Peer Reviewed Article

Volume 6, Issue 2 (2021), pp. 6-29
International Journal of
Multidisciplinary Perspectives in Higher Education
ISSN: 2474-2546 Print/ ISSN: 2474-2554 Online
https://ojed.org/jimphe

Reflections on Pandemic Emotions: Reconstructing Self as a Female Educator in Nepal

Bhawana Shrestha

Abstract

Even though the documentation on the effects of the pandemic on educators is being done, enough spaces have not been provided to the female educators working in higher education in Nepal. In this paper, I attempt to explore the journey of navigating my emotions as an educator in Nepal working from home and hope to contribute to the broader discussions on emotions and emotional expressions. The context of this self-study is my life as an educator working in higher education between 29 March 2020 to 29 March 2021. This paper focuses on exploring the question, 'How did the reflections of my emotions during the time of pandemic help me reconstruct my identity as an educator?'. Written as a retrospective reflection on vulnerability, courage, and empathy, self-reflective diary entries were used for data analysis. The paper shows the gendered implication on the emotional expression on me as a female faculty and how it impacted my identity as an educational leader.

कोभिड-१९ महामारीले शिक्षकहरुमाथि कस्तो प्रभाव पारेको छ भन्ने कुराको अभिलेखिकरण भइरहेको भए तापनि उच्च शिक्षामा कार्यरत महिला शिक्षकहरुका बारेमा त्यसले पर्याप्त ठाउँ दिएको छैन । यो अनुसन्धान पत्रमा म नेपालको उच्च शिक्षामा कार्यरत, घरबाट काम गर्न बाध्य महिलाको मनोभावहरुको एउटा यात्राको रुपमा अन्वेषण गर्दछु र त्यसले महामारी नृसृत भावना र मनोभावजन्य विषयमा हुने बृहत्तर छलफलमा योगदान पुन्याउने आशा गर्दछु। यो स्व-अन्वेषणको परिवेश म महिला शिक्षकले नेपालको उच्च शिक्षामा काम गरेको २९ मार्च २०२० देखि २९ मार्च २०२१ सम्मको समयावधि हो। यो अनुसन्धान पत्रको मूल प्रश्न महामारीमाथिका मेरा प्रतिविम्बनले कसरी मेरो पहिचानको पुनर्निर्माणमा मद्दत पुर्यायो भन्ने अन्वेषण गर्दछ । कमजोरी, साहस र सहानुभूति को पूर्वब्यापी प्रतिविम्बन भएकोले यसमा तथ्यांक विश्लेषणका लागि स्व

6

प्रतिबिम्बित डायरीको प्रयोग गरिएको थियो। यो अनुसन्धान पत्रले महिला शिक्षकको मनोभावजन्य अभिब्यक्तिमा निहित लैङ्गिक महत्ताका साथै कसरी त्यसले शैक्षिक नेतृका रुपमा मेरो परिचयलाई प्रभाव पार्यो भन्ने देखाउँछ।

Affective Self-Understanding and Reflective Writing

What can the documentation of emotions and the reflection of them contribute to the understanding of one's identity as an educational leader? Affective self-understanding is a reflective practice that 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. This paper explores my journey of affective self-understanding where I navigate my emotions as an educator working in higher education in Nepal with the upsurge of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. The paper further explains how the reflection of my emotions through affective self-understanding helped me identify my vulnerability and then slowly helped me find courage amid the crisis and foster empathy.

The need for exploring the emotions arose with the sudden increase in the anxiety attacks that I started getting which started 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. 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. 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 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 cited in Peltier et al., 2005) as it encompassed two interrelated ideas that are 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.

Reflective journal writings had been an engaging process for me as an educator and had worked as a medium for learning and growth. I started reflective journal writing in 2013 when I had just started teaching to help me clear my confusion. I find it difficult to share my thoughts and confusions with others easily and given my inexperience in teaching, I needed a way out to express those confusions. 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. 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. Witnessing its benefits, I have continued the writing until now where I share my reflections in the form of blogs written in the English language. This paper has used the self-study method to interpret the reflective journal writings that I had used to get a comprehensive understanding of the new possibilities amid the crisis.

