Teaching Moral Literacy through Critical Pedagogical Bricolage: A Co-constructed Auto-Ethnography of an Educational Leadership Program

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Abstract

In this collaborative auto-ethnographical inquiry, two developing scholar–practitioner educational leaders explore the notion of moral literacy through a lens of critical pedagogical bricolage. This study aims to reveal certain experiences of two doctoral candidates engaged in an educational doctorate, contemplating their identities as emergent leaders from diverse backgrounds. By approaching this inquiry from a qualitative and strictly post-positivist understanding of research, we aim to present critical components of our program and the literature presented in that program that led to our understanding of moral literacy's role in theoretical and pragmatic provinces of educational leadership. Our analysis is presented in three themes: transformation of the candidate through the teaching of moral literacy, consideration of the interplay between local identity and moral literacy, and the potential of bricolage (or critical pedagogical bricolage) as a catalyst for teaching moral literacy.

Keywords

Auto-Ethnography, Bricolage, Critical Pedagogy, Educational Leadership, Moral Literacy, Scholar–Practitionership

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In this collaborative auto-ethnographical inquiry, two developing scholar–practitioner educational leaders explore the notion of moral literacy through a lens of critical pedagogical bricolage. This study aims to reveal certain experiences of two doctoral candidates engaged in an educational doctorate, contemplating their identities as emergent leaders from diverse backgrounds. By approaching this inquiry from a qualitative and strictly post-positivist understanding of research, we aim to present critical components of our program and the literature presented in that program that led to our understanding of moral literacy's role in theoretical and pragmatic provinces of educational leadership. Our analysis is presented in three themes: transformation of the candidate through the teaching of moral literacy, consideration of the interplay between local identity and moral literacy, and the potential of bricolage (or critical pedagogical bricolage) as a catalyst for teaching moral literacy. Keywords: Auto-Ethnography, Bricolage, Critical Pedagogy, Educational Leadership, Moral Literacy, Scholar–Practitionership

Educational leaders have to make several decisions each day directly or indirectly related to the student learning. To do so the moral literacy of an educational leader becomes something of consequence. Leaders must recognize ethical dilemmas from the countless routine concerns that they face throughout their often-fragmented schedules. Through deliberation or engaging their moral imagination they must draw critical conclusions based on experiential and observational data collected and analyzed from the bound but likely multicultural surroundings. Starratt (2005) suggests that school leaders should "ensure that the structures and procedures that support and channel the learning process reflect a concern for justice and fairness for all students, while providing room for creativity and imagination" (p. 127). Starratt (2005) employed key terms—structure, process, support, channel, justice, and fairness—that implicate high ethical demands on the leader's moral being.

What knowledge, dispositions, and competencies ensure commitment to these key requirements for practice? Are current leaders aware of and prepared for the demands of these factors? Probably most importantly, how do leaders develop these skills and competencies? What sorts of activities are most conducive to the strengthening of moral literacy in preparation and in practice? The implied range of concepts and concerns requires an eclectic approach to leadership—a *bricolage*. Discussion on preparation and practice invites a consideration of a philosophical, critical, and pragmatic engagement of students and their faculty. Traditional pedagogical practices arguably lack the complexity to address the implicit and nuanced needs of the 21st century.

To forward learning in an era of uncertainty we suggest a leadership preparation and practice rooted in moral literacy as a *pedagogical bricolage* (Praitis, 2006). Pedagogical

bricolage represents a nonlinear multifaceted educational practice founded on critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1988; Kincheloe, 2011; Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). Tuana (2007) argued that moral literacy is a complex and multifaceted process. Tuana put forth three principal components of moral literacy: ethical sensitivity, ethical reasoning skills, and moral imagination. Providing a pedagogical framework for moral literacy teaching and learning in teacher/leader development programs, Leonard (2007) discussed three additional requisites for teacher and leader candidates: attitude formation, attitude adjustment, and attitude alignment. Leonard (2007) asked teacher and leader educator programs to engage candidates in authentic learning to make connections between theory, research, and practice through cultural dialogue and critical (self)reflection.

Tuana (2007) affirmed that moral literacy engages through the pedagogical technique of using of narratives and stories (p. 375). Regarding the pedagogical environment of moral literacy teaching, Zdenek and Schochor (2007) stated, "teachers must do more than simply provide opportunities for moral dissonance to foster moral development in students" (p. 520). Couched in these ideas we see the occasion of a co-created and self-reflective narrative process of auto-ethnography as a means to inquire into the concept of moral literacy in a foundations of ethics and philosophy course of an educational leadership doctorate program.

Background of the Study

At respective times the researchers found themselves engaged in a moral philosophy class that did not provide solutions or readymade answers. Instead the course presented readings and questions that created a complexity and depth of concern causing every cell of the learners' brain to vibrate. This educational doctorate class began with philosophical questions such as those Jenlink (2014) posited: "What makes a moral person moral? Who decides what morality means? What makes leadership practice moral? In today's schools, what stands as moral leadership?" (p. 1). These questions among many other such questions introduced the learners to a type of phenomenological intentionality. Throughout the course, students continued to struggle to find the answers of the question put forward. Did they find the answers at the end? If so, how did they arrive at their conclusions? Were those answers practical or did they only generate more philosophical queries? Were the doctoral students able to present themselves as a new person, as a moral being? Were they able to explain the transformation? The pedagogical process, which was highly critical, challenging, and evolving, was the summative reflection of the program participants. For us as researchers, this formed a means to inquire into the concept of moral literacy presented in a course on the foundations of ethics and philosophy in an educational leadership doctorate program.

Research Questions

As a co-constructed auto-ethnography this study will aim particularly answer the following questions.

1. How did we experience the transformation of our identity through moral literacy during our doctoral program class?
2. What role did our local identity play in learning the concepts and ideals of moral literacy?
3. What role did pedagogical practices play in teaching and learning moral literacy and shaping our morally literate identity?

