
Bridging Imagination and Reality in the Classroom: A Collaborative Autoethnographic Study of 'Fiction to Fact' Pedagogy

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Abstract

Educators in Nepalese higher education employ diverse pedagogical approaches to facilitate learning but often struggle to articulate their own signature pedagogy the distinctive teaching style they have developed through years of practice. This study explores the concept of 'fiction to fact' as a signature pedagogy and examines its alignment with Jerome Bruner's narrative constructivism and the sociocultural theories of Piaget and Vygotsky within Nepal's evolving higher education context. Here, fiction refers to imagination and mental planning, whereas fact denotes the realization of those plans in practice. The study demonstrates how this pedagogy transforms students' emotional and cognitive learning experiences by stimulating curiosity, encouraging active participation, and connecting imagination with real-world application. A collaborative autoethnographic reflection method was employed, integrating the researcher's classroom experiences with the practices of three community school teachers who implemented the 'fiction to fact' approach. Data were generated through classroom observation notes and critical self-reflections and analyzed thematically. The findings reveal that this signature pedagogy significantly enhanced students' engagement, understanding, and transformative learning. It effectively supported students in designing project plans, developing worksheets, visualizing prototypes, and refining their work until successful completion, thereby bridging imagination and reality. The study concludes that the 'fiction to fact' approach represents an innovative and effective signature pedagogy that can help educators identify, strengthen, and articulate their own pedagogical identity while improving classroom practice. It recommends integrating this approach into Nepal's teacher licensing curriculum and teacher education programs to equip teachers with innovative pedagogies required for 21st-century education.

Keywords: autoethnography, fiction-to-fact, signature pedagogy

Introduction

I have been working as a teacher for the last 15 years in Nepalese schools and have received teaching experience from grade 2 to Master's degree level. My competency and proficiency in the teaching field are gradually improving, which can be

observed from my class delivery and professional write-ups along with the changes taking place in academia after the massive changes brought by technology and development. I have experienced enhanced confidence and teaching competencies along with the years of teaching to different levels of students and academic publications. I used to try to become an active, innovative, and updated teacher by inculcating various teaching pedagogies to make my students feel excited about learning. When I first heard the word signature pedagogy in M.Ed. STEAM classroom at Kathmandu University, I realized every teacher has his/her signature pedagogy and my quest sprouted to navigate more on the very concept. Thus, I have developed my own signature pedagogy “From Fiction to Fact”. So, I have discussed the use of this method from an autoethnographic perspective.

This signature pedagogy is developed based on the theoretical orientation of cognitive psychologist and educational theorist Jerome S. Bruner (1915-2016). It is a Narrative Pedagogy which deals with cognitive scaffolding. ‘From Fiction to Fact’ was developed based on the concept of constructivism brought by Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. They stated that students construct knowledge by linking fiction to the facts. Fiction activates schema and engagement; fact revelation drives critical discernment and knowledge construction (Bruner, 1986). This paper is the production of my reflective journals that were recorded from my teaching experiences. A popular definition of reflection depicts reflective thinking as active, persistent, and careful consideration of a belief or supposed form of knowledge (Dewey, 1910). It requires meaningful observation of our personal conduct and timely improvements if these are not in the correct way. Thus, reflective practice helps teachers to engage in lifelong learning and to continue to learn on the basis of their experiences to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Kolb, 1984).

Literature Review

The concept of signature philosophy was introduced by Lee Shulman in 2005. It refers to distinctive teaching methods unique to a discipline or profession which shapes how students learn to think, perform, and act like professionals, and reflects the values, habits, and ways of knowing in any specific field (Shulman, 2005). According to Shulman, there are three fundamental dimensions that professionals must keep in mind: to think, perform, and act with integrity (p.52). He describes signature pedagogies as forms of instruction that come to mind about the preparation of members of particular professions (Shulman, 2005). Pedagogy organizes fundamental ways to educate future practitioners for their new professions. He claims that pedagogical signatures can also

teach people a lot about “the personalities, dispositions, and cultures of their fields” (Shulman, 2005, p. 52). Signature pedagogies are invented for the field of education to study ‘educational practice, educating students, and preparing them for distinctive forms of professional practice’ (Olsen & Clark, 2009).

In my understanding, signature pedagogies are the unique ways of teaching which can be common to the discipline or profession, that help students build the 'habits of mind' (Mezirow, 1991) to develop into experts in their field. As a teacher, it is our responsibility to navigate our personal teaching pedagogy, which has brought us to this stage in the teaching field. It allows teachers to communicate their unique approaches to help prospective and current students recognize the learning activities. Signature pedagogies are widely used in professional education to prepare students for the complex and unpredictable nature of professional work. As Shulman (2005) notes, most signature pedagogies involve educational settings where students need to publicly perform as practitioners and teachers need to observe and guide them.

