



Imagining a Decolonial STEAM Education Framework through the Lens of Pagal: An Epistemological Integration in the context of Nepal

Simon Dahal

Vice Principal/Academic Coordinator

Pathik Gyan Niketan

dahal.simon@gmail.com

Received: June 22, 2026

Revised & Accepted: August 19, 2026

Copyright: Author(s) (2026)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

Abstract

The issue of epistemicide has gained increasing scholarly attention as researchers seek to challenge Eurocentric colonial frameworks of knowledge. As STEAM education continues to expand globally, including in Nepal, this philosophical inquiry reimagines a culturally responsive and decolonial STEAM framework. While STEAM extends the traditional STEM model by incorporating the arts, its epistemological foundations remain deeply rooted in Western traditions and often marginalize indigenous ways of knowing. Drawing on the theoretical perspectives of decoloniality, wisdom-based inquiry, and transformative learning, this study employs a hermeneutic reading of Laxmi Prasad Devkota's masterpiece *Pagal* ("The Lunatic") together with critical discourse analysis to reconceptualize STEAM education. It also explores the potential of Nepali literature as a source of epistemological integration by demonstrating how Devkota's work transcends conventional disciplinary boundaries. The poem posits foregrounds imagination, ecological connectedness, intuition, and emotion as legitimate forms of knowledge, offering a foundation for a pluralistic, culturally responsive, and transformative vision of STEAM education grounded in epistemic justice.

Keywords: Epistemic Justice, Decolonial education, South Asian Education, Laxmi Prasad Devkota, *Pagal*

Introduction

The thought of re-reading Laxmi Prasad Devkota's masterpiece *Pagal* ("The Lunatic") through decolonial and transformative perspectives arose from an assignment of my MPhil. course at Kathmandu University. I have taken the Nepali version of *Pagal* (Devkota, 1956) and the



English translation, which are in Devkota's own words from *The Lunatic* (n.d.) which have served as a hermeneutic text. Here, I have expanded the idea of the assignment into a philosophical inquiry towards the possibility of utilizing Nepali literature as hermeneutic text for envisioning a STEAM practice rooted in the Nepali culture devoid of Western hegemonic influences.

Nepathya

I begin with the figurative discussion of *Nepathya*. In literal terms, *Nepathya* implies the backstage, especially that of a theatre. Figuratively, *Nepathya* is also used to connote background. Here I use *Nepathya* figuratively to discuss the hidden contexts of epistemic ideologies held in STEAM education and to highlight possible epistemic integration through the re-reading of Laxmi Prasad Devkota's poem *Pagal*. To try and understand works of literary giants such as Devkota is a daunting task in itself. Classical literary pieces such as the poem *Pagal*, are the "tip of an iceberg". Contexts, lived experiences, and mental schemas that shape the author to conjure such a masterpiece lie in the *Nepathya*, just like the base of iceberg. Thus, contemplating on the words of the literary pieces without an understanding of its *Nepathya* would be a superficial analysis. To comprehend the *Nepathya* is again another daunting task, and is a matter of heart-to-heart communication (Palmer, 1998).

As per the recorded biography of Bodhi Dharma, the proponent of modern-day Zen, he gathered his students before returning to India and said that the ones who remembered his words had his skin, those who contemplated on his words had his flesh, those who understood his teachings of No-thingness had his bones, and those who experienced his teachings had his marrow (Reps & Senzaki, 1998). When we were studying his essay "*K Nepal Sano Cha*", our Nepali teacher shared a fascinating incident related with Devkota. The then students of literature at Tribhuvan University, the first university of Nepal, went to ask Devkota regarding the interpretation of the essay to which he had replied, amidst a lot of broken pencils and smoke; I wrote what I felt, it is not my duty or responsibility to explain what I wrote, that I leave it to you! Drawing from this response of Devkota, the question always remains whether we have the flesh, the bones, or the marrow while trying to understand and relate the works of intellectual giants.