Within the conceptualization of moral literacy as a type of critical pedagogical bricolage we saw the occasion to engage in a co-created and self-reflective narrative process of auto-ethnography from the perspectives of two diverse cultures—one Eastern, one Western. We considered the activity of a collaborative autoethnographic inquiry as a necessity first and foremost to our development as leaders; secondly it was as a means to enhance our research into the nature and needs of educational leadership as praxis or scholar–practitionership. Finally we desired to understand better how our cultural background and upbringing might underscore our ideals of educational leadership preparation, if at all. For these reasons we as researcher/participants undertook this study as an autoethnographic project (Chang, 2008; Denzin, 2014; Ellis, 2004).

As doctoral students in the same program at different times, we were challenged to consider our moral selves and what it meant to be ethically sensitive in the face of dilemmas. As individuals newly charged with the preparation of future educational leaders, we saw *coming to terms* with our experiences of becoming morally literate—both at the personal and professional level. Our respective positions as assistant professors of educational administration and leadership at the master's and doctoral level places on us the onus of being authentic, ethical, and empathetic mentors to a number of aspiring leaders. By engaging in this collaborative inquiry we saw it as an invaluable exercise in translating our past experiences as school administrators and our learning as doctoral students into teaching that potentially has meaning for those candidates.

Methodology

Co-constructed narratives (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Kempster & Stewart, 2010) are used as data. As authors (Chang, 2008; Denzin, 2014; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000) say about auto-ethnography, this project was designed to reflectively examine the cultural experiences of two students from two different cultures, one from Nepal and other from the U.S., in a doctoral class in the United States. The study also wanted paint the picture of the pedagogy of teaching moral literacy in a doctoral program. The research began with authors who attended the same doctoral program in two years apart, writing experiential and cultural narratives.

Individually each author created an auto-ethnographic narrative, later they put their reflective and reflexive texts together. Each of the researchers first read the narratives of the next author. After revisiting the narratives, both the participant-researchers started to look for the common themes from their narratives. The authors discussed and dialogued about the sections of their narratives and the implied meaning of those narratives. This dialogue made them able to produce another layer of interpretation of their personal experiences. The thematic narratives were later analyzed using the lens of critical pedagogical bricolage, which was defined and discussed in theoretical framework. Sitting together and critically questioning one another's experiences and developing interpretative discussion, authors were able to grow together in the environment of meaningful dialogue. Hence this research did not only produce an academic output but also helped us as researchers to transform to become critically reflective educators. Each set of the narratives presented under our individual name is personal and solely represent our individual experiences. After the intercultural dialogue of understanding our narratives with one another, we collectively were able to explain the process of moral literacy teaching in critical pedagogical environment. Through our dialogue we created the themes. The research process we followed was similar to that Ellis (2004) talks about when she stated,

> Back and forth auto-ethnographers gaze. First they look through an
> ethnographic wide angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects
> of their personal experience and then they look inward, exposing a vulnerable

self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations. (p. 37)

Each of us encountered difficulties in putting our *personal selves* into the social context of the class. However we aspired to do so. Writing explicitly about our personal experiences of a class and analyzing those experiences combining with one other's similar experience was an engaging process. We chose the co-constructed interpretative auto-ethnography with an intention of contributing to the existing research. Doing so, we were ready to disclose the readers our authentic voice and interpretation. We were highly aware about the vulnerability that this type of research casts on the researchers and the research environment. We were equally aware that once our personal experiences reach the public, while exposing vulnerability, could serve to generate more dialogues about the topic. As Jones, Adams, and Ellis (2013) acknowledged, we wanted to generate questions in the readers' minds, creating a mutual relationship with readers by compelling them to respond.

Being students of a moral philosophy class, which was based on the philosophy of scholar-practitionership (Jenlink, 2001), we felt a mutual responsibility to bring the pedagogy implemented in this transformative class into the academic circle. In this sense, we were engaged in a political undertaking. According to Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2010), auto-ethnography is "a political, socially-just and socially conscious act" (para. 9), which allowed us as researchers to tell the story of our own experiences. Examining our own experiences (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), we were promoting and perpetuating a tradition of research that Richardson (2000) called "creative analytic practices" (p. 927). As Auto-ethnographers we made ourselves free from the conventional writing formats and norms that traditional conventions have prescribed (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Schoepflin, 2009). Denzin (2014) would call this process a creative, performative, critical, reflective and reflexive one.

Co-Constructed Narratives

Co-constructed narratives (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Kempster & Stewart, 2010) form the core of this study. Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2010) explained the role of doing auto-ethnography as:

> Co-constructed narratives [that] illustrate the meanings of relational experiences, particularly how people collaboratively cope with the ambiguities, uncertainties, and contradictions of being friends, family, and/or intimate partners. Co-constructed narratives view relationships as jointly-authored, incomplete, and historically situated affairs. Joint activity structures co-constructed research projects. Often told about or around an epiphany, each person first writes her or his experience, and then shares and reacts to the story the other wrote at the same time. (Para. 23)

Making the practice of conducting auto-ethnographic study more liberating Ellis et al. (2011) argued that auto-ethnographers must not limit themselves in the boundaries of traditional methodological literatures but it should transcend to create more engaging ways of presenting the experiences which should allow readers, both insiders and outsiders, to understand the culture. This study has tried, as Ellis et al. (2011) explained, to justify the intentionality of auto-ethnography. We as participant-researchers/auto-ethnographers acknowledged, "not only are there ethical questions about doing auto-ethnography but also that auto-ethnography itself is an ethical practice" (Ellis, 2007, p. 26). We have maintained the narrative ethics (Adams, 2008), and hope our study will not harm anybody. However,

traditional ethical practice of fully concealing the participant is not possible in autoethnography.

Adhering to a postpositivist epistemology we view auto-ethnography as a means of breaking with traditional research and addressing the quality of inquiry differently (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Throughout the research process, we strived to maintain the integrity of our personal narratives, our analytical narratives, and collaboratively constructed story of our cultural experiences. Authenticity was an objective, desiring to put forward our personal heuristics concerning the happenings and circumstances of the moral philosophy/literacy class in our doctoral program. In our minds not only did our personal cultural upbringing play a part in what stands out in our auto-observations, but also the cultural aspects of the cohort activities and the classroom assignments were equally important. Therefore, our inquiry was as much learning as experiencing, as much writing the narratives as living them (Richardson, 2000). In other words, following a particular pre-established research protocol was not allowed to become a constraint.