Signature philosophy/ pedagogy prepares every teacher or student to be ready to prepare their students for professional practice, embeds disciplinary culture and identity, and aligns teaching with real-world application and bridges theory and practice effectively. There are three structures to be considered in signature philosophy: Surface Structure, observable teaching practices (e.g., lectures, case studies), Deep Structure, underlying assumptions about how knowledge is best learned. Implicit Structure: Moral and ethical values as well as guiding professional behavior are learned.

Philosophical Connection

Here in this paper, my ontology is to clearly mention both the subjective and objective aspects of my signature philosophy ‘From Fiction to Facts’. To conduct the mixed-method study, we need to understand both the subjective and objective reality (Saunders et al., 2019). Subjective reality incorporates the implicit application of ‘from fiction to fact’ in the real-world classroom and its effectiveness, whereas objective reality will be the concrete outcomes after the application of my signature philosophy in the real-world classroom, which is measurable or can be clearly counted or indicated. I expect that every teacher has to begin the class with a fictional story related to the topic or objective, and later their goal has to be reaching into the facts that the learners need to accumulate. We have seen the biggest inventions in the world started from imagination and finally came true as fact. For example, the Wright brothers imagined a plane, and later it was possible to build a real plane, which can be observed the journey from fiction to fact.

The Epistemological aspect in this research indicates the process of obtaining knowledge or the content of a research work. Here, knowledge is understood as the outcome of the research and the interpretation of the obtained information and the rigorous findings of the research work based on my signature philosophy 'From Fiction to Fact'. The data from my personal life experience will be used as the major source of knowledge, and this will be supported by the information obtained from the class observation of the application of my signature philosophy by fellow teachers. Knowledge is created from the transformative teaching style by the application of my signature philosophy 'From Fiction to Fact'. The teacher may use fictional stories before starting the demo with the real object. For example, in my classroom, while teaching the concept of past, present, and future tense, I tell them a story that happened in the past and encourage them to connect it with their present life and ask them to imagine what may happen in the future. Thus, finally, my students complete a journey from fiction to fact in their mind and later reflect it in real life.

Here, while navigating my personal signature philosophy, most of the values are already set by my own experiences and observed incidents. Furthermore, some other values are formed on the basis of the data received from the observations of the application of my signature pedagogy 'From Fiction to Fact'. I have observed that learners mostly seem quite interested in listening to fictional storytelling before jumping into the real world, and slowly they take a shifting approach to learn facts. This approach may be used in every kind of classroom teaching, i.e., medical, engineering, technology, business, education, and undoubtedly in arts classes too.

Teacher's Role

In the application of this signature philosophy, the teacher has to be the facilitator, and the student should be the active learner who obtains the knowledge, inculcating both the facts and fictions along with the implications and importance of my signature philosophy 'From Fiction to Fact'. In this context, the teacher as a person should be a mentor and conscious agency to aware the learners to make them understand the content and examples through various teaching methods under the implication of my signature philosophy 'From Fiction to Fact'. Here in this stage, the teacher is the manager who handles the thorough process in organizing the journey of imagination to facts in the process of learning in a classroom setting. For example, the teacher introduces the stories related to the content to be taught and keeps on mentoring the learner by adding the content with some stories and finally delivers the factual knowledge to the learner.

Emphasis on Learning

In this part, the application of my signature philosophy ‘From Fiction to Fact’ focuses on students’ learning in the classroom setting. The teachers would introduce imaginary stories or fiction in the beginning, and later the facts would be taught to the students. Thus, it is a kind of journey in teaching-learning activity where both the teacher and students logically learn the facts connecting with previously mentioned fictions. Here, personally, I am sure that ‘From Fiction to Fact’ can be applied in the process of teaching and learning in all the subjects or content delivery. The question may arise: can this philosophy be applied in subjects like mathematics or science? And I am sure that the pedagogy ‘from fiction to fact’ can be applied in each and every kind of subject. Let’s take an example from medial sector; even in the medical class, we assume that the practitioner doctor as a teacher doesn’t directly take students into the surgery room or the post-mortem center; rather, he/she first delivers several cases that happened in the past and the complications that happened at the time of treatment. When the doctor tells what happened in that particular incident in the past can be taken as fiction as students just imagine the situations of that time, and the same case can create different schema across students. But later, while attending to patients in the hospital, the teacher uses facts by showing how patients suffer and how to provide them with treatment. This overall journey can be taken as the process from fiction to fact pedagogy in teaching.