Origins of Pagal

The poem *Pagal* was born out of an enraged Devkota, after reading a line about him written by *Mahapandit Rahul* who had glorified the greatness of Devkota and even stated that in Devkota alone, was the greatness of three giants of Indian Literature: Pant – Prasad – Nirala. In that article, *Mahapandit* had credited Nepali literature of accomplishing a great feat within the span of a century, which took Indian literature almost four centuries. However, when the article merely mentioned the incident of Devkota visiting Ranchi – generally correlated with the in/famous mental asylum at Ranchi, India; a fuse sparked within him turning him into a *Durvasa* – the angry sage of Hindu mythology. Devkota channeled this fury later that day of 1956 A.D. into the masterpiece *Pagal* (Sharma, 2025). History as witness, almost all individuals who attained greatness seem to be ahead of their time. Devkota is no exception.



Engulfed by his progressive thoughts and the inability of his contemporaries to understand them, his pain was subdued with his expression through literature and consumption of cigarettes. Influenced by British and Romantic movement, his early compositions displayed the mixture of romanticism and social transformation. The ones composed in his later life expressed his dissatisfaction with the political and social construct and are found to be filled with Nepali modernist consciousness (Timalsina, 2024). These details of the *Nepathya* in the materialization of *Pagal* help us find inquiry systems, epistemic systems, and integration that Devkota could have blended in his poetic words.

Origins of STEAM

At a time of technological and economical race with the emerging economies, the National Science Foundation (NSF) in the United States thought it necessary to address education needs across science, mathematics, engineering, and technology (SMET). The goal of this initiative was to support critical workforce needs in these emerging fields. SMET was later replaced with STEM in 2001 to sound more pleasant (Mejias et al., 2021). This movement was driven preliminarily by economic concerns popularized by the literatures at that time to maintain global competitiveness. From this inception, the Rhode Island School of Design put effort to prove that integrating arts and design into STEM would foster creativity and sustain the United States as a global innovator. Then, in 2008, Georgette Yakman developed a STΣ@M model that structured traditional isolated academic silos into an integrative pyramid and defined STEAM as Science and Technology interpreted through Engineering and Arts based in a language of Mathematics (Yakman, 2008). Thus, a transdisciplinary framework integrating arts into the established STEM rubric was established to foster creativity, equity, and deeper learning. With time, researchers identified how the disciplines interact with each other and categorized STEAM into the instrumental axis – focusing on application to practical problems, and pedagogical axis – focusing on learning (Mejias et al., 2021). While early STEAM practices often used arts merely as a hook or visual aid to serve STEM goals (Hunter-Doniger, 2018), recent models promote a model that does not privilege one discipline over the other and rejects disciplinary distinctions to create entirely new forms of meaning (Mejias et al., 2021). The current epistemic practices in STEAM focus on decolonization by leveraging indigenous knowledge and cultural knowledge to re-center learning and moving away from oppressive languages of mastery towards generative pedagogies that allow students to imagine a world in the making (Warren et al., 2020).

Epistemic Assumptions in STEAM – Parallels with *Pagal*

Yakman (2008) has highlighted the evolution of epistemic assumptions of STEM from an objectivist view of knowledge to a multidimensional and transdisciplinary framework of STEAM. In this process, the isolated academic silos have been dismantled and synergistic spaces have been visualized. The paradigm shift in the epistemology is also realized through wisdom-oriented framework by Dahal (2022) as he compares STEM metaphorically as “Avidya” and STEM with Kala (STEAM) as “Vidya”. He uses transformative praxis as the foundational theory along with critical pedagogies to give voice to culturally responsive



pedagogies addressing humanitarian crises. In this context, the author presents the Vedic traditions in the context of Nepal - where the progression from lower level of knowledge “Avidya”, to a higher intellectual and spiritual awareness leading the learner from ignorance to wisdom, is conceptualized as a movement from limited understanding to higher understanding. As the global shift in paradigm in the philosophy of STEM and STEAM has been discussed even in the context of Nepal, below, I have sought parallels from the poem *Pagal* in the same context to link Devkota with the current epistemological trend of STEAM.