In the second stage of this research, we developed both independently and collaboratively a critical dialogue regarding our own narratives. One of us would initiate a reflective passage similar to journaling, engaging his memory, considering the potential of the experience or challenge upon which he reflected; the other would likewise engage in a similar activity. We then shared our writing with one another. After reading each other's narrative, we provided the other with thoughts on what the writing meant and/or what it *could* mean to others. We viewed this as a democratic process, valuing one another's input and interpretations of our own and each other's auto-observations.

As a third step we delineated the common themes from our culturally bound narratives as informed by our original research questions. These themes were aspects that we viewed as being common in our respective passages and writing. We agreed upon the concept of transformation through moral literacy, our shared understanding of the relevance of what we called local identity, and our common commitment to the idea of bricolage. We equally hoped that the readers, if they go through a process as we went, would have "a feeling that the experience described is life-like, believable, and possible" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 751) that would make this study more trustworthy.

Autoethnography Evolved

Chet's auto-observations. It was the first day of the class. I was entering into a moral ground of defining and understanding different pedagogical situations which I have experienced, and which might have shaped my morality since it was the first of its type. It was the first formal class of moral philosophy in my entire academic life. Various questions what professor dropped on the floor on that day were related to the moral literacy. What is your moral foundation? What makes a moral person moral (Jenlink, 2014)? What are the characteristics of a moral person? What role should one play to make a moral decision? The questions compelled me to look inward. When I tried to reflect upon my own interior self (Starratt, 2003), I was compelled to dissect the pedagogical context in which I grew up, which framed my morality and shaped my moral and ethical self. My journey produced a question, how am I growing as a moral and ethical leader? I was asked to define morality. However, I felt very hard to define the morality, I was blank.

As a student of "scholar–practitioner leadership" preparation program, I was supposed to understand my own moral and ethical foundation. I got informed by the texts, but until and unless I practice them, I was not able to call myself a moral practitioner. In the very beginning of doctoral class, I was challenged to connect my practice with the theory or translate my

theoretical understanding into practice. I noticed that to become a moral leader as a scholar-practitioner needed theoretical understanding and practical applications of moral theories.

On this quest of exploring literacy I was exposed to a pedagogical environment, which used a bricolage of democratic, critical, critical reflective, and critical self-reflective approaches in the class. We went beyond the dominant discourse and also embraced or tried to understand and use of hidden approaches like indigenous pedagogies. Throughout the process my major focus became reflecting upon my own development as a moral person and exploring my own moral identity through critical self-reflection. I found critical pedagogy as a way of moral literacy teaching.

In this critical pedagogical environment, there were critical readings, reflective times, moral conundrums to solve, biographical writing assignments, peer critique sessions, presentations followed by critical discussions, and opportunities of using diverse media like poetics, aesthetics etc. to present, illustrate, or deconstruct moral dilemmas that occur in educational and social world. We were constantly challenged by our professor(s) to define and redefine the educational and social world as a moral architecture (Jenlink, 2014).

I started to experience a growth within me. What remained unchanged was respecting others, working hard, and being the "true you." Another aspect became prevalent to me was communicate, or dialogue. As in one of the assigned readings, Giroux (2007) argued "pedagogy must be understood as central to any discourse about academic freedom, but, more importantly, it must be understood as the most crucial referent we have for understanding politics and defending the university as one of the very few remaining democratic public spheres" (para. xii). I experienced a critical pedagogical environment at SFA. It became important for shaping my authentic and moral self, who I am today as a moral being.

When I talk about the critical pedagogical environment, I do not forget to acknowledge the bricolage of the pedagogies we were introduced to. There was democracy, there was respect, there were critical moments, and there were uncomfortable choices full of moral dilemmas. In the very first class of mine at SFA I tried to introduce myself as open-minded learner. When my friends asked me about my religion, I said that I was born in a Hindu family and am inspired my Buddhism. On the same day, I told that I respect all the religions, and I am ready to talk about all the good aspects of them. Later I started to reflect, what was the meaning of "good" aspect?

As an international student I had seen the discriminations based upon caste and religion. As I grew up in an all colored world, I was not race conscious. However, I was gradually entering into the world, which was full of racial discourses. I started to deconstruct the caste system where I was born and raised. Critical discourse in race that occurred in our class had provided me a critical lens. The critical discussions in the class about race, religion, economic status, immigration status made me aware of the privileges I was enjoying as a dominant caste male member of my cultural world in Nepal. The dialogues about race, ethnicity, privilege, culture, etc., supported me a lot to develop cultural awareness. I gradually grew to appreciate critical spirituality (Dantley, 2003), as a moral path of knowing the world.

The critical dialogues in the doctoral class challenged me several times. Sometimes the critical discussion even created tensions among and between members of the same learning community. In a class where critical pedagogy was in real practice, we as students used to get opportunities to engage in critical dialogue about the world and ourselves and we also shared such thoughts in a collective forum like cohorts (McDougall, Holden, & Danaher, 2012). The pedagogical environment or the process was encouraging students to adopt the mode of thinking and reasoning. This encouragement teaches the students to increase the appreciation of knowledge construction. Similarly, critical pedagogy curriculum contains the places where students can reflect upon their personal values and belief systems, this opportunity finally guides towards to new product of educational program. In the first year I personally felt several

such occasions (McDougall et al., 2012). The reflective nature of assignments and critical nature of class discussions helped me to see the world from different perspective. Most importantly, I was forced get out of my comfort zone, prior suppositions, and superficial arguments and self-serving internal motive.

Exposure to the work of Spring (2008) was the point at which questions began to lead to even more questions. How do we develop the moral capacity? Is this capacity affected by time, place, and surroundings? Is morality a relative concept or it is unchangeable? When I started to think about these questions, there were several answers on the floor. I soon came to the tentative conclusion, that the culture might define moral value or morality in local setting however, a common ground for all the moral tasks was the humanity (Spring, 2008). I again asked myself: Did I already have the human virtue or did Spring (2008) cultivate it? I credited to the critical pedagogical bricolage for supporting me to find a backup for my moral identity. I realized that I was close to Spring (2008) to grasp the meaning of morality. I started to feel that I was gradually becoming literate on moral phenomenon.

