

Nelta Choutari

Nepalese ELT Practitioners Meet the World

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Welcome to Nelta Choutari March Issue 2014

March 8, 2014

EDITORIAL

Umes Shrestha

(with Usha and Jeevan)

Dear Readers of NeltaChoutari Blog Magazine,

We took an extra week to publish this issue, but the time has been worth it!

As we present the 'NELTA Conference special issue', including an amazing set of blog posts based on the 19th International Conference, we are excited by many things. We have continued our tradition of the special issue after this important event for Nepal's ELT community. We are also proud to see the emergence of new venues of professional conversation, most significantly the "official" blog started by NELTA (www.neltaeltforum.weebly.com). We see such development as the community's dream coming true, because there should be more venues of professional conversation, some run by individual scholars, others by groups, some less structured and formal than others, and so on. We remain an independent community of bloggers who strive to publish the voice of other colleagues on top of ours, in the spirit of the Nepali way, building scholarship from the ground up.

We remain inspired by the passion for promoting critical pedagogy, promoting local scholarship, incorporating the voices of local teachers, writing ourselves to value the voices of teachers on the ground across the country, and fostering creativity and innovation in the teaching of English... drawing on global scholarship for promoting local professional practice. We continue to explore new landscape, ask new questions, and try new ideas. Our strength lies in our ability to engage almost 3,000 visits to the site every month from more than 80 countries around the world, and in the achievements reflected in almost four hundred blog entries, a thousand comments, 1.53 lakh total views. Former and present editors and also the ELT community have put in a lot of hard work and dedication over the years. And we are driven to take Choutari to new heights every year, building on our strength in quantity and quality.

Now to focus on the theme of this special issue — The conference was held in two phases, first in Kathmandu and then in Hetauda, under the theme, 'Authentic Assessment: A Paradigm Shift from Traditional to Alternative Assessment' and it was attended by over 600 presenters and participants in Kathmandu, and by over 300 in Hetauda. It has become a tradition in this blog to dedicate an issue to the conference and to show our solidarity and respect to NELTA as an organization that we belong to, and to all English language teachers and professionals all over Nepal.

Let me start by sharing my personal reflection. Initially, the theme of the conference didn't really create any interest in my mind. However, after attending the plenary sessions by Professor Stephen Stoyhoff (US), Professor Keith Morrow (UK), and Professor Z.N. Patil (India), and pondering over what they presented and shared, I realized the gravity of the issues related with testing and assessment in our context.

For far too long, and for the worst, we have snubbed our learners and students based on the results of one-off examinations. We, both teachers and parents, have robbed them of their true potential and pushed them into the dark 'You're a failure' zone. I have always thought that our assessment system had holes all over it, but now it seems to me that it is a total disaster. For years, the primary objective of our traditional assessment system has been about how to make students pass the tests (or how to make them fail the tests), instead of how to make them literate, proficient, and talented.

Our teachers may have changed with time, our students too – but the curriculum and assessment system has not changed at all. It is still 'old' and terribly traditional, and it constantly victimizes numerous learners and students. Out of fear and pressure, students study only to pass the test, unfortunately, not to be educated. And, as one of our writers has [said on this blog](#), this is the tragedy!

So, this is what I've decided. The next time I enter the classroom, I will not judge any student based on their performance on the exams. This is one idea that I'm going to take from the conference into my classroom. And specifically, I will never hold any biased or indifferent attitude toward 'low-scorers' or 'under-achievers' because now I can understand and empathize with their struggles, motivation (or lack of it) and various external reasons which are somehow the spiraling repercussion of a very 'poor' assessment system.

I might have painted a very bleak picture of assessment and its objectives but it's time to get real and it's time to act. We must act, individually and collaboratively, and raise enough strength to wipe out the damaging consequences of one-off assessments, like the SLC exam. Prof. Stoyhoff quoted Bob Dylan and said, "Times, They Are a-Changing" and indeed, the concept of assessment and its purpose is changing. The change,

however, must be towards viewing assessment through sociocultural perspective and the change must be towards teachers and authorities taking more responsibility.