Emphasis on Curriculum

In the process of applying ‘From Fiction to Fact’, it would be better to include this methodology in various kinds of curriculum approved by the government of Nepal. If the curriculum includes this methodology, the teachers also require some kind of knowledge and application process for obtaining the expected result. I can take several examples from my own teaching career. Most of the time, while the allocated content is set by the curriculum, I prepare the teaching materials and the methodology before going to the real class. As part of the preparation, I also try to find relevant stories to use as the props for warm-up and orientation into learning. For example, once while teaching about Chitwan National Park for grade ten students, I told them the story of a one-horned rhino, which is found in Chitwan National Park. Once they listened to the story, I introduced the content knowledge about the park, gave every detail, and finally connected the text with the previously told story about the rhino. The students were excited to be involved in this process from fiction to fact.

From Fiction to Facts: Experience from the Classroom Implementation

In the classroom application of ‘from fiction to facts’, I first define the topic that I am going to teach, prepare the required materials like a textbook, story book, artifacts related to the story, and materials related to the text to be taught. When everything is prepared, I enter the classroom and begin my task. First, I need to conduct warm-up activities to energize my students and motivate them to learn. I begin the class with the fictional story, describing the setting, characters, and the plot. After the sensitization for learning, further elaboration of the textual contents begins.

After the sensitization, I provide all the facts about the textual contents, and the students also take part in group discussions and peer presentations. They would be asked to connect the previously told story with the given text and share their views turn by turn. The lesson plan would be developed in the 5E instructional model to make the class more engaging and practical. Evaluation would be conducted as required in the given context. So the seven steps that I implemented to apply “From Fiction to Facts” were:

- Step 1: Define topic and prepare necessary materials
- Step 2: Create short fiction (story) for warm-up (1-2 minutes)
- Step 3: Encourage imagination while telling that story (1-2 minutes)
- Step 4: Bridge to the story and the topic to be taught (2-3 minutes)
- Step 5: Teach the text (Introduce/teach factual content) (30 minutes)
- Step 6: Link back the facts of the text to the previous story (2-3 minutes)
- Step 7: Evaluate and reflect in real-life context. (2-3 minutes)

For example, I implemented it in the form of a dialogue such as:

Topic: “Telehealth Service” for Grade 9

- Step 1: Fiction: Telling a story of how a pregnant woman (Ritu) died during delivery in a remote village (1-2 minutes)
- Step 2: Encourage them to note/respond on how Ritu could be saved by using technology (1-2 minutes)
- Step 3: Connect Ritu's story with given text (2-3 minutes)
- Step 4: Introduce/teach Factual Content/Text (30 minutes)
- Step 5: Link back to Ritu's Story (2-3 minutes)
- Step 6: Reflect on the importance of telehealth in our country (Factual). (2-3 minutes)

Critical inquiry keeps teachers alert to their actions on students. It prevents the dump from damp daily frustrations, work through internal conflicts, and become aware

of diverse cultures and social settings. As with all mental models, there is a clear distinction between what we profess to believe in and our values in action, those that actually guide our behavior (Senge, et. al., 1994). The recording of the classroom teaching (major parts) in the dialogue form is presented here in script form to show how the ‘fiction to fact’ pedagogy can be used as signature philosophy in a real-world classroom. The name of the school, teacher, and students are changed to fictional due to ethical issues.

Grade: 9 B, 2nd Period, Shree ABC Secondary School, Kaski

Date: 9 Mangsir, 2028 (24 November, 2025)

Subject: English, “The Acceleration Behind Telehealth,…….)

Teacher: Kalu sir

Students: Anjali, Bibek, Prativa, Sujana, Aayush, Samiksha, Roshan, Nisha, and 32 more students in the classroom.

(The bell rings. Students go into the class. Other class students are playing outside, and one tube-light is flickering on the ceiling. The smart board is open, with the home page being displayed. The teacher enters)

Kalu sir: Good morning, Grade 9B!

Students: Good morning, sir!

Kalu sir: Sit down! (He observes all the students and begins a class with a fictional story of Ritu from a remote district, Jajarkot, who was pregnant and died in a remote village before giving birth to a baby due to the lack of medical treatment during the COVID pandemic.)

Anjali: Sir, wasn’t there any possible way to save Rita’s life?

Kalu sir: Yes, there were, but such ways were not available in a remote district of Jajarkot. Can you think how Rita’s life could be saved in that situation?

Bibek: Sir, there are no hospitals in Jajarkot?

Kalu sir: Bibek, there are hospitals with poor facilities, and even expert doctors aren’t available there.

Prativa: Sir, while my little sister was sick during the COVID-19 pandemic, my daddy called a doctor in video chat, and he advised us to give her some medicine that really worked to make her feel well quickly. Wasn’t that possible for Rita also?