I started to recreate a definition of morality for me. For me morality at this point became respecting the earth and the environment, human rights as well as human life, valuing diversity, respecting others culture, be involve with others etc. Should my own definition of morality be fit for all? I started to question [everything]. Obviously, the answer was negative. What should be the characters of a moral leader? Should not this leader be open, flexible, critical, and effective? What will be the way of assessing the moral dimension of leadership? Days started to get messier with more questions related to moral aspect of leadership and life.

Learning about the moral literacy now became a biographical process rather than becoming informed by others. A simple truth started to strike. My decisions about an issue as a moral person should be the same whether the decision will impact the other or me. In one of the classes, I reflected upon private schools of Nepal. There was a moral question, whether or all the private schools of Nepal would be closed forever or not? These schools were on the reach of very few. Most of the students who go to these schools grow in an English environment. They are mostly the children of socially and economically advantaged class of Nepal. They would occupy the center of politics, jobs, and the society. Fullan (2003) had also notated that flight to private schooling "this would be a challenge to social cohesion and a prelude to growing inequality (p. 4). I started to ask myself, would it be a moral decision to close all the private schools? Will it be ok to let the poor people or minorities never reach to the center of the politics, job world, or the society? How do leaders be effective in the uncertain times like the present? Collins (2005) suggested commitment, vision, humility, and professional will as solutions. The class provided opportunities and challenges to reflect upon hard questions.

The inward journey continued. In one of the reflective accounts for the class assignment, I wrote, "As a moral leader, how do I give followers an opportunity to express their feelings and voices? Can I be enough self-critical to provide autonomy and influence of other members over decision-making? I have some questions playing in my head. How do I empower the people who work with me or work for me? How to give greater emphasis upon moral values, moral decision-making? As a leader how do I ensure overall well-being of my co-workers? I need a higher level of thinking and higher level of performance to be a more ethical leader in future." I noticed, I was growing, and I was willing to let others grow.

The Ed.D. at my university I did not only use critical pedagogy in the class, it also took us to the depth of our own selves in our outside lives. I was introduced with the terms like moral intensity and moral imagination (Tuana, 2007). The study was not always simple. I framed several questions and discussed those questions in the class. How to understand the moral intensity of a situation in a complex, multicultural, and diverse community?

There were some other texts that informed exactly how scholar-practitioners show moral behaviors. One example, Zdenek and Schochor (2007), put huge emphasis on the need of moral literacy in schools. Zdenek and Schochor (2007) said, "While teachers do not necessarily have to become scholars in the area of moral literacy or moral education, they must be well versed in developing environments in which their students grow in moral ways" (p. 520). The texts again demanded a critical educator, a critical pedagogy, and critical consciousness. Branson (2007) suggested a process of moral leadership development through exploration of authentic inner self. Branson (2007) added, "the more self-knowledge a person has of their inner Self then the more detached from that Self they become . . . the more they can transcend their innate personal desires in order to consider what is in the best interests of others" (p. 487).

The content advocated the reflective pedagogy, which finally leads to critical consciousness. I was experiencing the same in the doctoral class. Starratt (2005) mentioned a more critical observation of the traditional learning and said, "This form of learning is posed learning, phony, fake, superficial learning. Indeed, this learning is morally harmful (p. 402). I was noticing that moral leadership lessons forced us to re-assess our own moral compass.

We often heard the voices in our cohort discussions. We no longer wanted to silence ourselves or others. Is this transformation possible in all other programs? If yes, it is good. We own the critical dialogue as our pedagogy. If this dialogue should occur in every classroom, schools to universities. It would transform all involved. I was aware that I needed to advocate pedagogical transformation and that was a moral responsibility as well as moral act.

The more we advanced in the class, the more we started to ask important moral and ethical questions. The most important question became how do we define and redefine our own moral and ethical Self. I was continuously building my moral and ethical leader identity. I was installing the curiosity of a scholar and action of practitioner in my life as a scholar-practitioner. Reflecting upon a particular period of Nepalese educational awakening, I started an assignment with my childhood memories. I observed the moral responsibility of the people of my father's generation to build schools for future generations. Why did they serve selflessly to build schools in those remote villages? What was the inner guiding force? My father always told me the story of the school where I started my elementary education. I found a teachers and leaders in the personalities of these people. Nepalese villages started to experience schools from 1950s only. The stories my father told to me about the establishment of new schools in Nepal were the first lessons that cultivated the passion in me to serve the educational world. I found this educator a powerful teacher of morality in my life. If I have got some service leadership quality, it originates to the historical needs of the schools before I was born. The pedagogy I encountered with was the local pedagogy. I named it the pedagogy of nowhere. It was the process of storytelling. I would propose a story telling or visualizing of the story and critical reflection on those as pedagogy of moral leadership development.

There were some more critical questions to ask. These questions were founded on my childhood, middle school, high school, college, and university experiences. Does best content ensure learning? Does learning need a prescribed curriculum? How do we minimize the oppression of text, culture, language, and ability in education? Where is the place of learning process? Which one is more important: the right process or the desired product? Whose desire defines the product as a desired product? To have a better process a better content may require. How do we determine the particular learning content? How does the politics of content look like?

In schools worksheets replace lectures, whiteboards replace chalkboards, and silence replaces discrimination. Is this the only change we are looking for? How should education look like tomorrow? Is not it the moral responsibility of school leaders to actively imagine and project the moral and ethical future generation? How do we encourage the present generation

to be able to create better than past generation did? After all they are facing more global challenges than we did.

The future generation need to save the earth and save the huge population of human being. Enormous challenge is there ahead. How do we support them to like the neighborhood where you find 100 different cultures and dozens of face colors and shapes? Are our kids engaged authentically? Are they questioning them that who they are? Are they feeling safe and secure in the schools? Are they able to walk up to the school? Are our kids in different part of the globe eating well? Do they have schools? Do they have teacher or good teachers? We can blame indoor classes for defining formal or school learning as an indoor activity. How do we teach the "real world" phenomenon? How do we address the indigenous knowledge and practices? How do we include them in our lives? How do we decide what matter has to be changed? A moral and ethical question here is how we as educators support the more happier, prosperous, safe, and caring world. The questions started to rule my brain. Did I have answers? Did my professor have a confident answer? Did my friends have a definite answer? The only answer was "No," nobody has.

