many researchers view emotions as a universal construct (Ekman, 1972)I started my study with this thesis in mind, but gradually I started observing that contextual and cultural differences influence how we feel emotions. Even the management of emotions is highly determined by how culture has determined the role of emotions (Lim, 2016). The major difference lies in how we perceive the notion of 'self'. While the west sees self as independent and thus considers the expression and management of their emotions to influence other people; the east sees self as fundamentally connected to and interdependent on others. Thus, the expression of emotions and the management of emotions is looked at from the perspective of social harmony. Though the display of emotional expression in private is universal, its display in social setting varies between the east and the west. Particularly in the context of Nepal, the focal emotions, the emotions that are experienced and expressed more frequently, are anger, shame, and guilt. For Nepali educators, their joy and expression of pleasure is associated not with their personal achievement but with their group or with their students. This is different for the educators in the west who value self-gratification are are excited about their personal success. Thus, though the knowledge has been transferred across cultures, EI does not transfer across cultures (Menzies, 2018)

Apart from those key observations that I made about EI as an action researcher is that different action projects can be developed in a school setting to help both the teachers and the students manage daily stressors with patience, and empathy.

Resilience is a learnable skill and action research enhances adaptive regulation of distressing emotions and helps foster resilience through the management of daily stressors and challenges as a part of regular practice (Maharaj & Ramaswaroop, 2022). Freedman (2018) observes that majority of Asia Pacific had low well-being and EI, thus introducing EI through action research is beneficial as teaching EI in primary, secondary, and special needs students can be most stressful and needs continuous coping mechanisms for the teachers themselves. Action research provides that opportunity for educators. Meanwhile, context plays a very important role in helping foster EI among educators, with action research this can be emphasized. However, the teachers themselves are seeking help to build their reflective learning skills and even for the action project development (Melton & Hooker, 2017). So, the plan is to look at the implications of my research and build on further to help the educators strengthen their EI competencies through action projects through workshops, video tutorials, conversations, as well as impact evaluation and publication.

Implications

Educational leaders have a very important role to play in educational institutions for the overall development of the educational institutions. The more they can nurture EI in themselves, the more they will be able to ensure transformational leadership and make effective decisions. Because of the multiple roles they have to fulfill, there go on an emotional roller coaster ride. For this critical self-reflection is important. With the changing times, the role of educational leaders have become more challenging. In line to this PhD research, I have drawn the following implications:

1. Context responsive reflection is important when we think of critical self-reflection as well as there is the direction relationship between the culture in

which one grows up, the value system they have and the decision they make in their classroom and beyond. Not one framework fits all and thus the cultural and gender underpinnings are to be considered in any framework. LISTEN model can further be implemented and researched in several other contexts both virtually and in-person, and the critical examination of which can help emerge other relevant contextual models for critical self-reflection.

2. Though the debate of whether EI is from the east or the west is still ongoing, but what is universally agreed that in order to cultivate the culture that expects excellence in school reformation by especially in challenging the status quo with empathy it is important for the educational leaders to nurture high level of EI. However, as much as the action projects and workshops are being designed from the western notion of EI, bringing the touch of east can help not only become time-relevant for the educators of east but also help foster understanding and empathy for the educators of west.
3. A common thread that connects educational leaders all around the world is that they experience wide array of emotions because of the frequently changing dynamics in education. Emotions can be “intense, disruptive, de-motivating, motivating, exhilarating, positive, and negative, and they can challenge the leadership abilities of any person,” thus needs to be frequently reflected on (Moore, 2009, p. 21). However, educational leaders are struggling to find a safe space for their continuous reflection. More investment on creating these platform, especially keeping the well-being of the educators on mind is important.
4. I aspire to build a relationship between KU as a PhD scholar, local government, and other national and international thinktanks that works on

teacher development and educational policy and share my lessons learned. I would further want LISTEN as a model of critical self-reflection for other educational leaders and help them nurture EI in them in collaboration with the educational leaders by understanding their context. Here, I also am optimistic about this model being helpful for both the academic and non-academic educational leaders in terms of enhancing their self-awareness and fostering authenticity in themselves.

5. A balance between the personal and professional life is important for educational leaders. However, it is also the area where educational leaders have found difficult to find that balance. This research is the combination of both my personal life and my professional aspiration. However, it not only shares my story but does involve the stories and context of the research participants too. Then with LISTEN model, educational leaders can follow the framework and reflect and enhance their living values. I relate to Dhungana's (2022) perspective of looking living values from the socio-cultural lens. They can continuously engage in critical reflection even during the challenging contexts and work on to improve what they are doing (Whitehead, 1969). And improving what they are doing will help the educational leaders redefine 'quality education' where they see their work as important and treat themselves in the way they matter.
6. I dream not only educational leaders but everyone critically reflecting on our deeply-rooted values keeping our socio-cultural context and gender in the center. Here, we find a blend of both the local and the global knowledge and respect the traveling of the knowledge that ensures equity and inclusion, and

fosters connection by acknowledging vulnerability (Brown, 2012; Luitel & Taylor, 2010).