Economic Rationale of STEAM: The Neocolonial Trap

With testing times, humanity has faced two major problems: learning about the universe and learning how to become civilized. The first problem was partially solved with the reliance and excessive investment to modern science while the second problem is yet to be addressed (Maxwell, 2019a). The very origin of STEM discipline, described in the origins section above, holds the hidden socio-cultural motive which is problematic, since, unfortunately, the primary driver for governments to fund in STEM/STEAM education is national economic competitiveness in the global market of the 4IR (Fourth Industrial Revolution) (Taylor & Taylor, 2022). This, egocentric drive for technological development has linked the economic growth to Anthropocene, which is a geological era defined by the catastrophic effects of human footprints such as climate change and species extinction (Taylor & Taylor, 2019). Harari (2015) has pointed out that mega flora and fauna have been destroyed within a century of human habitation of that particular area indicating that colonial mindset has been ingrained in the human psyche for quite some time. But, with the help of technological advancement made in sciences, the extent with which this civilization can destroy itself and the entire ecosystem is alarming. With the origins of STEAM grounded in economic rationale, the practice of STEAM could well be emphasizing technological innovation, economic competitiveness, and workforce development, thereby reinforcing the hidden agenda of its predecessor STEM. This is partly because the current academia largely devotes itself to knowledge-inquiry which excludes feelings and values, as its primary goal is to maintain neutrality. This assumption is misleading, as it considers knowledge to be value-free. This paradigm has granted humanity the power to use knowledge without wisdom leading to global crises and lack of responsibility (Maxwell, 2019a). This fact was highlighted by Lev Vygotsky in his observation of the sociocultural theories, “the task is not so much the education of blind children as it is the re-education of the sighted” (Vygotsky, 1993, p. 86). This culturally blind Western modern science curricula is compared to a Neocolonial Trojan Horse by Taylor & Taylor (2022) which instructs indigenous children to discard their innate cultural capital at the respective school gates and rather assimilate Western supremacy.

Devkota (1956) assumes the role of a “lunatic” in his masterpiece. Through his literary prowess, he gives voice to this lunatic who is against all sorts of hegemony. The revolt in the poem is not just against a mere rejection of money, but a total subversion of the values, and definitions of richness. The direct upheaval against an economic rationale is the speaker’s dismissal of the mental construct of material wealth as a legitimate measure of reality or value



when he asserts, “जस्तो तिमी, त्यो चिसो, मीठो अक्षर काटेको पान्दीकीको बाटुलो सत्यलाई ! – “*Just as you try to grab that cold sweet, minted coin’s round reality*”. He contextualizes this with the pursuit of wealth by the “learned men” - whom he deprecates, yet praises and raises the insignificant individual into “seventh heaven” – the highest heaven, also called the world of Satya or Brahma. By describing the coin as cold, Devkota highlights the dehumanizing and sterile nature of present day centered around capital accumulation – which is considered as wealth. He doesn’t hold back to compare the expensive wines of Sultanates with blood and their courtesans as mere corpses when he says, “मैले नवाबको मदिरालाई खून भनेको छु, छिमेकी रण्डीलाई लाश भनेको छु! राजालाई गरीब, सिकन्दरलाई मैले गाली दिएको छु!” – “*I have called the Nawab’s wine all blood. And the courtesans all corpses. And the king a pauper. I have denounced Alexander the Great.*” These powerful words are a resisting force and a rude awakening to the colonized mindset which hasn’t questioned what goes on around. Devkota deconstructs the economic rationale of rich-and-poor, the learned-and-illiterate, and wealth-and-indigence in the phrase “तिम्ना महापण्डित, मेरो महामूर्ख! तिम्रो स्वर्ग, मेरो नरक! तिम्रो सुन, मेरो फलाम साथी! तिम्रो धर्म मेरो पाप!” – “*Your highly learned men are my big fools. Your heaven is my hell. Your gold, my iron. Friend, your piety, my sin.*” Devkota has even gone ahead to shatter the fear mentality of sin-and-piety which religious sects have meticulously inscribed in the human psyche. In this “moon-struck” state, he proclaims that what other consider universe is a mere “hair” to his intellect. This plight of the “lunatic” is rather a roar after a deep realization of the hegemonic practices that have been instilled in the masses. Unless these colonized structures are seen in our everyday lives, and our epistemic practices, there remains no question of breaking free from them. What would freedom mean without the realization of the bondage? Devkota’s “Lunatic” could thus be a contemplating text that holds the potential to shake the very foundational beliefs in an individual. In relation to the STEAM philosophy, the in-depth study of “The Lunatic” as a hermeneutic text could induce the same rigor and the hell-bent attitude to attain freedom, come what may.