The contact of students with some fantastic creations of information technology, have changed the lives of the developed world. This phenomenon is gradually reaching to the cities of developing world too. Is sitting on the couch and playing videogame for six to eight hours a day is the life this child deserved? What else was possible in prosperous life of this kid? How do these kids innovate the technologies to save the world? How do these kids behave in the real world? What will happen to the future of the world is people completely get isolated and individualized? How do we support the emotional need of the kid in the school and the family? What will happen to the world if people became extremely selfish and self-fulfilling only? What will happen to the human kind if we use the weapons of mass destruction in the biggest cities in the world? Are we creating critical understanding on these students on these big issues? What will happen to the human brain, if the computer does all the thinking? Have we stimulated and challenged our kids to use their brain? Where is our moral courage and moral sensitivity? At the end we started to deconstruct such and many other questions. We did not have prescriptive answers, but I felt that I was becoming morally literate day by day.

Chuck's auto-observations. I entered the doctorate program looking for answers. At the time I was a new principal of a struggling elementary campus—"struggling," that is, by district standards. The state had rated us "Recognized," which meant "Not Exemplary" in the eyes of my then superintendent. My issue was not necessarily the rating or that we were not an "Exemplary" campus; my problem was with the reason why we were not exemplary. Over and over, year after year the campus had failed to see a significant percentage of Latino and African American children meet standard on state assessments. My hope was to find an answer and ultimately a solution to this problem in my doctoral studies.

At the time I had only been in my second year of being a principal with only five years total in any administrative role. For me, this meant I had no aspirations of becoming a superintendent (although I had already completed a superintendent program at another nearby university). The doctoral program was more about finding a path to what I perceived to be current success and not so much about professional trajectory. Notwithstanding it was an apparent "next step" as an educational leader.

I had not decided to enroll in the doc program until just a few months before it started. I had "underachieving" students and test scores on my mind—I was concerned at first about pursuing a terminal degree. Nevertheless, summer arrived and I found myself in the first doc class with a cohort of other seekers of knowledge. Before me was the 3-inch 3-ring binder I had brought with me to class. Contained within its vinyl covers are a plethora of instructor-selected readings—unfamiliar authors and articles that I had never read or even heard of in my teacher or principal prep courses. These photocopied texts are divided into various topical

sections—*Scholar–Practitioner Perspectives, Democratic Perspectives, Critical Pragmatic Perspectives, Cultural Perspectives, Postmodern Perspectives, Social Justice Perspectives,* and *Authentic Leadership Perspectives*. The course is titled *Connecting Leadership Theory to Practice*, and judging by the looks on the faces of fellow strangers, I am not the only one who feels overwhelmed and out of place in that moment.

Over time our discussions would evolve into passionate and professional dialogues over the topics of the reading packet as well as issues of epistemologies, aesthetics, praxis, culturally relevant and critical race pedagogies, the role of metaphor and memory in leadership, reflection and reflexivity, *bricolage*, and moral dispositions. However, while our ability to wield big words and make our writing hold currency did evolve and improve, it would take the entirety of our terminal program's course before I would begin to synthesize the impact that my experience had had on me as a scholar–practitioner educational leader. Through the pedagogical *bricolage* of study and theoretical frameworks and research paradigms, personal reflection in scholarship and professional reflection in practice, contemplation of moral dispositions in leadership, I was learning to do what Freire called *reading the world*.

I had come to seek answers; instead I encountered questions layered upon questions. My ideals and values, such as my concept of a Protestant work ethic—something my East Texas community had instilled in me from an early age—did not align to the varying concepts of democracy. For government, all was well and good, but in communities and schools there was a structure in place. Nor did my ideas about behavior and discipline—most likely attached to my work ethic—line up well to readings that introduced Freirean and Foucauldian thought. But most evident was realizing how much the *plantation ecology* of the culture I had grown up in had managed to institutionalize prejudices and racism in the businesses and schools I had always known. Even the way in which discipline was administered and how control was manifested in many teaching and testing settings reeked of it. Whether I liked it or not Freire was giving a label and a language to the oppression I had many times witnessed firsthand; Foucault was naming the apparatus.

My intention had been to find knowledge; instead I discovered the depths of my own ignorance and biases. One particular course brought this personal struggle to the forefront in a way that others did not—*Inquiry into the Foundations of Ethics and Philosophy of School Leaders*. In this course, we read Dewey's *Democracy and Education* and were introduced to Joel Spring's *Wheels in the Head* and Rachels' *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. We explored Michael Dantley's and Alven M. Neiman's concepts of critical spirituality, contemplated Eugenie Samier's "moral implications of doing nothing" as the passive evil in educational administration, and delved into Kathleen Knight Abowitz' "Moral Perception through Aesthetics: Engaging Imaginations in Educational Ethics" and Jerry Starratt's "Cultivating the Moral Character of Learning and Teaching."

There were other texts—numerous. Albeit, these—those enumerated in the previous paragraph—really hold their own place in my memory even now. These made me question myself both as a school principal and as a person—as a citizen in a free democratic society. Practices and policies in my district—at that time my *home* district (where I myself had gone to school, graduated, worked, went to college, and stayed to teach)—were called into scrutiny.

Starratt (2005) challenged me to question how I would "address a neglected dimension of [my] work, namely the cultivation of the moral character of learning and teaching" (p. 399). Abowitz (2007) lead to the formation of new questions with statements such as "Moral perception and imagination are central components of moral decision making and the actions we take as educators; however these constructs have not occupied a central place in the pedagogy of educational ethics" (p. 288). Spring (2008) pushed me to consider the history and purpose of educational systems; and, Rachels (2009) guided me in a deeper understanding of how *Others* view the world.

Likewise, Dantley and Neiman gave me pause to consider my spiritual self—my beliefs, my principles, my relationship with God and how that governs and guides my relationship with my fellow human beings and the world, and helped me value of *the divine* (i.e., *the spiritual*) over *the religious* (i.e., *the dogmatic*). In the process, some would argue that my foundational beliefs and fundamental values were compromised. Conversely, I argue that my foundational beliefs and fundamental values were clarified and contextualized, even strengthened, and as a result I found value *and* morality in the work of school leadership.