The themes that will be discussed in this paper relate to my questioning self about my vulnerabilities, the newfound courage, and the reconstructing of my identity as an educator during times of crisis. Through the interpretation of these themes, I have come to understand my journey of emotions during the period 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 acknowledge that addressing the full understanding of the teacher's identity is 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, thus can be closely associated with self-concept (Lauriala & Kukkonen, 2005). Thus, this paper shares my subjective understanding and transformation of my identity based on the self-reflection that I had with the knowledge that I have at the present moment.

Theoretical Influences

With the popular use of the concepts like 'emotional literacy', and 'emotional intelligence, the agreement on the importance of emotional life in the teaching-learning process as well as critical reflection is increasing. Though the concept 'emotional literacy' and 'emotional intelligence' are often found to be used interchangeably (Brackett, 2019; Dirkx, 2006; Goleman, 2005; Khadka, 2019; Shrestha, 2018), the concept 'emotional literacy' means one's affective self-understanding while the concept 'emotional intelligence' addresses the process of enriching that self-understanding through focused attention or reflective analysis (Park, 1999). With the increasing social science research showing the significance of emotions on human agency as well as learning, and decision making (Archer, 2010; Brackett, 2019; 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, however, is a complex teaching-learning process among the participants who are involved in the higher education institution (Bubnys, 2019).

To navigate this complexity, I am employing a critical paradigm. Through this, I aim not only to understand or share an account of behaviors but also to seek change in behaviors in myself (Mack, 2010). The change in behaviors 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. Standing on the ontological assumption that the social reality is defined by the persons of the society, 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 asked to display certain emotions only. The display of emotions, both externalizing and internalizing, are related to the socialization contexts like family, schools, classmates. Gender is considered as one of the important factors in the socialization process and in setting the guidelines about the expressions of emotions (Olson et al., 2019). Gendered expectations might differ according to the culture, however, the influence of gender in the emotional understanding during the process of critical reflection is unavoidable.

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. Though the similarities between reflexivity and reflection are evident, 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). Reflection can be broadly categorized into three interrelated stages; awareness, critical analysis, and change (Hay et al., 2004). 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 which Mezirow (1991) calls perspective transformation.

Using the broader view of epistemological reflexivity, I have derived the understanding as a researcher through my involvement in the reciprocal processes on interpretation related to my being in this

world. 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 (Hand, 2003). Therefore, the critical reflection of my personal position, self, and identity has been acknowledged and can be seen accounted for in my reflective diary writing. Reflective writing empowers us to have that perspective transformation "when questions about the investigated phenomenon are written down creating the possibility to go back and reflect… and reveal the richness of the phenomena in the outlived experience"(Bubnys, 2019, p.4). Mortari (2015) terms this practice as "the journal of emotional life in which the learner writes about their self-investigation of their emotional life to gain a meaningful comprehension out of it" (p. 158). Recording my emotional life in a journal has not just helped me keep myself open to other opinions but has also helped me understand my own assumptions and beliefs as an educator.

Self and Identity

Though self and identity are complementary terms, they are distinct. According to Owens (2006), "the central quality that distinguishes self from identity is that the self is a process and organization born of self-reflection whereas identity is a tool by which individuals or groups categorize themselves and present themselves to the world" (p.206). Self is a source of continuity that provides a sense of connectedness and unbrokenness to the rejuvenated identity of an individual. We understand our rejuvenated selves by observing ourselves in association with our social relationships and social interactions (Swann & Bosson, 2010). I have been a higher education faculty for the last five years in an institution in Nepal that is affiliated with an American University. A married Nepali woman, I am also a doctoral student. So, I relate with interaction theorist Goffman's (1959) argument that people are like actors taking on various identities where the self is a consequence of the scene that comes off rather than the cause. Given this situationist approach to the self and identity, I feel the continuous need for reflection in general, with high importance during the times of crisis in particular to find my true self, opposite to Goffman's notion of not having a true self. With a research interest that focuses on improving her practices as an education leader concerning her works in the field of emotional intelligence, reflection on my own emotions is crucial.