Human history is filled with colonial instances – from colonizing flora and fauna to innumerable wars waged between various communities all across the globe. It just so happened that the present age is dominated by a Eurocentric hegemony in almost all possible areas because “the European empires did so many things on such a large scale, that you can find plenty of examples to support (or oppose) whatever you want about them...They created the world as we know it, including the ideologies we use in order to judge them” (Harari, 2015, p. 337). It is probably due to this very reason that these hidden structures are still prevalent in the STEAM practices. Ample parallels are drawn further below from the poem which depicts that epistemic ingenuity is implicitly available in this work of Devkota and may well be available in other Nepali literary pieces. The re-reading of those literatures could not only delink from the colonial matrices but also promote cultural pedagogy in the Nepali context if it could be widely researched and used in conjunction with the STEAM ideals.

Beyond Constructivism – Alternate possibilities



STEAM has evolved in terms of epistemology from its objectivist predecessor STEM to a constructivist approach purposefully linking two or more disciplines to solve real world problems all the while being grounded in technical and economic rationales (Yakman, 2008). Constructivism has been the primary theoretical foundation for STEAM education which has successfully shifted the pedagogical focus from transmission of information to the active creation of meaning through materials and the environment (Kizhukarakkatu, 2025). As STEAM is inherently student-centered, it draws heavily on the belief that knowledge is built by the learner rather than being received from an instructor (Dougiamas, 1998). However, constructivism is a humongous epistemic practice in itself. Taylor (2014) has described the multiple versions of constructivism promulgated by different thinkers, wherein each version offers a unique lens on how knowledge could be developed and validated. To address the misconceptions of students and provide a remedy for individual mental operations, Personal (also Trivial) Constructivism is discussed. Radical Constructivism brings forth the concept that cognition serves as an adaptive purpose wherein an individual's experience of the world is organized rather than discovering an objective truth. This primarily focuses on the viability of knowledge – knowledge is thus judged in its ability to answer whether it works or not. With the introduction of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), Social Constructivism draws on Vygotsky and recognizes learning as a social process where a student's potential for learning expands through collaboration with more capable peers, or the "informed other". Furthermore, Cultural Constructivism is discussed which highlights that learning is culturally mediated, drawing from the mental works of prior human practice. Critical Constructivism is presented which adds a socio-political dimension serving as a referent for cultural reform challenging the hegemonic value systems embedded in curricula – especially in technical subjects like Western modern science, which claims absolute truth. This form of constructivism calls for a socially responsible education. Finally, Constructionism is discussed which asserts that constructivism happens most effectively when the learner is consciously engaged in constructing something – an artifact or public entity, for others to see. The STEAM practices, however, remain human-centric and focus on the outer objective, physical reality, oftentimes ignoring the emotional and spiritual aspects (Taylor & Taylor, 2022). This has led to the introduction of transformative educational practice in STEAM.

While constructivism explains the "how" of knowing, transformative education focuses on reforming and transforming the learner's way of being in the world (Dahal, 2022). Transformative approach is defined through five interconnected ways of knowing (Taylor & Taylor, 2019). They are: Cultural-self knowing which seeks to understand the premise of one's own worldview. Knowledge concerned with connecting with others and the natural world in an emphatic manner is termed as Relational knowing. Critical social knowing educates on recognizing how power structures social reality. When knowledge is constructed by imagining what a better, more ethical world should be, it is termed as Visionary and ethical knowing. Finally, Knowing-in-action is discussed that seeks to develop agency to take local action for global change. As the introduction of A in STEM gradually evolved, so did the models of