Engaging in assignments intended to connect theory and practice, in activities meant to interrogate the ethical and philosophical grounds of school leadership and policy I found a new problem. This was an ever-probing mind—an unremitting criticality of all things political, all things oppressive, and all things speculative. I began to understand the reasons school boards put certain policies in place when those policies only have an impact on certain student populations; I started to interpret more clearly the actions of discipline and discourses of punishment in the language of certain superintendents and other school officials—especially in my own behaviors and language. This did nothing to make my work more enjoyable. In fact, for me, school leadership became more arduous—I felt weighted under the pressure of obligation to a social justice I could not achieve and a democratic effort that I could not guarantee.

I had found the answer to the question I had originally asked. However it was an answer that I did not like. I realized that the perceived achievement gap—if such a "gap" exists—found its definition in an unfair measure. Yet a culturally constructed plumb line that has a golden plummet defines the gap. I recognized that the performance of many disenfranchised students was not due to ability but to access; in fact it hinged on systemic issues and socio-economic problems that perpetuated a predestined missing of the mark—i.e. "met standard"—that those that draw the margins put in place. The system—society—has removed, and still removes, the resources needed for an equitable start. If an achievement gap actually exists it has been established long before any child sets foot on the schoolhouse steps. Therefore if educators and policy makers are to care, if they truly seek equity and believe in equality, our efforts cannot wait until pre-k or kindergarten. My answer, while I did find an answer, did not give me what I wanted. I wanted a sure method—a best practice—to fix the problem. I had to acknowledge that what I had wanted was selfish and paternalistic.

Most importantly, the consideration of the tensions between power/privilege and otherness/oppression brought to my attention certain ethical dilemmas that I did not readily see before. The challenge of being an instructional leader and truly—authentically—listening to each and every voice that breached my office threshold became more problematic than democratic. I had always envisioned myself as a leader that would "rally the troops," someone who would build consensus. But what happens when the troops are not concerned with equity and justice? What happens when the consensus refuses to see—or simply is unable to see—the moral decision that should be made?

As an educational leader I was beginning to see that my role as student advocate, my recognition of my responsibility as an agent of change, was not always going to get me nominated educator of the year. Reading the situations and scenarios in my environs was becoming a new habit—and the questions that I formed as I read this "new text" led me to see issues that I did not always want to admit existed. The more I read, the more I asked, the more I asked, the more I became aware of the privilege and prejudice that were at play.

My acknowledgement of privilege and prejudice left me powerless. I was forcing myself to look at the relationships that had defined my life and think critically about what those relationships had meant then and now. Nevertheless I was fueled with a newfound hope to empower others and see others liberate themselves—just as my professor in the doc courses had not given us any answers, only posited queries to which we spent hours debating and

discussing until we made meaning for ourselves. My answer in turn had given me a new question. How to prepare others for a medley of paradigms and perspectives to be able to read the world and then lead a change for the world—to repair the world—was my new question. How could I engage other leaders and aspiring leaders in learning as I myself had been engaged? What dispositions had been developed in me to enable me to read the world? What had developed in me as an authentic dedication to stand in the gap as morally critical pedagogue and ethically sensitive bricoleur? That is a question to which I am still seeking the answer.

Discussion

Taking this class in ethical foundations of philosophy as doctoral students in an educational leadership program we gradually evolved as morally literate doctoral candidates and educational leaders. Through critical self-reflection, critical cultural dialogues, and the problematizing of moral dilemma cases we were challenged to synthesize a new critical pedagogical vehicle of moral literacy (Jenlink, 2014) for teaching, learning, and leading. One of us being a native of Nepal and the other from the United States we were members of the same doctoral program but in different cohorts. One possessed a primarily Western cultural upbringing—as many Westerners, "looking for answers"—and the other was raised with an Eastern heritage—whose "journey produced a question." Both had very distinct local moral identities when we entered the program. Being the first international student to enroll in the program, one of us was "the first of [his] type"; the other was from the university community with East Texas values and "a Protestant work ethic."

However, upon completing the moral philosophy class, we had each witnessed a very similar self-realization, and we experienced a more expanded and global moral identity. While our cultural identities—that of an individualized society as opposed to a collective one—had played a role in how we made sense of things we also found that the end results were not dissimilar. Analysis of the development of our identity as expressed in our narratives serves to explore the questions that drive this study. In alignment with our research questions this analysis is presented as (1) transformation through moral literacy, (2) local identity and moral literacy, and (3) bricolage as critical teaching for moral literacy.

Transformation through moral literacy. According to Jenlink (2014), moral literacy requires an enabling presence, "cultivating positive change and building positive foundations. . . . [It] can lead to happiness and transformation in one's life and practice and the educational setting, respectively" (p. 42). The philosophy of the doctoral program course was grounded in transformative critical pedagogy. According to Cho (2010) critical pedagogy focuses on the relationship between knowledge and power. Cho (2010) further extended that "by asserting that knowledge is intrinsically interwoven with power, critical pedagogy adamantly and steadfastly dismisses the mainstream assumption of knowledge as objective and neutral" (p. 311). For Giroux (1997) to transform a "language of critique" into a "language of possibility" (p. 108) is the major roles of critical pedagogy. The concept of the scholar-practitioner in our doctoral program operationalized leadership development through both criticality and hope. Cho (2010) argued, "Critical pedagogists attempt to develop not only a pedagogy of critique, but also to build a pedagogy of hope" (p. 310).

In fact, we were both unable to find a fixed prescriptive definition of morality. There were several topics in the academia, which were hard to understand without further questioning their core concepts and underlying intents. The concept of morality is one of those. For the sake of this analysis we align with Starratt (2004) who defined morals and morality as "the living and acting out of ethical beliefs and commitments" (p. 5). Herein it is necessary to place emphasis on "living" and "acting out" as key to understanding not only morality but also the significance of moral literacy. Starratt (2003) challenged school leaders to reflect upon their

own self and experiences to define morality. For Starratt (2003), "that interior self" (p. 243) provides moral answers for leaders seeking to develop or be transformed by moral authenticity.