7. A critical aspect of nurturing EI is to find a vocabulary that accurately represents our emotions and deeply resonates our contexts. With constant assessing and comparing that goes around in the context of education, we often stop reflecting our life with authenticity to our values. With shame, comparison, and disengagement being the common outlook, I imagine educational leaders living a harmonious and connected life which Brown (2012) calls as wholehearted that has the tenets of “vulnerability and worthiness: facing uncertainty, exposure, and emotional risks, and knowing that I am enough” (p.29).
8. An action research strategy could be a tool for educational leaders personal and professional development. With self-study and auto-ethnography, the educational leaders can reflect on their narratives critically and enhance their living values and foster context responsive and transformative strategies for their educational practices. Here, enhancing living value means enhancing connection, and empathy, acknowledging context, dialogue, and critical immersion.
9. Educational research needs to grow further from the conventional understanding of what constitutes as a credible research and need to acknowledge the value of emotions. To attain the academic rigor with accuracy and honesty, ensuring the value of emotions is important. So hopefully, other educational research emerges that generates and interprets the emotions of the educational leaders, researchers, research participants, and also the readers.

Research Limitations

This PhD research was conducted at a time when we, as a society, were going through limitedness personally, professionally, resource wise, as well as access wise. With the lockdown because of Covid 19, access to educators and schools was limited. With the increasing number of death tolls and upsurging complexities in the well-being being a part of an action research of someone's PhD journey was not the priority of several educators. In person conversation, discussion, and dialogues could not happen. So even though I had passion and persistence, this research has limitations. Although, I wanted educational leaders other than my research participants to at least go through the LISTEN model once through workshops in the third cycle of my research journey, I could not do so with the second lockdown that happened because of COVID and because of the lack of access to proper internet facilities, even the educational leaders who wanted to be a part of the process, were not able to. The research participants after each cycle wanted to meet in person and wanted to have the sharing in-person but with changing context and extreme risks, I could not hold an in-person gathering keeping my ethical consideration in mind. As a researcher, I was more concerned about their well-being rather than about how deep the sharing might be when held in-person. With EI being popular in the west, there are several resources related to it from the western writers, as I wanted to have a more contextual voice, I felt limited with the timeframe as well to further explore contextual relevant literature and having conversation with related people from whom I could get more resources from. Though the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Upanishad* helped me make sense of the eastern notion, my limited understanding of the Sanskrit text has created my own limitation in the meaning-making. Apart from these, I also acknowledge this research limited to the notions of Hinduism brings its own set of questions related to context in

a secular country that Nepal is today. Nevertheless, the only reason for me to choose Hindu textbooks to understand the eastern perspectives was based on the religious backdrop that I assimilated and grew up with. Yet I have not been able to bring the whole of Hinduism as well. I, growing up in a context when the debate of secularism was growing outside the boundaries of my home, have only been able to bring the pieces of what I could remember from and got influenced by my mother. So as fragmented as my memories are, this dissertation can be found fragmented too, struggling to find the centeredness amid the ocean of information that's available.

Conclusion

My research made an effort to contribute to research evidence in the critical self-reflection aspect of the educational leaders and how the socio-cultural perspective plays a crucial role in their identity formation as an educational leader. The main purpose of my study was to explore deeper into my living values and address the question how can I improve what I am doing as an educational leader who is working in the field of EI through my as well as my research participant's journey using action research methodology. As the need emerged, I also used autoethnography writing using narratives to answer research questions and address the research purpose.

My research journey has been a complex one that not only was focused on the the action-reflection cycles but also on the process of critical reflection. Since nurturing EI was what I wanted to look into, I could not overlook my emotions that had emerged from the interaction with my mother as soon as I started my PhD. So along with the action projects and its reflection, my reflection on my emotions associated with the relationship with my mother went hand in hand. On a personal note, this research helped me strengthen my bond with her by finding a connecting point in our roots. I am critically appreciative about her and my relationship with her.

I still need to figure out a lot about how the relationship with my mother and the relationship with motherhood unfolds but coming this far on this journey, I am not fearful of addressing the need for critical reflection on that front. I now see my vulnerability as my strength. Similarly, powerful emotional experiences during the pandemic came across as a data itself which helped me gain further connection within myself and my relationships both in professional settings and with the research participants by drawing accounts from those experiences.

This thesis is like the *bhajan* that my mother chants every day, a song that I kept on working on everyday bit by bit and now has become my *dharma*. This journey made me see myself in a better life, a more confident educator, an open educator, an empathic educator. Most importantly, it helped me find a connection to my creative, cultural, and joyful self. The critical dialogues within the self and with the research participants helped me and my research participants explore their emotional journey with more clarity in their identity as an educational leader. I had never understood gone through my culture in-depth like the one I did for my research. To be able to make sense of my own gendered notions and to break the hegemonic underpinnings associated to it was a daunting task. But this journey that I navigated with the support of the research participants, critical friends, and my supervisors helped me to self-audit continuously; rigorously but with self-empathy. I can make more sense of my values as an educational leader now and can see the relationship between my value as an educator and my actions and decisions.