epistemic and pedagogical approaches around it. Recent models of pedagogical approach value the arts and STEM equally thus promoting a mutually instrumental approach (Mejias et al., 2021). Transformative approach to STEAM blur the boundaries of disciplines to create hybrid epistemologies that allow for new forms of meaning that cannot be otherwise defined by the traditional disciplinary approach (Liao, 2016). This environment allows students to ponder over and tackle real-world problems of living through inquiry-based dialogue that help them to develop the wisdom necessary for a sustainable future (Taylor P. C., 2014). Transformative learning posits conscientization – which is the shifting of structural premises of one's thoughts and feelings (Dahal, 2022) that seeks to develop moral agency. Nonetheless, the mentality of the practitioner to rely on disciplinary silo of academics can still limit its actual practice (Thapaliya & Luitel, 2024). For now, at least in principle, transformative approach to STEAM integrates Arts and Humanities to address the inner world of moral values, emotions, and spirituality (Taylor & Taylor, 2022). While STEAM philosophy is expanding its epistemic boundaries from Constructivism to Transformative approach, epistemic alternatives are also found in Devkota's "Lunatic" which have its roots in Nepali culture and context.

Devkota hints towards an objective behaviorist approach in meaning making when he says, "तिमी गुलाफलाई गुलाफ सिवाय देख्न सक्तैनौ" – "*To you a rose is but a rose*". He rejects the objectivist view of the world and promotes an aesthetic and historical worldview in the very next line, "म उसमा हेलेन र पद्मिनी पाउँछु" – "*It embodies Helen and Padmini for me*". He combines beauty, myth, and history in this simple line and also does not differentiate between the Greek mythical figure – Helen, with the Rajput queen Padmini who burnt herself to death to avoid falling into the hands of a Muslim king. This effort echoes multiple ways of knowing where identity and position in history is in effect for knowledge generation. He also favors a fluid reality than a rigid and settled view of the world when he proclaims, "तिम्रो संसार ठोस छ । मेरो बाफ !" – "*You have a world of solids, mine is one of vapor*" and "तिमी ढुङ्गालाई वस्तु ठान्दछौ, ठोस कठोरता तिम्रो यथार्थ छ । म सपनालाई समात्र खोज्दछु" – "*You take a stone for hard reality, I seek to catch a dream*". Here, Devktoa is not merely observing a pre-existing world but is actively constructing a unique one out of vapor and dreams. This can be correlated with radical constructivism as knowledge is judged by its viability to the individual rather than its correspondence to an objective reality. The poem also functions as a transformative text as it seeks conscientization and an upsetting of values. When Devkota declares, "तिम्रो उन्नति, मेरो अवनति, यस्तै छ मोलमोलाइको उलट-पलट" – "*Your progression is regression to me, such is the upsetting of values, friend*"; it can be related to the essence of transformative education which is shifting of the structural premises of one's thoughts. Further along the poem, Devkota sees "advancement as retreat" and "heaven as hell" along with "progression as regression" which demands a total re-evaluation of what counts as progress or knowledge construct.

Re-reading of "Lunatic" through the lens of a rebellion to the economic rationale and epistemic assumptions helps surface the fact that Devkota had attained the consciousness which could distill the hidden structures present in the then society. His work can be considered as a cue by



the radical thinkers to siphon alternate ways of meaning making and re-evaluation of values and morals that could be a fresh guiding light for the society. Case in point is the envisioning of a STEAM ideology, free from the hidden economic rationales and conventional epistemic approaches grounded in the culture and context of Nepal. For this the Western hegemonic structures need to be understood and deconstructed.

Pagal as a Rebellion to the Western Hegemonic Practices in STEAM

Le Grange (2016) conceptualizes decolonization as uncentering, displacing, deconstructing, offering a renewed understanding of history, culture, and language, and a process of “foreverbecoming”. Although Nepal was never colonized, Devkota’s thoughts seem to have glanced upon the colonial practices and is seen rebelling against them through his expressions in *Pagal* aiming to deconstruct the social schema, displacing the understanding, and urging for an uncentering of the “common understandings”. Devkota’s marginalized voice resonates with that of Lopez and Singh (2024) for recognition in an ethnocentric academic space. Although a little too implicit, Devkota is seen to have realized the foreign (more than just colonial) components in the society and rebel from behind the mask of a lunatic. In a nutshell, Devkota’s lunatic is challenging the meta narrative and urging his “friend”, probably *Mahapandit Rahul* along with all the readers, to deconstruct those meta-narratives. If an individual, Devkota, could reach so far into the future and realize foreign hegemony at a time when the decolonial movement had not even begun elsewhere in the world, inspiration should be drawn from him to envision a decolonial model of education. Then, maybe a Devkota would not have to burden himself on being a lunatic.