Having said that, here I present the blog entries of this special issue.

Besides the conference related posts, we have also included Gopal Prashad Bashyal's experience of attending a BELTA Conference held in Dhaka of Bangladesh. Also adding some variety, former and current Choutari editors, Shyam Sharma and Uttam Gaulee, have collaboratively written a reflection on a recent Choutari meeting. And, finally, to go along with the reports, reflections, and essays, we have also included a photo-highlight of both phases of Nelta conference.

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After going through the blog entries, please post your comments and feedback, and help us experience an enriched professional communication.

And, please don't forget to join our new initiative – Choutari Mentorship Project. Some of our colleagues have already started benefiting from this project. We sincerely thank all participating mentors and mentees. You can also watch a short video by Uttam Gaulee explaining the purpose of this project here. This video was part of a presentation in the 19th International Conference of NELTA in Kathmandu.

As usual, please like us on our [Facebook page](#), encourage writers by liking their posts, leave comments, share what you like on your network, and contribute your own blog posts for future issues.

—



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Professor Stephen Stoyhoff's Keynote Speech: Classroom Assessment

March 8, 2014

Ganga Ram Gautam



Prof. Stoyhoff in his keynote address during 19th NELTA International Conference held in Kathmandu on Feb 27, discussed his professional journey in the field of language assessment using a “trekking” metaphor as part of an anecdote from his Nepal visit long time ago.

The highlights of the message that he conveyed through the metaphor were:

- a) a beginning is always exciting but not easy
- b) we need to understand the challenges and put every effort to face them in order to get to the next level
- c) we must understand the significance of our endeavor in the work that we do
- d) we should not give up but try various alternatives so that we might find a better way for addressing the challenges and issues

Describing the various landscapes of language assessment in the last few decades, Prof. Stoyhoff shared about two key orientations, namely, the psychometric perspectives and socio-cultural perspectives, which have influenced language assessment. Highlighting

the key features of these perspectives, he also talked about the shifts that have taken place in the area of assessment along with the changes in the curriculum and materials in English language teaching and learning.

Drawing on the principles and practices of the socio-cultural perspective in language assessment, he elaborated alternative approaches to language assessment and how these approaches address the issue of 'authenticity' in language assessment. The key message that Prof. Stoyhoff delivered during his presentation was that it is the teacher who is chiefly responsible for selecting the appropriate assessment and in many cases developing them, administering them properly, interpreting the results correctly and using results responsibly. He advised the teachers to be more attentive to the purposes and practices associated with assessment and their impact on students' learning and their teaching. Thus, he highlighted the term "Assessment Literate" as the key that every teacher should be aware of.

As concluding remarks, Prof. Stoyhoff said:

- a) Set ambitious goals
- b) Persist in important endeavors
- c) Periodically gauge your progress and recognize changes in the professional landscape
- d) Prepare for the challenges that are ahead

The presentation was both academic and practical and participants enjoyed it thoroughly. The uptake of the presentation was that the best way to keep abreast with the new trends and development in the professional field that one is engaged in is through continuous professional development.



Ganga Ram Gautam

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Nelta Conference Hetauda Phase – A short report

March 8, 2014

Narayan Prasad Tiwari



The 19th International Conference of NELTA (Phase II) began on March 3, 2014 in Hetauda.

One of the key speakers, Prof Stephen Stoyhoff (US) presented on the theme: Language Assessment and the path to Crystal Mountain. Using the metaphor of a trek through the Himalayan Mountains, the speaker considered the paradigm shift that has occurred in language assessment over the past few decades and its implications for EFL teachers. He emphasized psychometric and socio-cultural perspectives on assessment. Prof. Stoyhoff further presented "Classroom based Language Assessment: Improving the Design and Use of Teacher Developed Assessments" during plenary session. He reviewed key trends in language assessment and their complications for teacher constructed assessments of second language ability.

