

Chapter 5

Gender–Equitable Strategies for Teachers’ Continuous Professional Development: A Socio–Cultural Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Equal opportunity for the continuous professional development of female teachers seems insufficient in the schools of Nepal. This chapter explores the gender-equitable strategies to support female teachers for their professional development. This chapter is based on the authors’ lived experiences while facilitating the continuous professional development of school teachers in Nepal. Adapting a socio-cultural perspective of gender and engaging in a co-generative inquiry, the authors make a series of reflections on when/where they encountered gender issues and how they addressed them. This chapter is about how the fluid gender roles of the authors contribute to developing context-responsive gender-equitable strategies for supporting female teachers’ professional development.

A (NEPALI) SOCIO-CULTURAL ALL-INCLUSIVE PERSPECTIVE

Generally, gender is understood as a socially and culturally constructed relationship between men and women those changes over time and place depending on the circumstance (UNESCO, 2015). In Nepal,

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the perception of gender seems primarily limited to physicality, i.e., in connection to fe/male body, biological sex, relationships, and roles. For instance, the concept of thinking is associated with maleness, and feeling (a concept to help operationalize) is associated with femaleness. Likewise, masculinity is associated with men and femininity with women (Belenky & Stanton, 2000). Gender seems limited to the physical entity (or matter) that seems insufficient to address gender inequity, particularly in Nepali teachers' professional development. Equity is a strategy (e.g., including male teachers) intending to support disadvantaged teachers (i.e., females) in creating a safe and harmonious learning environment. In other words, equity is about creating better opportunities for professional learning (or development) and ensuring a harmonious learning environment for female teachers by developing context-responsive gender-equitable strategies.

The purpose of ensuring gender-equitable opportunities was to nurture mutual relationships among male and female (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 2005) teachers and between authors by creating harmonious learning space as/for teachers' professional development. Seemingly, Nepali academic scholars have failed to notice and value sociocultural perspective/s and practices to address gender issues. They have been promoting non-inclusive and non-socio-cultural perspectives. As gender is fluid and culturally co-constructed, Nepal's wisdom traditions do not differentiate gender as binary attributes. Instead, it appreciates gender as masculine-feminine inherent human attributes which are complementary to each other. In the Eastern Wisdom Tradition (EWT), the appreciation of masculine-feminine seems connected to human beings' subtle bodies, which is possible when one can perceive humans as conscious beings beyond physicality. Such nondiscriminatory and all-inclusive ways of perceiving gender supported the authors to rethink gender, gender equity, and gender issues from a socio-cultural post-gender perspective, in an imaginary inclusive way.

The authors believe that gender is arbitrary, and limits human potentiality unnecessarily (Dvorsky & Hughes, 2008). They agree with the notion of post-gender in the Eastern Wisdom Tradition in the form of Ardhanarishwar (see Figure 1), which is an all-inclusive metaphor for living methodology (Dhungana, 2020). The metaphor is akin to an all-inclusive perspective (Taylor et al., 2012) and the pedagogical tactfulness of Van Manen (1991). Such undertakings understand masculine and feminine attributes not in terms of duality but as 'holonic one'. The imaginary gesture of deity unravels the embodied language and experiences (Timalsina, 2021) of gender fluidity and gender roles. According to Mishra (2017) and Iyengar (1992), the union of masculine (i.e., logical way) and feminine (i.e., intuitive way) symbolizes a balanced, harmonious, and liberated life. Here, the logical way is associated not only with men neither is the intuitive way with women. In these undertakings, logical means careful thoughts, slow thinking, and/or reflective mind; intuitive means a carefree emotional (loving and caring) act, fast-thinking, common thinking, and/or pre-reflective mind. All human beings possess logicity and intuitiveness in the form of consciousness. The authors visualized this consciousness using the metaphor of Ardhanarishwar (Shiv-Shakti), the Hindu deity. It is a metaphor for all-inclusive (i.e., logical and intuitive) ways of knowing that interplay and creates synergy and thereby hold the possibility of developing harmonious space.

According to Mishra (2017), "Shiva and Shakti are the personifications of the duality in the existence... It can be called an intuitive and logical aspect of the feminine and masculine nature of an individual... Life is created based on this principle. (p. 38)." Iyengar (1992) and Mishra (2017) brought forth the Eastern Wisdom Traditions of the interplay between masculinity and femininity. The interplay of masculinity and femininity gives rise to harmony. The authors adapted the Eastern concept of 'mind-body interaction' (Telles, 2005). Mind-body interaction refers to the interplay of the two types of attributes: masculine and feminine (*Ida* and *Pingala* in Vedic traditions) or (*yin* and *yang* in Taoism) that all individuals possess

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