In Frick's (2009) research "the complexities of moral leadership praxis" he explored the internal struggle school leaders experience during the time of making ethical judgments. Through a modified phenomenological research, Frick (2009) captured administrators' perspectives about moral practice and decision-making experiences. Based on his findings, Frick (2009) suggested that school leaders experienced an intrapersonal and moral dissonance in the process of making ethical decisions when faced with difficult moral choices. These school leaders faced authentic ethical dilemmas. This study explained the moral conflict in school leadership as an intrapersonal moral phenomenon, and how the conflict can be resolved in practice. Our own experiences as emergent moral leaders—that the readings with which we wrestled brought to light—also validated it.

Ultimately, as Amonett (2014) purported, moral literacy teaching transforms the learning into an advocate for social justice, care, and democracy. Amonett stated, "Social justice, moral courage, and transformation can occur when both scholarly theory and application occur simultaneously in the environment of support, collegiality, and love" (p. 59). As transformative teaching, moral literacy is a critical literacy. The focus centers on developing scholar-practitioners who have the capacity to do what Freire referred to as "reading the world." Powell (1999) proposed, "Literacy as a moral imperative envisions language as functioning in a transformative way—as a means for seeing the world differently—so that we might begin to construct a more humane and compassionate society" (p. 20). The morally literate leader's preoccupation with care and humanity is a democratic matter in schooling. As Bajovic and Elliott (2011) stated, "a democratic society requires both critical and moral literacy: critical literacy to empower and lead to transformative action and moral literacy to acknowledge the differences of power in society. . . ." (p. 32).

Local identity and moral literacy. According to Dewey (2005) reflection is a critical underpinning of growth and learning. It is related to self and the possibility of improving future practice through retrospective analysis of action Freire (2010) in his notion of praxis accepts "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 234). In our writing, we attempted to explore our authentic selves and tried to locate the morality in it.

Our autoethnographic narratives acknowledge once again education as practice of freedom (Freire, 2010). We as future educational leaders, have a moral duty to ensure democracy in education, to free minds of learners (Dewey, 1916). As Giroux (2010) suggested, practice of freedom is for attempting to expand the capacities necessary for human agency and, hence, the possibilities for democracy itself. Giroux (2010) further added at all levels of education, pedagogical practices should promote the sense of *unfinishedness* (Freire, 2010). As we practiced a critical pedagogical bricolage at SFA, the program installed a sense of unfulfilled human potential on us. We tried to question our own expertise, weaknesses, experiences and even existence as a moral person. Why I am here? What is my greatest responsibility? Who I am as moral and ethical being? We found ourselves in the process of defining and redefining morality in our respective identity development as scholar-practitioners.

In this questioning we encountered our local identities and began to struggle with how our heritage and histories shaped our understanding of the world. Herman (2007) stated,

> The more comprehensive the claims of a way of life are, the more pervasive its
> values will be in the agent's maxims. Consider the possible diversity of willings
> in child rearing practices, recreation, conjugal relations, and caring for the
> homeless. Something as ordinary as choices in clothes may be dictated as

slavishness to fashion, whim, religious discipline or cultural identification. (p. 34)

We come to realize and recognize that this cultural conditioning colored our decision-making strategies in dilemmas that we had faced as educational leaders in our particular homelands.

During our reflections, Chet was "compelled to dissect the pedagogical context in which [he] grew up." In contrast, Chuck, seeking a means to improve the ratings of his school like many other doctoral students in the U.S., enrolled to "find an answer and ultimately a solution." Chet spoke of embracing his childhood memories and "a particular period of Nepalese educational awakening" in order to complete an assignment. Chuck had been brought to a place where he could "acknowledge that what [he] had wanted was selfish and paternalistic." Privilege and our social positions were addressed: "I became aware of the privilege and prejudice that were at play" and "I had seen the discriminations based upon caste and religion." With one raised a White Christian and the other brought up a Hindu Brahmin, we were dealing with issues of privilege and power and how these had shaped our local identity.

Additionally, we dealt with deeper implications related to our local identities. Chet contemplated his upbringing in these words: "The stories my father told to me about the establishment of new schools in Nepal were the first lessons that cultivated the passion in me to serve the educational world." Within Chuck's reflections he realized "how much the *plantation ecology* of the culture I had grown up in had managed to institutionalize prejudices and racism in the businesses and schools I had always known." For both of us, we saw how local identity, in many ways transcultural and interconnected, as being shared and similar. It overshadowed our external differences.

Our upbringing, our religious instruction, our codes of dress and grooming had influenced us in making choices that we had deemed in our own interpretations to be ethical and right—often without taking the rights of the student or the parent into real consideration. Many times these decisions left us without support from our policies and public, our supervisors and superintendents. Once again Herman (1997) wrote,

> When values have a form that resists transformation, agents who endorse them are left vulnerable in circumstances of conflicts and change. Values whose form permits their location in the terms of the deliberative field have a shared ground (was when we come to see both liberty and equality expressing the conditions for human dignity). This both separates them from their heteronomous history and provides a common deliberative framework in which to work out conflict. (p. 371)

Moral literacy teaching pushed us to become critical conscious of our own autobiographies and how those autobiographies shaded our prejudices and presumptions. We were challenged to consider the way in which democracy welcomed dissent and created spaces for a multitude of voices to speak up and speak out. We were learning to consider the humanness of others regardless of how the others viewed our values or us as individuals. While the eastern culture perhaps understood the way in which collectivism was implicated the western culture was coming to terms with the individualistic teachings he had always lived by.

Bricolage as critical teaching for moral literacy. In the quest of new knowledge, new scholarship, and new practice (Jenlink, 2001), we began cultivating a new way of reflective thinking—a critical thinking that moved us toward action through advocacy and activism. As discussed earlier, critical pedagogical bricolage was not only *critiquing* hope was also *creating* hope (Freire & Freire, 1995). As Boler (2010) stated "the analysis of utterance in the in the

classroom requires more than rational dialogue" (p. 8). Critical pedagogical bricolage as a pedagogy however helped the learners and the professor of the moral literacy class be liberated from the traditional one-dimensional practice.

