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Overcoming Barriers as a Nepali Woman Through Emotional Intelligence:

My Emotional Literacy Journey Into My PhD in Educational Leadership

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Abstract

This article explores my process of being emotionally literate, realizing my personal power through this process, and deciding to move ahead with my PhD to explore further my contribution to the flourishing of humanity. In this qualitative reflective self-study, I have used my detailed personal, professional, and academic reflective journal and audio-visual narratives that I kept over seven years as data to explore the process of learning. The article reveals my process of learning from my experiences as a confused Nepali girl to my experience of working as a journalist, to becoming an aspiring educational leader and a researcher. The results are discussed using a microscopic lens into my childhood together with an understanding of how social settings played a major role in my learning and how emotional intelligence played an instrumental role in deconstructing that and helped me understand myself better, urging me to explore further through my PhD research as an educational leader.

Introduction

Though the terms “emotional literacy” and “emotional intelligence” (EI) are used interchangeably in general, the first addresses one’s lack of the “basics” of emotional understanding, while the latter is seen as the process of enriching the understanding through focused attention on emotional experience and skills (Park, 1999). I agree with Ventegodt et al. (2003) that to be human is to strike a balance between multiple extremes, especially between reason and feelings, meaning that mind and body come together in perfect unity to make life deeper and complete. Meanwhile, having grown up in an educational system that values cognition more than emotion, particularly when emotions are associated with women and reason is associated with men (Maharjan & Sah, 2012), I can understand why I kept on being fearful to critically reflect on my experiences. However, realizing that the benefits of understanding my emotions could lead to productive interactions has developed an interest in me to explore more in this field. This paper spans the timeframe of seven reflective years—my experiences as a girl, my professional experiences as a journalist, my initial entry as a teacher, and my experiences as an educator in a community school—and

how the introduction of emotional intelligence helped me understand my own limitations as an educator and prompted me to work on it further.

Emotional Intelligence in the Context of Nepal

While most of the modern systematic studies in emotional intelligence are being done by western psychologists, serious discourse about it seems to have recently started in Nepal. However, a careful study of Nepali ancestral culture and philosophical scriptures reveals that the concepts of emotions and emotional intelligence are embedded in them. The writers of *Alankarashastra*, the Sanskrit literary tradition that focuses on aesthetic experience, have probably done the most extensive analysis of emotions in our tradition (McDaniel, 2007). The emotions, according to *Alankara*, are powerful yet generic, joyful yet painful, and full of curiosity, and if anyone wants to attain *Brahman*, knowledge or bliss, the need for proper emotional disposition is important. Cherniss and Goleman (2001) suggest something similar by bringing forth the four major EI domains: “Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, and Relationship Management” (p. 160). Goleman (2005) 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. Meanwhile, in the context of Nepal, even after being mentioned and analyzed elaborately in ancient texts, emotion has mostly been studied and practiced from the *bhakti* sense, or the showing of devotion to God than practicing it in daily life. Tracing back the history of EI specifically in the context of Nepali educational leadership context, no published research has addressed the history of its inception and development. Thus, through the snowball sampling method, a non-probability sampling method, I have tried to dig deeper into how the discussion of EI was introduced into Nepali educational leadership practices. Also known as chain-referral sampling, snowball sampling is usually used to locate difficult-to-find populations (Johnson, 2014). For this research, I have relied on referrals from my PhD supervisors and the academic scholars who were a part of my research presentations at different conferences.

From the seed respondents, I gathered that courses on EI were first found to be developed around 2002 at the Nepal Administrative Staff College (NASC), a national-level autonomous institution that provides necessary training for employees of the Government of Nepal and public enterprises, with the facilitation of Dr. Kedar Bahadur Rayamajhi. 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). When Dr. Rayamajhi was introduced to the term EI during his master’s studies in the United Kingdom, he could connect the missing dots of how Nepali learn EI via cultural and religious celebrations but do not practice it in their leadership roles. That prompted him to include a few chapters on EI in the training syllabus for NASC (K. Rayamajhi, personal communication, June 10, 2021). Because of the Maoist insurgency during those times, educational leaders were under extreme stress because 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 staffs of the Nepal government (L. Awasthi, personal communication, May. 30, 2021). Dr. Mahesh Nath Parajuli, the former dean of the Kathmandu University School of Education (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.