Thus, I agree with Snyder (1974) that rather than perpetually getting engaged in impression management activities, self-monitoring helps us find our true enduring sense of self that has valued cross-sectional consistency. In this light, my true enduring self as an educator is someone who strives on improving the quality of life and learning both in myself and in others, enhancing optimism and trust by being mindful of our emotions. However, with the global pandemic, it became evident that my own optimism and trust were shaken with the deteriorating work-life balance as well as the mental health fueling the need for critical questioning of my deeply held beliefs and assumptions as an educator (Mezirow & Taylor, 2011).

My experiences during the time of 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 in terms of my gender. The need for the expression of my emotions that I felt particularly because I was a female heightened as I felt limited and suppressed within the collective identity as an educator. When the team reflection meeting was going on, 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 for an hour of rest during the break. Somehow, I had started seeing myself more as an outsider who was in the zoom meeting but not a part of it in anyways 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 creation of knowledge through the act of questioning myself as a researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Working from home during the time of pandemic offered me a unique opportunity to systematically observe the different educational landscapes that men educators and women educators were in. 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.

Role of Reflection on Emotions in Shaping Teacher's Identity

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 teacher'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 teacher's identity challenging, making the role of reflection in the exploration of identity significant (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) further argue reflection "as a key means by which teachers can become more in tune with their sense of self and with a deep understanding of how this self fits into a larger context which involves others; in other words, reflection is a factor in the shaping of identity" (p.182).

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 effective and is dependent upon power and agency, while the other is that the introspection of those components helps them gain a richer understanding about themselves as a teacher. Given that teachers are not just technical experts, the importance of exploring their emotional experiences is extremely important in relation to their personal lives. Nias (1996) observes teachers having a deep emotional relationship with their work for three reasons; first, teaching involves interaction because of which emotional dimensions are inevitable; second, teaching becomes the main source for them for their self-esteem, fulfillment, as well as vulnerability; third is because of the extension of the second as they are heavily invested in their students as well as the values which they believe represent their work. More than emotion as a psychological phenomenon, the emotions that teachers experience and express are matters of social construction, especially concerning power and culture, and have to be re-thought associating it with identity (Campbell, 1994). Therefore, the role of reflection on emotions is immense as the identity formation of the teacher "involves how the social operation of power and agency influences the discourses about emotion and identity and vice versa" (p. 218).

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).

Methodology

      The drive to improve my practice as an educational leader motivated me to explore my assumptions rigorously in an organized manner. 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 aim to make my process of critical reflection ongoing and iterative through careful critical questioning on the written journal entries (Loughran et al., 2007). The writing on the journal was unstructured and an honest depiction of the circumstances and the reflections. As a researcher, I have engaged in the critical reflection of my written reflections and have tried to deconstruct the underlying emotions and explore the tacit knowledge which Mezirow (1991) calls 'taken-for-granted' frames of reference. This self-study spans the time frame of one year keeping the global pandemic COVID-19 in the backdrop and using the lens of Mezirow's (1991) transformative theory. The journals had both inside and outside classroom reflections as an individual experience where classroom meant virtual classrooms. In this self-study, I have been involved in a dialogic process where I have engaged in a conversation with self and others by sharing them as a blog or social media posts (Boyer et al., 2006). The interdependent relations between the individual experience, critical reflection, and dialogue played a crucial role in the perspective transformation helping me reconstruct my identity as an educator. Since it is a challenge to analyze every account of emotions in any given context (Zembylas, 2003), I have chosen to focus on the major incidents that happened during the pandemic that influenced me most when it comes to orienting my identity as a higher education teacher.

      I 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 reflective journaling of the major events, I have found myself getting further clarity over the incident as soon as I write them down. After writing, when I read it again, I analyze and examine my thoughts, feelings, and actions about my identity as a teacher. This has led further to making connections through interactions within myself and others, thus engaging me actively in the meaning-making process.

Reflections
Vulnerability

COVID-19 induced a substantial global burden worldwide since its first diagnosis in Wuhan, China, highly affecting the nations with lower capacity to cope with the pandemic and claimed that vulnerability and lack of coping capacity as the two major dimensions to be 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 higher education married Nepali female faculty who belongs 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 for both the formal as well as 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 for me in helping me become a more independent learner in terms of acknowledging my vulnerability and in shaping my identity as a teacher.