Recognizing the “Apparatus of Control”

Gone are the days when control could be observed externally, may it be a colonizing effort of a tribe or nation, or sheer control over the masses through dictatorship. As the famous saying available in social media goes, “*If you are not paying for the product, you are the product*”; no further debate should remain how media industry, tech giants, and big data algorithms are controlling the masses. In the same context, Yuval Noah Harari (2016) mentions that there is so much propaganda around us, it is naïve to think that one is acting out of free will. He makes the readers critically aware of a future where the property of an individual capable of understanding the narrating self and experiencing the self will be cherished. Looking at the present age, it does not seem that his prediction is of a too distant future. But the current society did not arrive at this grave situation overnight. It has to be realized deeply that the racial, colonial, and patriarchal motives that have historically excluded or erased non-Western presences in scholarship which have instilled the white supremacy of knowing, living, and becoming are a prime cause for this. Warren et al. (2020) argue that academic inquiry needs to be disentangled from this “apparatus of control” – that the disciplinary knowledge is the new form of domestication into western supremacy through the falsehood of liberal inclusion. Epistemic delinking from colonial matrices of power (Mignolo, 2009) and collective imagining, articulation, and enactment of alternate possibilities for human learning (Espinoza, 2009) are the only way forward, which is being widely discussed in STEAM ideologies.



Furthermore, Maxwell (2019a) argues that the academic enquiry must undergo a fundamental paradigm shift from the primary pursuit of knowledge – knowledge-inquiry, towards a system devoted to seeking and promoting wisdom – defined as the active endeavour and desire to realize what is of value in life. He urges that this transformation is desperately urgent as the collective human ability to solve current problems is being dangerously outpaced by its technological power.

Although in principle, STEAM has transgressed the disciplinary models, the practitioners still hold the Western supremacist paradigm that posits the detached, omniscient observer as the universal authority who evaluates and dictates disciplinary rules – which is termed as “zero-point epistemology” (Warren et al., 2020). Modern STEAM practices have evolved towards shared epistemic practices – behaviors that cut across all disciplines such as deep noticing, exploring materiality, and through repurposing of existing tools (Mejias et al., 2021). The authors highlight that the current practices focus on concepts like transdisciplinary equity – to de-settle structural boundaries and empower marginalized communities, decolonization – through leveraging indigenous knowledge and cultural funds of knowledge to re-center learning, and world-making – moving away from the oppressive languages of mastery towards generative pedagogies that allow students to imagine the world as “it might be”, not take for granted how “it is”. Another significant shortcoming of traditional STEM/STEAM practice is the exclusive emphasis on pure knowledge that are abstract, symbolic, and culture-free, thus marginalizing those “impure” knowledge rooted in body-mind complexities, ethnic traditions or communal practices (Luitel, 2013). In Nepal, many disciplines, especially of the likes of mathematics and science, are dominated by a hegemonic knowledge delivery model where students are considered as an empty vessel who are supposed to ignore their cultural and contextual selves and receive knowledge from the instructor (Thapaliya & Luitel, 2024).

Devkota utilizes his moral agency as a transformative engine that rebels against the corrupt and shameless leadership, “निर्लज्ज नेतृत्वको नीरस रसनाको रण्डीको नाच हेर! जन-अधिकारको डुँडालोको भाँच हेर!” - “*Look at the strumpet-tongued dance of shameless leadership! At the breaking of the backbones of the people’s rights!*”. While the world views his “insanity” and actions as a lack of self-control, he frames his rebellion as a highly conscious, ethical choice to reject the apparatus of control in favor of a higher, spiritual, and humanitarian value system. Firstly, he inverts the social and political hierarchies dictated by the hegemonic leadership by elevating the marginalized and stripping the power of prestige. By raising the “insignificant individual” and raising them to the “seventh heaven”, Devkota displays conscientization that restores value to those whom leadership have deemed worthless. By denouncing Alexander - the great and deprecating the “high-souled ones” he refuses to acknowledge the legitimacy of leadership built on brute force and blood of innumerable innocents, “*I have denounced Alexander the Great. And I have deprecated the so-called high-souled ones. And the insignificant individual I have raised, Up an ascending arch of praises, Into the seventh heaven. Your highly learned men are my big fools.*” – “सिकन्दरलाई मैले गाली दिएको छु! महात्मा भनाउँदाको निन्दा गरेको छु! नगण्य व्यक्तिलाई, तर, सातौं आसमानसम्म, तारीफको पुलमा चढाएको छु,



