

Chapter 9

Transformation Through Participatory Action Research in a Community School of Nepal

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ABSTRACT

A school is a vulnerable place which is easily influenced by different activities that happen inside and outside the school. With the view to improving the quality of education, Rupantaran conducted participatory action research in a community school through creative teaching and learning methods. Transformative learning theory guided this study. The results of this study were observed at three levels: micro, meso, and macro levels. When teachers critically reflected, they had an inner transformation at the micro level. As a result of interventions, the teachers' pedagogy altered at meso level. Macro-level transformation occurred as the result of the intervention at school level. Establishment of gardening, urine-diversion toilets, pig, fish, and mushroom farming are examples of macro-level transformation. This study also discovered that students and instructors have the ability to affect the school community, which was possible through participatory action research. Thus, this study concludes that transformation is hard to achieve, and participatory action research is a means to bring transformation.

INTRODUCTION

Transformative learning is shifting one's perspectives to significantly improve one's own and/or others' lives. In general, knowledge is acquired based on existing knowledge as a foundation. Depending on one's past knowledge and/or the information received, this knowledge acquisition may be false consciousness or a genuine knowledge gain. One judges new information based on their existing expertise/

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knowledge. It is challenging to bring about change when our old information is deeply ingrained within us. When one has weak beliefs, one's past knowledge has less of an impact on the material one learns, which increases the likelihood of transformation. Transformation occurs when one is aware of a fact, information, or false consciousness. Transformation is difficult to achieve when the mind is occupied with particular sets of beliefs and values. Additionally, there is a shift in understanding, which leads to a change in perspective and, ultimately, to transformation.

Adults who are learning restore new information. Adults can also learn through experiences and then reflect on the experiences. While reflecting on the experiences, new information causes unease that brings dilemma, internal debates and finally, metamorphosis happens while adjusting to the new experiences or information. On top of that, it's important to take into account a variety of viewpoints for comprehensive development. In this chapter, we claim three forms of transformation that are based on Habermas's interests. Since the writers are involved in project supervision in addition to performing the research, the focus of this book chapter is to evaluate different kinds of transformation. Thus, this book chapter aims to see the overall effect/transformation brought by Rupantaran in three stages.

BACKGROUND

In 2017, as a joint effort of Kathmandu University, Tribhuvan University and Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Rupantaran, which means transformation, a project was mounted and funded by NORAD. From 2017 to 2023, master's, MPhil, doctoral and post-doctoral fellows conducted participatory action research in several schools of Nepal to bring change in education, health, and livelihood. With the aim to improve the quality of teaching and learning at the basic education level in Nepal, different interventions were done to motivate and capacitate head teachers, teachers and students to improve health and livelihood prospects at the local level. To improve the quality, relevance and sustainability of education in Nepal, the idea of contextualized approach to teaching and learning was used.

Issues

Traditional didactic teaching has been a norm in the classroom where students are told what to learn (Rajbanshi, 2017) without individualized instruction (Cuban, 1984). Teachers in Nepal learned in the traditional didactic method; thus, they follow the traditional way of teaching which is the teacher-centered approach (Ministry of Education and Sports [MOES], 2007), which has been a topic of criticism. Furthermore, the education system demands students to memorize the content and regurgitate during assessments (Jonassen, 1996). Students who depend on rote learning cannot connect what they learned in school to the real-life situation. In the present context, the curriculum of schools in Nepal is not practical and does not address the need of students from different ethnicity and locality (Parajuli & Das, 2013).

Educators need to prepare children as responsible citizens of the future by engaging them in active participation. National Curriculum Framework mentions that a student-centered approach is a way to engage students in learning, which is lacking in schools in Nepal (MOES, 2007). Thus, there is a need for teachers to learn new teaching strategies and reflect on their teaching practice (National Research Council, 1996). Looking at these issues of teaching and learning, intervention in education seems important and thus, this study was conducted involving teachers in participatory action research for developing effective intervention (Xia et al., 2016), and bringing change in education.

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