As a consequence of the lockdown, universities in Nepal were temporarily closed for nearly two months since March 24, 2020, however, I being the part of the institution associated with the foreign University decided to shift to a completely online model right away since 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 faculties, mostly female faculties 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 that conducted an international virtual conference for higher education educators based on rethinking education amid the crisis, I realized how I was finding it difficult to find at least one female higher education faculty as a speaker and was feeling frustrated about it. 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. The female faculties were busy doing the household, caring for their babies, taking classes, checking assignments all at the same time. However, when it came to male faculty members they were busy in the meetings, seminars, and virtual conferences that had some major role in the decision making. I was noticing our voices as female faculties during the crisis were not being heard. We were not finding space to share what we were going through, what our experiences were, 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 on 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 all the faculties had to be a part of to enhance the skills for virtual teaching-learning had either no or few female faculties. Those were also filled with praises for the male faculties while female faculties had to go through shame and guilt for not being even 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 that of 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 make
> sense of why they are turning off their camera while they are
> talking to their students because on the other side they are
> patting their crying toddlers.

The expectation for women to perform a majority of the housework and childcare responsibility is there despite the increment of 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 the society even to create a perspective about our own identity. In this context, while the home is considered as a place for healing and recovery in general, for women it is recognized as a place for additional unpaid work. Therefore, what Olson et al. (2019) has claimed for secondary school teaching applies to higher education teaching as well:

> Whether emotion management bolsters or counters a teacher's
> wellbeing and intention to stay in their job or the profession,
> may depend on the fit of this emotion management within that
> teacher's identity—and the extent to which the job allows the
> teacher to fulfill the objectives linked to that identity. (p. 141)

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. 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 (Harvard Business Review, 2018). Apart from that the rising death tolls were triggering fear of losing our loved ones, and the increasing uncertainty was weakening the 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. 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 that is inside all of us. As we have become closer than ever, the terror has also grown more than ever with this increasing uncertainty.

The lack of safe space for the expression of the authentic self had led women to experience emotional and physical exhaustion, anxiety, and unproductiveness. I, too was one of them when teachers were being considered as the trailblazers amid the crisis. Chapagain and Neupane (2020) highlighted the importance of the attitude and ability of the teachers in playing a supportive role in the creation of the flexible environment and identify themselves as "learning engineers" who play the role of champions amid the crisis (p. 109). However, with the increasing fear in my personal life, I identified myself in a vulnerable spot as a higher education faculty not being able to give my best in fulfilling the role as a champion. 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.

Courage

The massive pressure and uncertainty concerning the workload that was being 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 failure to maintain a balance between my work and family chores leading to serious implications on my emotional well-being. The increasing demand of 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 to 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 (2002) 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 all at the same time. The student had sent an abusive and threatening message for not receiving the grades he had anticipated. 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 message was crafted from the student, I felt angry for being born as a female and then to be working as an educator during the difficult time. I understood what Palmer (2017) meant when he claimed teaching, as a daily exercise where we practice vulnerability. It was even more difficult when it was online with its easy access to abuse.

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. Few conversations with other female higher education faculties helped us understand the gravity of the situation but the shame and guilt that we have to go through when bringing these issues into the limelight, especially at times like the pandemic present us in a negative light. More than the victim, we were judged 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 cases like these. This transparent self-disclosure among us formed a strong sense of courage and mutual trust between us 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, irritated or frustrated and most importantly 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 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 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 and disappointment regarding the events that helped me connect with other educators who were going through a similar situation like mine. 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. I echo with Spelmen (1989) that "[anyone] who does not get angry when there is reason to be angry or does not get angry in the right way, at the right time with the right people, is a dolt" (as cited in Campbell, 1994, p. 47). Though we could not muster the strength to bring out all the stories in public 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. Choosing vulnerability involves being transparent and open to the

emotional exposures in relationship with self and with others and often comes with risks. Here, the importance of emotional regulation is important to understand what the teachers are feeling and what function the emotion fulfills. However, I echo with Hoy (2013) as she claims

> The unpreparedness of teachers for the reality that their chosen profession will require emotional labor to enact a myriad of sometimes contradictory display rules; that they will live with a constantly changing landscape of criticism and reforms 'inflicted' upon them by parents, administrators, and policymakers. (p. 264)

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.