Similarly, Jones (2010) advocated for stronger moves than dialoguing alone. According to Jones (2010), the classes observe self-disclosing narratives and through "multiplicity of voices/narratives, teachers and students can speak and work across difference towards an egalitarian, multicultural, and democratic social order in the classroom—and elsewhere" (p. 58). The Doctoral classes we attended, hence become true practice place of critical pedagogical bricolage as well as critical and courageous conversations (Singleton & Linton, 2006). As Garrison (2010) claimed "the success of dialogues across differences depends less on ideas and more on attitudes of desire, imagination, possibilities, perceptions, risk, and vulnerability" (pp. 93–94).

As Dewey (1916) viewed a moral role for scholar-practitioners in these terms: "The problem is to extract the desirable traits of forms of community life which actually exist, and employ them to criticize undesirable features and suggest improvement" (p. 83). The program, while supporting the cohorts including us to critique and dialogue all the time, created challenges. Once we observed as a critical question Boler's (2000) inquiry, "what does it mean to recognize, in the educational practices of college and university classrooms, that all voices are not equal" (p. 322)? We were forced to find the answer of the question in the program where we were in. Boler (2000) offered an answer about moral practice in a classroom: "The uniqueness of classrooms is that, ideally, they provide a public space in which marginalized and silenced voices can respond to ignorant expressions rooted in privilege, white supremacy, or other dominant ideologies. (p. 322). The class that utilized critical pedagogical bricolage as in practice, it became one of Boler's (2000) classes.

Does only knowledge exercise in the classroom ensures us be effective in moral practice? The answer is negative if you are not willing to practicing it in a moral way. Chet wrote about "the bricolage of the pedagogies we were introduced to" and the lenses of democracy, respect, moments of critical reflective inquiry, and confronting case studies "full of moral dilemmas." This meant recognizing bricolage as "democratic, critical, critical reflective, and critical self-reflective approaches." While this developed more obviously in Chet's reflection, it was a means for both of us to venture beyond "the dominant discourse" or hegemony in our cultures, and gave us pause to contemplate "hidden approaches like indigenous pedagogies." Specifically, bricolage as an approach to teaching and learning for Chuck, a means for reading the complexities of the dynamic world, of "personal reflection in scholarship and professional reflexion in practice."

Scholar-practitioners are those knowledge creators who verify it through immediate practice. Mullen (2003) viewed scholar-practitioners as those members of academia, who engage in interplay between theory and practice and this enables them to recognize their own limitations and capacities. Jenlink (2001) advocated for a more active and critical role of us. "The emergent ideal of scholar- practitioner leaders who reflect the core values of social justice, caring, equity, and democracy through their leadership praxis holds promise for a new direction in leadership preparation and practice" (p. 79). The program based on a philosophy deeply rooted in the notion of social justice, caring, equity, and democracy (Jenlink, 2001) demands a critical pedagogical practice. Finally, the bricolage of critical pedagogical practice provides an opportunity of transcending practices to moral practices.

Hutchinson (2011) presented bricolage in terms of "a process of re-assembling thinking into a new version of the whole" (p. 187). As such, bricolage emerges as teachers and learners participate in conversations, agreements, and disagreements. These dialogues manifest through folk theories, personal perspectives, competence claims, proposed and possible projections, and the learners' worldviews regarding provenance. However, viewing classroom

discussions only as the forum for bricolage is overly limiting. Conversation and dialogue are perhaps better conceived as a vehicle for "do-it-yourself" critical theorizing and an avenue for patchwork application of newfound perspectives of the social, cultural, and political heterogeneity that forms our educational world at large.

Conclusion

Teaching as bricolage is a concept that flows between disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity to fully acknowledge and call into question all social constructions (Kincheloe, 2001). Kincheloe (2001) espoused a bricolage that "recognizes the dialectical nature of [the] disciplinary and interdisciplinary relationship and calls for a synergistic interaction between the two concepts" (p. 683). To do so requires more than discussion and reflection; it extends to action and progressive movement toward change. To Lévi-Strauss (1966), "bricoler" was a verb linked to activity and sport. Although it connoted mythical thought as theory it also was "always used with reference to some extraneous movement" (p. 16). This outward motion is implicated in transformational teaching and morally literate action. For Lincoln (2001), bricolage was as much an issue of theoretical concern as it was a matter of praxis. Implied were both the conceptual framework underlying research *and* the act of *doing* research as fieldwork. In carrying this concept over into bricolage as critical pedagogy one can see the connection in the way in which the ideas of teaching are converted into the performance of the learner.

Framing the teaching of moral literacy through the lens of critical pedagogical bricolage quite possibly requires a deeper deliberation and social imaginative than our respective auto-observations reveal at first glance. However, our contemplation here is designed to initiate and engage in a dialogue—one of international and intercultural concern—between two practitioners from different yet strikingly similar backgrounds. For each of us, it was the moral literacy gained through the critical perspectives of bricolage pushed us to read and re-read— think and re-think—about the often-conflicting standards that defined us professionally and personally. In our independent journeys we both dealt with issues of spirituality, morality, ethics, diversity, and other domains. We each faced ideas and ideals of identity and intersectionality as school principals, educational leaders, doctoral students, and as men from male dominant cultures. However, specifically significant to this study is our struggle to accept and understand literature and lessons that tried our biases and presumptions that gave us pause to consider the role of social justice and democracy in the lived experience of the scholar–practitioner educational leader.

According to Greenfield (1985) moral leadership involves a "pressure to act despite competing and often conflicting standards of goodness" (p. 142). Likewise moral leadership is a constellation of factors including moral literacy, moral integrity—consistently and congruently living out moral commitments and the stated and operative values one espouses— and moral imagination (Tuana, 2007). Fundamentally, it is the ethics of "professionally-informed decision making in approaching moral problems and dilemmas" (Frink, 2009, p. 55). In short we conclude that such a contemplation of the meaning of moral literacy is a critical and authentic means of arriving at a scholarly practice necessary for change agency, embracing issues of diversity, and that informs and enhances leadership. Moral literacy expressed through ethical acuity and the moral imagination are integral to any critical pedagogy especially one encompassing the vague and vast notion of bricolage.

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