Prof. Keith Morrow (UK) presented on "What does 'authentic' assessment mean? How do we do it?" His talked about genuineness and authenticity while focusing on assessment, testing observation, self assessment and individual growth over time. His plenary session proceeded with awareness and activity in ELT. The primary focus was on learners and teachers who need to strengthen awareness and what they could learn from it.

Prof. Z.N. Patil (India) mainly focused on assessment as an integral part of ELT through story telling techniques. He stressed on day to day assessment in teaching by citing

some relevant examples of poems and dramas. In the presentation “Enriching Linguistic, Communicative and Pragmatic Competence through Literature”, he presented audio-visual text and interacted with the participants and gave specific procedures to be adopted in classroom activities.

Mr. Brenden Mcsharry (British Council) presented on “21st Century Learning Skills and Assessment: the Implication for Nepal” stressing on thinking skills, working skills, working tools and living skills. Besides, he focused on 21st century themes like global citizenship, human rights, intercultural awareness, equality and diverse, healthy living and peace studies.

Laxman Gnawali and his team of Kathmandu University presented “Pechha Kuchha Fun Show” to all the participants that ultimately focused on insightful learning with innovative ideas.

Apart from the key presenters, there were around thirty presentations from different ELT practitioners from nation and abroad as well for two days. Around 450 English teachers actively took participation in different concurrent session according to their field of interest.



Narayan Prasad Tiwari

NELTA

Hetauda branch

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Interactive Language Fair at NELTA 2014 with Photo Feature

March 8, 2014

Laxman Gnawali



NELTA added a special event to its 19th International Conference 2014: Interactive Language Fair (ILF) designed after the IATEFL's ILF. In this event, 16 presenters showcased their research, innovations and experiments. As I coordinated this event, I would like to briefly describe the process of preparing and organizing the event.

Once the NELTA Conference Organizing Committee approved the proposal for the Interactive Language Fair and entrusted me with the responsibility to coordinate it, the call for proposals was made via emails, Yahoogroups, Facebook and the NELTA website. I received queries from potential presenters asking me what it was and how they could participate in it and I did my best to explain the nature and the process of the Fair. The proposals were submitted from home and abroad. Once the proposals were accepted, I asked the presenters to get ready with their slides and other materials for the Fair.



The Fair was scheduled for Day 3 of the conference, i.e. 1st March. Sixteen presenters came ready for the presentation. The hall opened for setting the show one hour before the Fair actually started. The presenters arranged their tables along the walls of the hall and displayed their materials on the laptops, tables and the walls.

When we opened the door for the participants, the hall was filled with very inquisitive ELT professionals and enthusiasts. The presenters made two-minute thumbnail presentations introducing themselves and highlighting the innovations they had made and invited the participants to visit their tables. Once the thumbnail presenters were over, the participants visited the presenters of their choice and asked questions, listened to the explanations, played games, tried the materials, clicked through the slides and also exchanged the information. What follows is the brief description of each of the presentations.

Babita Sharma Chapagain from Nepal shared samples of the reading materials developed by trainee teachers based on the local/rural context. She shared photos and sample books that were developed by the trainees and interacted with the visitors. Manju Bajracharya from Nepal shared the report of an action research she carried out with aim attempt to improve English spellings. She engaged visitors with some interesting spelling tasks and games. Dipesh Kumar Shah from Nepal shared his ideas on critical thinking that he tried out in his EFL classroom. Md Mahmudul Hasan from Bangladesh showcased his innovation called Smart Gamification. Illustrating what a flipped classroom is, he engaged visitors in games and exercises based on the concept.