This newfound courage where I gave myself the permission to feel and display my authentic emotions helped me improve my confidence, lower my levels of anxiety, and got me engaged in different programs where I could share my experiences. This also helped me have a difficult conversation with my husband where I shared the problems that I was having because of the added responsibilities on my front since the time we started working from home and need more support from him in the household. This is what Vygotsky (as cited in Allahyar & Nazari, 2012) explains transformation as the "inborn capacities entangled with socio culturally constructed meditational means, through the internalization of which an external operation is internally reconstructed" (p. 81). Once I moved away from the idea of perfectionism and balance, I was courageous enough to focus on the aspects that I found meaningful rather than the ones that I was forced to do.

Empathy

My reflection about my emotional experiences also led me to 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 the higher education teachers to focus on their self-reflection as a part of ethical decision making where they see themselves as a 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 has helped me see my strength but has also helped me figure out my limitations. On 30 January 2021, after facilitating a session for the facilitators and activists from different countries on the importance of being self-aware and authentic about our emotions that are associated with our activism, 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 come to realize the importance of encourage more.

The heightened awareness of the complexity that I was facing in expressing my authentic self in the challenging times made me question if the skills that I had were enough to encourage myself and others and what could I do to improve my practices. I thought of being a part of a course that would help me be better at it as a facilitator. Thus, I joined a facilitation certification course. The course helped me center around myself as an educator, see through my vulnerable side, and provided me 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 other's authentic emotions as well within and even 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) argued 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 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 a higher education teacher 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.

Conclusion

The move toward an understanding of my teacher self through the reflection on my emotions during the pandemic provided space for my transformation. Furthermore, the construction of my personal narratives 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 a higher education teacher might be by highlighting my situatedness of self (Zembylas, 2003). Therefore, the journey from being vulnerable to finding the courage to being empathic has become a continuous process for me through the reflection of my emotions and expression of emotions. Not explicitly on teacher identity construction, but this paper encourages critical attention towards the reflections and narratives of female higher education faculties of Nepal and how challenging it can be for her to find a space for her authentic expressions. This reflection also provides an insight into how the critical reflection on emotions can contribute to the transformation of a teacher's identity which can foster courage in her in contributing to the larger discourse amid the pandemic.

References

Allahyar, N., & Nazari, A. (2012). Potentiality of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory in exploring the role of teacher perceptions, expectations, and interaction strategies. *Journal of Working Papers in Language Pedagogy*, *6*, 79-92. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3657178

Archer, M. S. (2010). *Conversations about reflexivity*. Routledge.

Beauchamp, C., & Thomas, L. (2009). Understanding teacher identity: An overview of issues in the literature and implications for teacher education. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *39*(2), 175-189. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057640902902252

Brackett, M. (2019). Permission to feel: Unlocking the power of emotions to help our kids, ourselves, and our society thrive. Celadon Books.

Britzman, D. P. (1998). The terrible problem of knowing thyself: toward a poststructuralist account of teacher identity. In *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects: Toward a Psychoanalytic Study of Learning* (pp. 23-46). SUNY Press.

Brown, B. (2012). *Daring greatly: How the courage to be vulnerable transforms the way we live, love, parent, and lead* (1st ed.). Gotham.

Buber, M., 2014. Between man and man, Mansfield Centre: Martino Fine Books.

Bubnys, R. (2019). A journey of self-reflection in students' perception of practice and roles in the profession. *Sustainability*, *11*(1), 194. https://doi.org/10.3390/su11010194

Campbell, S. (1994). Being dismissed: The politics of emotional expression. *Hypatia*, *9*(3), 46-65. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.1994.tb00449.x

Chapagain, N. K., & Neupane, U. (2020). Contextual learning: Rethinking education for Nepal in the wake of COVID-19 crisis. *Applied Science and Technology Annals*, *1*(1), 98-111. https://doi.org/10.3126/asta.v1i1.30281

Chigondo, A. (2019). *Effects of socio-cultural environment on gender: A case of women in leadership in Zimbabwean listed companies* [Unpublished master's thesis]. Bindura University of Science Education .