I can also make sense of my culture better and see narrative storytelling as a safe space to broaden my understanding. When telling my story along with the research participants story during the research journey, I could sense that stories do comply with society and culture. It was fascinating to see my educational process

from *shrawana*, *manana*, and *nidhyasana*, and also blending with Listen, Introspect, Share, Try, Express, and Nurture. To see my own emotional roller coaster as a researcher on this journey made me more empathic towards the research participants and generated the need for safe space. Here, as I look this journey I am filled with critical appreciation where I have learned to acknowledge my vulnerable self. So my major learning has been that critical self-reflection is a process, not an outcome, and is triggered by experiences using reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. In this process, I questioned myself about my vulnerabilities, explored further my newfound courage, and navigated the reconstruction of my identity as an educator and also as a daughter.

In this process, I have come to understand my journey of emotions and how my gender had played a crucial role in the construction of my identity and the emotions that I was feeling as an educator and had an impact on my outcomes. I also acknowledge that addressing the full understanding of the educational leader's identity was challenging for me given how broad the concept is in itself. Given how identity is an ongoing process, it involves both a person and a context, I believe that individual voices combine into the voice of a community giving rise to discourses that shape perspectives, and thus can be closely associated with self-concept. Thus, this thesis shares my subjective understanding and transformation of my identity based on the critical self-reflection that I had with the knowledge that I have at the present moment and the action projects that I did along with the research participants.

Understanding the individuals as intentional beings and the formation of identity cannot be context-free, especially concerning socio-cultural contexts, identity is a shifting phenomenon and is transformational (Varghese et al., 2005). The constant reconstruction of the educational leader's identity based on the wide range of

narratives they create to explain themselves and their teaching lives, the discourses, and the context they are part of makes understanding of a their identity challenging, making the role of reflection in the exploration of identity significant (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Vygotsky (2012) argues that the individual experiences can be understood only when it goes beyond the individual and is examined through the social and cultural processes. If analyzed the human actions and speech, the representational systems of tools and signs used in the socio-cultural setting then it can be seen as the resources that constrain or transform the action. However, the examination in itself does not yield self-knowledge if not provided a discursive shift. The discourse with the self and with the others helps open up a space for self-consciousness even in terms of identity which consequently helps in the reconstruction of identity highlighting the importance of critical reflection on the emotional experiences and expression (Britzman, 1998). The lack of safe space for the expression of the authentic self while being a part of critical self-reflection was also felt, especially for the women educational leaders as they experienced emotional and physical exhaustion, anxiety, and unproductiveness. The emotional exhaustion contributed to burnout in my work context with the untold but heightened pressure from the management to adopt high-performance in the work systems.

I realized that the truth that I had started to share and the vulnerability that I had started to embrace had helped me feel courageous and started expressing my emotions, especially my anger, disappointment, and disconnection, especially with my mother. Brown (2012) argues that vulnerability sounds like truth and feels like courage and both of them are not always comfortable, however, both are not weak as they nurture relationships and fosters innovation. Though there are parts of me, my mother, and the research participants that I could not muster the strength to bring out

in public through this thesis given the ethical dilemmas that we had in that context, we nurtured a healthy relationship among each other within and beyond the institutions, we were working in. To see the *shakti* (courage) that had always been there inside of me but had been overlooked just like the goddesses that we worship was the major outcome of this critical self-reflection. With this consciousness as I move forward, though this is the conclusion of this thesis, it feels like I am just taking the first step in my journey of being and living wholeheartedly which feels like a rebirth. Thus, borrowing the words of my mother to describe my birth she shared on my recent birthday on the 4th of August 2022 that captures the courage that we both have displayed in our lives.

छोरी को जन्म दिनमा एक डाली कोपिला (Dedication to my daughter on her birthday)



चोखो निष्ठा ठाम थियो (A divine place, it was)

तिम्रो जन्म हुँदाखेरि छोरी (the place you were born)

जनकपुर नाम थियो (Janakpur, they called)



बाह्र बजेको रातमा (At twelve o' clock at night)

एकलै मुकाबिला गर्नु परेथ्यो (I had to fight alone)

केही थिएन हातमा (With no one to support)



हाँसी खुशी जिई रहनु (Live happily)

तिम्रो जन्मदिनमा यही शुभकामना (Happy birthday to you)

शुख शान्ति लिई रहनु (May you be always in harmony)

४ 

सन्धि थियो टनकपुरमा (There was a treaty signed in Tanakpur)

सीतामाताको जस्तै नाम कमियोस् (May your name be renowned like Goddess Sita)

जन्म भयो जनकपुरमा (Who was also born in Janakpur)

५ 

सानैमा दर्शन पनि गराएकी थिएँ (I had taken you to all the temples when you were a child)

गुरू महाराजजीको चरणकमलमा राखी (Had placed you on the lap of Guru Maharaj too)

मनमा शान्ति पनि भराएकी थिएँ (Hope that had filled your heart with harmony)

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