“I” in the Center

The objective of this paper is to explore my own narrative as an evolving researcher of EI by focusing on the insights gained through self-study. Self-study in education practices is characterized by the exploration of the researcher’s own practices in order to improve students’ learning by using various qualitative methodologies focusing on a wide range of substantive issues (Loughran et al., 2007). For this self-study, I have involved the concept of reflective practice developed by Schon (1984), “the mindful consideration of one’s own action” (Osterman, 1990, p. 134, . By posing questions about our own actions and patterns, we make judgments about our effectiveness and learn from them. I used written reflections on my subjective lived findings on the actions and experiences in the form of a diary, poems, and different audiovisual multimedia narratives for my reflective practice. For this, I am using the lens of critical paradigm employing the ontological assumption that “social reality is defined from persons in society” and the epistemological assumption that “knowledge is socially constructed through media, institution and society” (Mack, 2010, p. 10). I am aware that the relevance and knowledge construction in this paper have been explored through the researcher’s (my) own subjectivities and reflexivity, and thus I will try to articulate the best I can at present.

Who Am I?

A Child Oscillating in Betweenness

Having spent a substantial amount of my childhood and teen life (1990–2012) in eastern “*Madhesh*,” I identify more with the “*Madhesi*” identity, even though my physiognomy and my last name do not hold any identification in relation to it. The southern plain of Nepal that lies between the “*pahad*” (the hilly parts) in the north and the Indian provinces of West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttarakhand in east, south, and west is known as *Madhes*, and the residents there are called *Madhesis* (Yadav, 2010). However, the complexities associated with the distinction between them are much larger and go beyond the geographical

differences. I, at this stage in my life, find it difficult to unleash the true identity given how I am at the beginning of the unleashing of my own identity as an individual.

Growing up, I was raised to be a traditional Nepali woman who was strongly influenced by the asymmetrical economic and social power relations at play and the overt stereotype of *Madheshi* women as housewives and child bearers with no decision-making power. Maharjan and Sah (2012) argue that “*Madheshi* women are constrained in terms of mobility, marriage, decisions, and job opportunities due to superstition, belief, and norms of patriarchal society” (p. 120). These constraints left me puzzled with the feeling of “in-betweenness” within me now and then. On July 7, 2015, I wrote the poem “Threshold of my In-Betweenness” to express the confusion I was in. Here is an excerpt:

*Sometimes I am clear,
Sometimes too confused
Amid the confusion and clarity,
there is another me who,
always search a way out to move on
yet to be followed by you*

The “you” in the poem was the metaphorical representation of my identity as a traditional Nepali woman who wants to grow and move ahead but feels bound by her obligations and the responsibilities. A traditional Nepali woman plays multiple roles relevant to her relationships with particular individuals who are taught by the system through the process of socialization to maintain the values of domination and subordination and are given less power (Luitel, 1970). Here, power connotes the personal development and self-respect one has for oneself. Within this social system, I learned to repress my own emotions as a female, especially my anger, taking care to see if I am hurting someone’s feeling 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 caretaker of the family was so vivid that anything done for self-development triggered the feeling of either shame or guilt. The standard gender stereotypes in emotions that women tend to internalize their emotions while men externalize were so strong that I perceived that feelings like anger, aggression, frustration, and irritability were only for men. Salavera et al. (2019) claim that both externalizing and internalizing the emotions are related to “children’s adaptation to their main socialization contexts (family, school, classmates), and they strongly impact adolescents” lives (p. 2).

Growing Up With Shades of Red

My adolescent life was spent being overtly conscious of the social strata I was in. I used to find it hard to articulate the oscillation of my feelings because of my socioeconomic and educational realities. However, the speeches by the Maoist insurgents aptly represented how I felt. Junu Thapa, who was one of the Maoist insurgents in 2002 and was arrested later by the Nepal police, mentioned that she could not afford good education and that being a woman added to her disadvantage, with all the jobs provided to the upper-class