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education* (5th ed.). Routledge.

Cooper, J. E. (n.d.). Keeping a journal: A path to uncovering identity (and keeping your sanity). *Educational Perspectives*, *46*, 40-43. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1088286.pdf

Dirkx, J. M. (2006). Engaging emotions in adult learning: A Jungian perspective on emotion and transformative learning. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, *2006*(109), 15-26. https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.204

Garbett, D., & Ovens, A. (2012). Being a teacher educator: Exploring issues of authenticity and safety through self-study. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, *37*(3). https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2012v37n3.3

Gautam, D. K., & Gautam, P. K. (2020). Transition to online higher education during COVID-19 pandemic: Turmoil and way forward to developing country - Nepal. https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-59206/v1

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Anchor Books.

Goleman, D. (2005). Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ (10th Anniversary Edition). Bantam.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In The sage handbook of qualitative research (pp. 191-215). Sage.

Gupta, A. K., Sahoo, S., Mehra, A., & Grover, S. (2020). Psychological impact of 'Lockdown' due to COVID-19 pandemic in Nepal: An online survey. *Asian Journal of Psychiatry*, *54*, 102243. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajp.2020.102243

Hand, H. (2003). The mentor's tale: A reflexive account of semi-structured interviews. Nurse Researcher, 10(3), 15-27. https://doi.org/10.7748/nr2003.04.10.3.15.c5893

Harvard Business Review. (2018, October 15). Perfect is the enemy. *Women at work* [Apple podcast]. https://hbr.org/podcast/2018/10/perfect-is-the-enemy

Hay, A., Peltier, J. W., & Drago, W. A. (2004). Reflective learning and on-line management education: A comparison of traditional and on-line MBA students. *Strategic Change*, *13*(4), 169-182. https://doi.org/10.1002/jsc.680

Hoy, A. W. (2013). A reflection on the place of emotion in teaching and teacher education. *Advances in Research on Teaching*, *18*, 255-270. https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-3687(2013)0000018017

Ilies, R., Morgeson, F. P., & Nahrgang, J. D. (2005). Authentic leadership and eudaemonic well-being: Understanding leader–follower outcomes. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *16*(3), 373-394. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2005.03.002

Khadka, J. (2019). Effect of principals' emotional intelligence on schools' academic performance: A survey of Nepali institutional schools. *Education and Development*, *29*, 15-29. https://doi.org/10.3126/ed.v29i0.32564

Kolakshyapati, S., Pandey, B., Sharma, B., & KC, E. (2021). Higher workload experienced by women during the COVID-19 lockdown period. *Eurpoasian Journal of Medical Sciences*, *3*(1), 16-17. https://www.europasianjournals.org/ejms/index.php/ejms/article/view/307/151

Lauriala, A., & Kukkonen, M. (2005). Teacher and student identities as situated cognitions. In *Connecting policy and practice: Challenges for teaching and learning in schools and universities* (pp. 199-208). Psychology Press.

Lewis, A. (2000). Self-reflexivity and the therapeutic action of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalytic Psychology, 17(4), 667-689. https://doi.org/10.1037/0736-9735.17.4.667

Lopez, S. J., O'Byrne, K. K., & Peterson, S. (2003). Profiling Courage. In *Positive psychological assessment: A handbook of models and measures* (pp. 185-197). American Psychological Association.

Loughran, J. J., Hamilton, M. L., LaBoskey, V. K., & Russell, T. L. (2007). International handbook of self-study of teaching and teacher education practices. Springer.

Mack, L. (2010). The philosophical underpinnings of educational research. Polyglossia, 19, 1-11. https://docplayer.net/23953122-The-philosophical-underpinnings-of-educational-research.html

Matsumoto, D., Yoo, S. H., & Nakagawa, S. (2008). Culture, emotion regulation, and adjustment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *94*(6), 925-937. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.94.6.925

Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. Jossey-Bass.

Mezirow, J., & Taylor, E. W. (2011). *Transformative learning in practice: Insights from community, workplace, and higher education*. John Wiley & Sons.