Naheed Haq from Pakistan shared her research on formative assessment as a systematic part of teaching. Claire Bradin Siskin from India described and demonstrated the ESL Writing Online Workshop (ESL-WOW), an online multimedia program designed to guide non-native speakers of English through each stage of the writing process. Jeevan Karki from Nepal shared introduced a webzine and shared the ideas of encouraging students for creative writing by publishing their writing instantly in the webzine. Prof. James Crocker from Japan showcased The Font – A Literary Journal for Language Teachers, a publication which focuses on language teachers and learners' writing about their experiences as language educators abroad and at home. Dinesh Kumar Thapa from Nepal shared the art of making learners engaged with reading texts at a deeper level with the aid of graphic organizers. Kshitiz Upadhyay-Dhungel from Nepal shared an experience of a Principal of ECD pre-school in learning/teaching English language in a more lucid way in the Nepalese context.

Durga Prasad Pandey from Nepal highlighted self-management as a way to self-leading professional development. The visitors discussed 'Doing' (Physical), 'Thinking' (Mental), 'Feeling' (Social), 'Being' (The self). Shyam Kumar Shrestha from Nepal got the visitors to share their experiences of teaching children who are uninterested in reading authentic materials. Praveen Kumar Yadab from Nepal shared the experience of professional development in ELT through blogging on NeltaChoutari. Dhani Ram Yogi and Bir Singh Nayak from Nepal showed the link between the content from social studies and EFL teaching and learning based on project based learning concept. Sagun Shrestha from Nepal argued that technology brings amicable language learning environment in the ELT classrooms and demonstrated the use of some online resources such as nicenet, delicious and others. Teachers of English Access Micro-Scholarship Program Mandira Adhikari, Radha Krishna Humagain, Gokul Sharma and Kalpana Poudel and some of their students showcased a non-traditional classroom through a 'poster presentation' for a 'gallery walk'.

During and after the Fair, I reflected and made two conclusions. First, when we visit other countries and participate in ELT events, we can and we should return with ideas to add new activities and try them out here in Nepal. I initiated this ILF event because I had attended a similar event in the IATEFL Liverpool Conference in 2013. I feel this is a way to enrich our practices. Two, the ELT professionals in Nepal are comparable at the international level which was demonstrated by the quality of the presenters in the Fair. The visitors/participants said that the Fair was a good learning opportunity for them.

The Interactive Language Fair will continue at the NELTA 2015 Conference.

Laxman Gnawali

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Some of the photos of the ILF:











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Photos: Umes Shrestha

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A Presenter's Reflection on Nelta Conference

March 8, 2014

Prema Bhusal

I was very excited from the very beginning when I heard that 19th International conference was going to be held. We had a discussion in our classroom as well with our Associate Professor, Laxman sir. Then, out of curiosity, I decided to write a presentation proposal for the conference. Then, without making any delay, I sent my proposal to the representatives and received prompt response of acceptance. From that day, I had different kinds of curiosities in my mind about what and how it would go in the conference.



On the first day of the conference, I saw an overwhelming number of participants from home and abroad. Then, I entered in the plenary hall and attended the sessions of key speakers Prof. Stephen Stoyhoff, Prof. Keith Morrow and Prof. Z, N. Patil. Along with them, I saw other apex personalities from different parts of the country.

I was really mesmerized by the thoughts about assessment and different issues shared by the key speakers. All the key speakers were exploring assessment in different ways. Some were talking about authenticity, genuineness and some from socio-cultural perspectives and some talking assessment as love and arrange marriage. Although, all the key speakers have equally contributed assessment taken from different perspectives, I felt very blissful when I heard this line from Prof. Z.N Patil, from India that "Formative assessment is like a love marriage and summative assessment is like an arranged marriage". It made a great impact to me as this was really relevant to what I was doing. I'm doing an online course on 'assessment' sponsored by OregonUniversity, U.S and U.S Embassy. When I shared Prof. Patil's analogy of formative assessment as a love marriage and summative assessment as an arranged marriage, my professor, Sandra Clark mentioned that the analogy made her and her staffs laugh as she had never heard that before. Now, it is a matter of discussion in our online discussion board.