Kalu sir: You are correct; that could be possible if the internet were available in Jajarkot at that time. We call this service a telehealth service, which is mostly practiced in developed countries.

Sujan: That's true, sir. Poor Rita! (He imagines Rita and becomes very sad.)

Kalu sir: Let's now discuss the telehealth service from Unit 2 Reading I 'The Acceleration behind Telehealth Services' from page number 13 in your textbook.

Aayush and other Students: Ok sir, we are on page number 13.

Kalu sir: Samiksha, you please read the dialogues of the reporter, and Roshan, please read the dialogues of Chang. (*Samiksha and Roshan read all the given dialogues turn by turn and the teacher elaborates all the given facts in the text.*)

Nisha: Sir, I think remote patient monitoring could be one of the applications of telehealth, and I can connect Rita died in the previous story due to the lack of this service.

Kalu sir: Great, now I know you have connected Rita's story (*fiction*) to the text (*fact*). Now tell me, what can be the solutions to such a problem in Rita's village?

Some students: (*excited, hands shooting up*) Sir, we need to use online medical service in remote villages where doctors are not easily available.

Kalu sir: Please listen to the homework. Please list all the possible sectors/professions or facilities which can be best provided by using technology and also write about at least two of them in short, how it is possible. Thank you! See you tomorrow. (The teacher leaves the class.)

Reflection after the Dialogue

According to Thapaliya (2022), reflective practice refers to studying our teaching practice and identifying the more appropriate ideas that work best for the learners. In critical reflective practice, teachers can adopt the theory until it accurately describes the practice. Throughout the application, I used a checklist to navigate the validity of my signature pedagogy and also observed the classes of three other teachers in their classrooms. Once the checklist was ready by incorporating all the required elements to be observed, I took permission from the school Principal and the concerned teachers at those schools to observe the classroom to fill out the checklist designed on the basis of my signature pedagogy. Before entering the classroom, I discussed with the subject teachers regarding the objectives of this class observation, and they were happy to invite me into their class. I attended grade seven, nine and ten English Language periods conducted on 12th, 13th and 14th November, 2025. The checklist was prepared on eight categories of observation listed as Preparation, fiction as warm-up, encourage and imagination, bridge the story, teach factual content, link back to fiction, evaluate & and

reflect in real life, and overall alignment. The summary ratings, strengths, and suggestions were filled out during the observation.

When I observed other teachers' English classes, I gave them a moderate alignment rating because they only partially followed the "From Fiction to Fact" teaching style. The teachers prepared well, defined the topic, and presented everything right there orally. The kids were really into it; I saw them all highly motivated, excited, and genuinely interested in what they were learning. They were keen to imagine things and shared their thoughts turn by turn. The teachers also taught the factual content effectively, explaining the required text and always checking facts by asking questions. But the structure was the tricky part. It didn't totally match the required steps. For instance, the classes didn't strictly start with the short fiction warm-up; instead, the teachers "added short fictions with the facts given in text book". Critically, I observed that they skipped the explicit bridge where we connect the fictional story to the real lesson (Step 4). Instead, they added extra information that "is not mentioned in the allocated text". My reflective journals also showed there weren't any group work, discussion, or presentations, although individual student work was very strong. Overall, I determined that while 5E lesson plan was used, the steps were "mixed up as required in the class" and "not in concrete order". To fix this, I suggest implementing the 5E lesson plan in a best practical way to make sure the steps flow better. From my reflection, 'from fiction to fact' pedagogy is contextual and it depends on the individual how he/she uses it in their classroom. This approach is highly useful for me as the teacher because I am confident to apply this in the practical way. Thus, my signature pedagogy is proved to be significant for me to conduct my classroom teaching effectively.

Conclusion

Overall, this autoethnographic study explored 'From Fiction to Fact' as a signature pedagogy which connects imagination and reality in the context of classroom teaching. It is the collaborative autoethnographic research based on my personal reflective journals, classroom observation notes, students' oral feedback, and colleagues' classroom teaching observations. The study revealed that the 'from fiction to fact' approach enhanced learners' classroom engagement, participation, curiosity in learning, and good understanding of fictional narratives in connection with the facts from the content to be learned. Thus, it is grounded in Burner's narrative constructivism, Piaget and Vygotsky's sociocultural theories. From the overall analysis, this approach is found applicable to encourage learners in constructing knowledge

actively by linking it to the real-life context. The major findings imply that introducing the lessons with stories and imaginative scenarios would help learners develop deep comprehension and creative and critical thinking skills. Its implementation may vary from one context to another in teaching practice. This approach helped both the facilitators and learners promote transformative learning. Therefore, ‘from fiction to fact’ can be a valuable pedagogical framework for teachers, which may enhance professional skills in teaching by promoting learner-centered practices.

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