Mortari, L. (2015). Emotion and education: Reflecting on the emotional experience emotion and education. *European Journal of Educational Research*, *4*(4), 157-176. https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-jer.4.4.157

Nepal, S., & Aryal, S. S. (2020). COVID-19 and Nepal: A gender perspective. *Journal of Lumbini Medical College*, *8*(1), 1-2.

Nepali, T. N. (2018). Balancing work life and family life: Problems and remedies. *Pravaha*, *24*(1), 217-232. https://doi.org/10.3126/pravaha.v24i1.20240

Nias, J. (1996). Thinking about feeling: The emotions in teaching. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *26*(3), 293-306. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764960260301

Nyongesa, B., Buregeya, A., & Mukhwana, A. (2017). Gender as a socio-cultural determinant of the choice of language learning strategies. *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies*, *2*, 1-13. http://erepository.kibu.ac.ke/handle/123456789/1204

Olson, R. E., McKenzie, J., Mills, K. A., Patulny, R., Ballocchi, A., & Caristo, F. (2019). Gendered emotion management and teacher outcomes in secondary school teaching: A review. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *80*, 128-144. www.elsevier.com/locate/tate

Owens, T. J. (2006). *Handbook of social psychology* (205-232nd ed.). Springer.Palmer, P. J. (2017). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*. John Wiley & Sons.

Park, J. (1999). Emotional literacy: Education for meaning. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, *4*(1), 19-28. https://doi.org/10.1080/1364436990040103

Peltier, J. W., Hay, A., & Drago, W. (2005). The reflective learning continuum: Reflecting on reflection. *Journal of Marketing Education*, *27*(3), 250-263. https://doi.org/10.1177/0273475305279657

Roulston, K. (2020). Groping through a grim Spring: Teaching and learning during a pandemic. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Perspectives in Higher Education*, *5*(2), 107-111. https://www.ojed.org/index.php/jimphe

Slaby, J., & Stephan, A. (2008). Affective intentionality and self-consciousness. *Consciousness and Cognition*, *17*(2), 506-513. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.concog.2008.03.007

Shrestha, B. (2018). Emotional intelligence in higher education: Perspectives of Nepalese college students. *Westcliff International Journal of Applied Research*, *2*(1), 77-89. https://doi.org/10.47670/wuwijar201821bsh

Snyder, M. (1974). Self-monitoring of expressive behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *30*(4), 526-537. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0037039

Swann, W. B., & Bosson, J. K. (2010). Self and identity. In *Handbook of social psychology* (pp. 589-627). John Wiley & Sons.

Tsai, J. L., & Knutson, B. (2004). Cultural variation in affect valuation. *PsycEXTRA Dataset*. https://doi.org/10.1037/e633912013-121

Varghese, M., Morgan, B., Johnston, B., & Johnson, K. A. (2005). Theorizing language teacher identity: Three perspectives and beyond. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, *4*(1), 21-44. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327701jlie0401_2

Vygotsky, L. S. (2012). *Thought and language*. MIT Press.

Wong, M., Teoh, J. Y., Huang, J., & Wong, S. H. (2020). The potential impact of vulnerability and coping capacity on the pandemic control of COVID-19. *Journal of Infection*, *81*(5), 816-846. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jinf.2020.05.060

Woodard, C. R. (2004). Hardiness and the concept of courage. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, *56*(3), 173-185. https://doi.org/10.1037/1065-9293.56.3.173

Zembylas, M. (2003). Emotions and teacher identity: A poststructural perspective. *Teachers and Teaching*, *9*(3), 213-238. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540600309378

Author Bio

BHAWANA SHRESTHA, is a Ph.D. scholar of Educational Leadership at Kathmandu University School of Education and is the founder of an education initiative 'My Emotions Matter', Nepal. She is exploring the answer to her research question on how to improve her practices as an education leader working in the field of Emotional Intelligence and trying to generate her living theory that will contribute to the 'flourishing of humanity'. She also works as a faculty

of King's College Nepal and teaches undergraduate, and graduate students. The author's major fields of study are emotional intelligence, educational leadership, gender, and reflective practices. Email: bsbhawana830@gmail.com