Now, let me share my feelings about concurrent sessions. When I started to join in concurrent sessions, I found different kinds of people from different parts of the world and I had different kinds of feelings in this session. It is because, some mentioned very good ideas about their teaching experiences and some were not very confident in their subject matter in spite of being a professor. Sometimes, I felt sad when some presenters were wondering and moving here and there, because none of the participants were in their session. Then, I compared myself with them – what will I do if I face the same situation? I had a kind of terrible feeling and without any delay, the turn of my presentation came on the final day, immediately after the lunch. Before presenting the topic “Developing Speaking Skills of Students”, my feelings was the same and wondering what will I do if there is no participant in my classroom? But apart from that, I had a kind of feelings to soothe myself that I will at least get a certificate if nobody is with me, but the God was with me and my wishes came true. I saw a number of participants in my session from the different parts of the world. When I saw their active participation and curiosity in the subject matter I have presented, a great relief came into my mind which gave me encouragement and I felt more confident. So, my presentation went on well than I had expected.

All in all, the 19th international conference of Nelta made a great impact on me. I just don't know how to express it in these few words. I have realized that I have built up my confidence on the subject matter and I've also made both personal and professional progress. This conference has helped me know better about global practices, the role of presenter, participants and the relationship between the two. It has helped me present more effectively and confidently in the days to come. All the reflection of the conference and attempts, I have done to gain knowledge undoubtedly has enriched my knowledge and skills. I got a chance to share my feelings to the open-minded people from different parts of the world.



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What does 'authentic' assessment mean?

March 8, 2014

Mabindra Regmi



"What does 'authentic' assessment mean? How do we do it?" A Critique on 19th NELTA Conference Plenary by Professor Keith Morrow, UK

Authenticity in Context

Man: Mary, am I a man?

Woman: Yes, John. You are a man, and I am a woman.

Dr. Keith Morrow started the plenary session at Hetauda on 3rd March, 2014 with this excerpt from an English textbook used in England over four decades ago. It is interesting to note that the textbook writers and language policy makers bordered absurdity in the name of imparting the right content to the students. Dr. Morrow shared the same line of thought and discussed with the audience regarding how the text in English textbooks have steadily gravitated towards authenticity. And how all this has resulted in a testing system that is more authentic in nature.

But what is authenticity? Dr. Morrow was of the notion that a text that mirrored the context of a society as exactly as possible could be considered more authentic. This resulted in an inextricable correlation between the text and the context of the learner while defining authenticity. Probably that was the reason why the speaker delivered the

whole session on authenticity along the thread of context of the learner. He exemplified his belief by giving an example of how an authentic piece of language text like his personal tax return paper, might prove to be far from authentic in a different context, say Nepal. This spatial, and most likely temporal, property of language discourse necessitated context of the learner to be addressed while designing both textbooks and assessments for language learners.

Dr. Morrow thus added the aspect of context while designing a test in addition to the two important traditional criteria: validity and reliability. He was of the opinion that there was a very direct and strong link between validity of a test and the context. However, the relationship between reliability of a test and the context could be rocky at the best. By making the test authentic in accordance to the context of the learner, the validity is confirmed as the test measures exactly what it intends to measure. But if you consider the reliability of the test, the same learner taking the same test at two different times might not result in the same performance level. Now this creates a dilemma – should we contextualise the testing material so it is more valid to the learner, or should we refrain from doing so, and confirm to the reliability criterion that is so essential in testing?

Although the session did not offer a viable solution for the ensuing dilemma, it did focus on the necessity of the testing material to be more authentic in nature. Authenticity in testing not only brings the learner closer to the language, but also creates a more meaningful learning. However, since it is the learner who is indulged in the language pedagogy, it is imperative to integrate the context of the learner to make the testing more authentic.

–



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