people (Railley, 2015). The Maoist insurgency (1996–2006) or *Jana Yuddha* (people’s war) was a war waged by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) against the “monopolized power by a minority governing elite of Hindu upper-caste Brahmins and Chettri families with co-optation of some Buddhist Newar merchants and Sankritized ethnic Magars” (Manchand, 2004, p. 240). I found women of my neighborhood reconstructing their gender narratives. The striking image of young women guerrilla with huge rifles on their shoulders, defiantly marching along, was alluring to watch every evening. I was surprised to witness those women. Maoist insurgents publicly opposed gender inequality and took a strong stand on holding husbands accountable and liable to punishment for domestic violence against their wives, polygamy, and alcoholism, as well as holding parents responsible for the non-attendance of their daughters in the schools. The reverse of the expression of emotion among women and men was fascinating to watch; women were seen externalizing their anger, and men, externalizing their fear. Meanwhile, the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) came across as the strongest expression of force. The non-cooperative approach of the army toward civilians and their threatening attitude situated them as a foe rather than a friend in the eyes of the locals. A tragic incident happened in my classmate’s family. Her elder brother, who was studying in grade 10, was killed in a bomb blast in his own house. The army personnel declared him a terrorist and brutally harassed my friend in front of the locals. The disgust I felt for the Nepal army, along with the picture of blood that had colored the wall of my friend’s house, has followed me for my lifetime. I and my friends cried the whole evening, holding each other’s hands and repressing our anger. On December 28, 2019, I expressed my repressed anger through a fictional representation of that incident in a story titled “Growing up with the Shades of Red.”

This time the color red disgusted me. I felt like puking because this time I could smell the red and it was pungent. This time the red was vivid and the vividness grew clearer and I could see a group of people with guns interrogating Ramila holding her filthy piece of cloth. I could recognize it was a tattered suttee ko saree. I was sure that must have been her mother’s just like mine because I could see Ramila turning red out of shame. I would have died at the moment if someone had held my sanitary pad like that. Ashamed, Ramila stood there still looking at that dangling piece.

I expressed the disgust that I had felt then on September 17, 2020, through a painting that I also shared, publicly sharing my narrative.



The naked woman inside the veil represents the feeling of shame I felt for being born as a girl and, more significantly, for being harassed and bullied only because I was a girl and being able to do nothing against it. It also represents my feeling that I was no more than a piece of meat for army personnel. Seeing a considerable number of female labor force participants as Maoist cadres displaying their anger in public (Valente, 2013) on the one hand, and being publicly teased and put to shame as a girl by male Nepali soldiers on the other hand, left me confused as to what to consider the truth. Mezirow (2000) argues that “in the absence of fixed truths and confronted with often rapid change in circumstances, we cannot fully trust what we know or believe,” which for me created too much incontestable meaning-making, making me project and resort to psychological mechanisms, especially rationalization, to create imaginary meanings (p. 4).

“I,” the Mechanical Monster

My school did not help me understand or reflect on my feeling of confusion and powerlessness but rather emphasized how I should be focusing on my School Leaving Certificate (SLC) exams, as that would be the only standard to win a job in the competitive job market and be successful and independent. I could completely relate to Malla (2015) when he used 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 (Cottom, 1980, p. 61). As one of the youngest modern education systems in the world and because of the problems of access and equity (Mathema, 2007) as well as “pedagogical displacement,” with almost no attempts to link school learning with community realities, it is “falling under global neo-liberal political agenda of the labor market, [and] parents from rural Nepal understand learning only as securing good exam results and have an overtly romanticized belief on English medium schools” (Wagle et al., 2019, p. 34). Luitel (2009) argued that Nepal lost the opportunity to develop its contextualized curriculum perhaps deliberately or under pressure by falling under the neocolonial global agenda of developed countries to control economically less powerful countries. The Nepali education system for a very long time imitated the Indian education system, which was a type

developed by the British to produce efficient clerks. The cultural interrelationship also comes into play even when it comes to the role of educationists (Malla, 2015). The modern period in education started with the dawn of democracy in 1950, which provided generous freedom for the rapid expansion of education. Many schools opened quickly, without adequate planning. A board of education was appointed in 1951, and much of the educational expansion was highly supported and influenced by American aid with the objective to make democracy a real success in a short period through education (Wood, 1965). It also had the vision to create job-oriented practical education that would produce trained human resources (Sharma, 2003). To achieve this, the supervision of foreign technical experts and global examples were given high importance, implying that a common curriculum standard works for all and overlooking the indigenous injustice in education (Wagle et al., 2019). 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.

Consequently, the new policy was “a complete collapse and a severe deterioration of general education standard” (Sharma, 2003, p. 106). The reinstallation of democracy brought the privatization of schools without proper guidelines and without setting things in order in public schools. The increasing gap in SLC outcomes among public and private schools increased the demand for private schools more, even if they were unaffordable and inaccessible. I, part of the same education system as the private schools, found myself, like a machine, unaware of how to move ahead and kept on waiting for an external force to drive me ahead in life. Thus, I learned that being a leader means being powerful, and being powerful means not failing in academics and thus securing a place in a high-paying job. This is what Mezirow (1991) explains as the “unconscious frame of reference” and clarifies as inherent inequality involved in socialization, adding, “Parents and mentors, who have an identity investment in their own interpretations and values, define a child’s reality, including such fundamentals as ways of recognizing the social threat, relating to authority, reacting to rejection and failure, being competitive, role-playing, and using time responsively” (p. 2).

Roots of My Emotional Awareness

Identifying My Psychological Wall

Because my physical mobility was restricted as an adolescent, mass media, especially television, became my source for gaining knowledge and experience of the outside world. The frequent use of the word “empowerment” in the media helped expand my one-dimensional perspective about “power,” which I had associated with repression, wealth, force, and abuse and which I thought involved a success-failure kind of relationship. For Nepali women, empowerment meant “being vocal and having a right to voice in both formal and informal institutions to enhance participation” (Dahal, 2013, p. 45). The impact of globalization in the Nepali media encouraged the idea that gender equality is possible through the expansion of mobility

and participation of women in economic activities, which was the goal of empowerment (Prajapati, 2008). The idea of the distribution of power between men and women was so fascinating that I started searching for contextual examples of gender equality in my interpersonal relationships and also in the institutions in society. The rise in the number of female journalists after the “people’s war” aroused hope in me. Orgeret et al. (2016) mention that with the establishment of new television and radio stations, the participation of women increased in the newscasting and hosting programs of education, health, and entertainment. The sudden transformation seen in the newsroom culture by widening the definition of news gave me the impression that with mutual support and solidarity, I could also be empowered and could contribute to the transformation of society by reducing social conflict and promoting equitable relationships; being a journalist could help me feel empowered, I anticipated.

After high school, I started working as a journalist, and three years into this career, one day I encountered a situation when I had to report the case of an eighth grader, a teen-aged girl, raped by her own classmates inside her classroom. More than being angry with the culprits about what they had done, I realized that she was going through extreme shame and guilt for failing to live up to the expectations of her family members and not fulfilling her duties as a daughter. The way she was expressing her vulnerability because of not being able to express her pain and her anger toward the boys who were continually harassing and bullying her was something relatable. We go through psychological traumas so often that our minds fight them off by freezing up emotionally, just like numbing as a natural response to physical injury. The psychological walls that we erect as a defense mechanism separate us not only from pain but also from our deepest emotions—which sounds like a good thing for the time being but leads to a long-term destructive pattern of being emotionally anesthetized. If left unchecked, a deep emotional pathology can be passed down through generations, creating an urgent need to learn about emotional awareness and to develop empathy, the ability to feel what others are feeling (Steiner & Perry, 1999).

I found a unique connection between this girl’s situation and my childhood and realized how vulnerable I was who used to feel like a failure for not securing a distinction by a marginal difference or shameful and unconsciously guilty for doing a job that asked me to work night shifts with males opposite to what the society expected out of me. However, not being able to express my true emotions, I used to project anger almost all the time, rationalizing that expressing anger is the ultimate way to feel powerful and that raising my voice was the way to empower myself and others. Anger, for me, 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.

To Break or Not to Break My Psychological Wall

The feeling of powerlessness and the urge for transformation in self and others made me join a teaching fellowship program, which had been initiated to tackle the complex challenges faced by children in disadvantaged communities, that fostered the understanding of teaching as leadership. Through the training and workshops that I received as a fellow, I came to understand the challenges in the Nepali education system. On November 4, 2013, after completing the 42 days of residential training, I reminisced about the training in my diary:

Stone mining was a means of livelihood for the villagers though they knew that it was illegal and risky. During our stay too, a boy lost his life while working there. I heard from the villagers that he was a very talented boy. This made us really unhappy, but from this, we came to see the real side of Nepal where people are bound to do that risky labor.

The daily conversation with the local teachers, parents, and the students slowly hinted that teacher-leaders are those who are “successful at closing the achievement gap” (America & Farr, 2010, p. xii), especially the ones in whose subjects the students passed the SLC exams with the highest grades. Leadership meant being able to set big goals for the students even at times of insurmountable odds, execute them effectively, keep on striving for continual effectiveness, and work relentlessly toward their objective of closing the achievement gap. But the gap seemed unbridgeable for me, teaching in a community where the students had to prioritize working in the fields to solve their everyday hand-to-mouth problems over doing their assignments for school. My students were not progressing academically, making me skeptical about my teaching skills as well as my leadership skills and again causing me to question my feeling of powerlessness as a leader. However, on November 7, 2014, when one of my students came to me with a poem he had written, I realized that I was not the only one who was feeling this way because of the role I was in as a teacher; my students, too, were feeling the same in their role. Here is an excerpt of the poem:

*Someone had said,
student life is a gift but
I say it is only trouble.
I was born intelligent
but education bounded me.*

Palmer (2017, p. 10) writes that “good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher.” For me, my identity and integrity were not about the good teaching techniques that I had acquired but had more to do with my shadows and my limits, my untouched past experiences as a confused schoolgirl, my fear of not getting a distinction on my SLC exam and being considered a failure, and my anger over not being able to enjoy freedom of speech and continually feeling bounded by my society, culture, and education. In that context, integrity for me was the fear of failing, again and again, rejecting the feeling of powerlessness and moving against it by projecting extreme anger. The repeated experience of failure started to become the source of hopelessness on the inside and anger on the outside. Steiner and Perry (1999) call this stage the primal experience, in which the person experiences a verbal barrier, not being able to talk about her emotions, and as a result takes the emotions as disturbing energy. Unaware of the right response, the person undergoes frequent emotional outbursts because of not being able to put her feelings into the right words and express them.

Finding My Hammer

Writing a journal, the mandatory task of the fellowship, helped me cross my verbal barrier by breaking the habitual modes of my thinking and helped me take a step back from an incident or a conversation to reflect on it and return to it with understanding. My diary became a place where I welcomed and encouraged

emotional discourse. In one journal entry, on October 25, 2014, using Progoff's *period log* journaling method (as cited in Lukinsky, 1990), I wrote:

"Sometimes I feel like since I don't have [many] photographs of my childhood, thus I don't have many memories. Maybe with this realization, I always take a photograph of my emotions, whether I am happy or sad, crying or smiling or anything, since the day I loathe the past memories... I just want to live my childhood again, which I know is an unfulfilled fantasy..."

Breaking the verbal barrier takes one into the mode of differentiating why one feels a certain way, while the other does not help them find the interconnections between the experiences and reach the stage of causality. 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. Steiner and Perry (1999, p. 3) 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." 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 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. It also meant that the difficult process of becoming emotionally literate through reflecting on my own learning process slowly 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 finding creative ways to lead those emotions into positive and productive interactions.

Hammering the First Brick

After reflecting on the significance of emotional literacy in my own life, in 2018, I founded the organization My Emotions Matter with the mission of fostering emotional intelligence in Nepal through workshops, courses, coaching, and consulting for individuals, schools, and organizations. Emotional intelligence has helped me discover myself through the practice of self-awareness and critical reflection. As a grown woman, 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 trying to bring a change within me by asking the research question of how I can improve what my work on emotional intelligence in Nepal, I understand that critical reflection on my early realities is important, as is critical self-study of my learning journey itself. Thus, I stepped into my PhD journey with the goal of reflecting on the dynamics that go beyond conscious awareness and bring the role of emotions into discussions of the learning and meaning-making process in transformative learning (Dirkx, 2006) in the context of Nepal.

Conclusion

As I conclude this paper as a self-study researcher, my purpose was to embrace self to provide data and explore my journey of learning through journaling as well other audiovisual narrative expressions. Within all my roles, from being a teacher to being the founder of my organization, and now as a PhD 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. 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. My subjectivities as a child who was brought up in the plains of Nepal during civil strife, a teenager who had an identity crisis, 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 my experiences have given birth to my assumptions and have led to my informed choice of choosing my “self” and my “actions” as the data even for my doctoral studies. Bringing forth my journey of emotional awareness and deconstructing it through a critical lens in my educational setting, I hope to strengthen the capacities for 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. For that, I hope to understand, support, and collaborate with other educational leaders to unravel their own leadership practices themselves through emotional intelligence. This is my way of contributing to the flourishing of humanity.

Bhawana Shrestha is a PhD scholar of educational leadership at Kathmandu University School of Education and is the founder of the education initiative My Emotions Matter in Nepal. She is exploring the answer to her research question of 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. The author’s major fields of

study are emotional intelligence, educational leadership, gender, and reflective practices. You can reach her at bsbhawana830@gmail.com.

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