तिम्ना महापण्डित, मेरो महामूर्ख!”). Devkota is seen in alignment with the visionary and ethical knowing of transformative education that seeks abilities to save the world rather than develop mere technical knowledge. For this, he connects with the Vedic story, where a sage, *Dadhichi*, sacrifices himself to offer a weapon of destruction of evil, *Vajra*, to the king of Gods, *Indra*. This “channeling of strength” is indicative of the fact that Devkota is not rebelling for chaos, but for ultimate moral sacrifice for the greater good. “तब मेरा मक्काएका हड्डीमा पनि दधीचिको आत्माको भयङ्कर बल पसेर, बोल्न खोज्दछ, साथी! स्वर्गबाट चट्याङ परेको दिनझैँ । जब मानवले मानवलाई मानव ठान्दैन, साथी,” – “*Then even into my corroded bones, my friend, The terrible strength of the soul of Dadhichi – the sage, Enters and seeks utterance. Like a clouded day crashing down to earth in the thunderbolt, When man regards a man as no man*”. Ultimately, Devkota’s lunatic avatar gets involved in a deliberate act of epistemic disobedience after he identifies that leadership uses “reason” as a hero or a justification for the all the conspiracies – “*When the sparrow-headed bold prints of black lies on the papers, Challenge the hero in me called Reason, With conspiracy false*”, “जब भँगेर-टाउके छापाको कालो मिथ्याले मेरो विवेक-वीरलाई जाली झुठले ललकार्छ ”. The lunatic challenges the cold, calculating logic that was used to misjudge his state of awe into being ridden to an asylum, *Ranchi*. The reading of “Lunatic” indicates that the perception of Devkota as a lunatic is also partly because of the difference in language. While Devkota uses a fluid, poetic language to make meaning and communicate, the society he depicts, and the one we are in, uses hard mathematical logic.

Language – Enforcer or Enabler?

Two distinct paradigms are observed in terms of the language used in STEAM practices. While the traditional STEAM paradigm has been seen to use language for reinforcement of Western hegemonic structures, modern/Transformative STEAM employs language as a tool for rebellion and even onto-epistemic rebellion. Especially in areas like mathematics, language is selective and highly bureaucratized which is designed to preserve the status of the subject as unassailable body of pure knowledge (Luitel, 2013). These languages function as a cultural border where students are forced to cross them by leaving their cultural identities at the school gate (Taylor P. C., 2014). Traditional pedagogy of STEAM is also marked by devaluing dialogic practices and a conversation of unidirectional nature that mandate the students to provide the correct answer to the teacher’s question (Dawson & Lee, 2018). The authors discuss about these oppressive languages of mastery through the metaphor of a pipeline where the teacher as an expert pours knowledge into the students viewed as empty vessel. This form of oppression is seldom recognized, let alone discussed. Warren et al. (2020) discuss this type of language under the zero-point epistemology which tries to continue the hegemonic language under the myth of neutrality in order to mask the Western supremacist origins and intentionality, all-the-while evaluating all other knowledge from a detached, omniscient standpoint.

In contrast, modern approach to STEAM have rebelled against the use of such language. Yakman (2008), in her model of STEAM, views mathematics as a primal language not in the sense of plugging numbers into formulae but rather as a linking agent between concept and



understanding of reality. Other practices advocate for folk languages that are “de-mathematized” in order to make the concepts available to all which is a move towards “im/pure” synergistic systems where global/formal knowledge can co-exist with “impure” local traditions (Luitel, 2013). In this synergistic combination, communication can be framed to emphasize reciprocity and the undistorted self (Thapaliya & Luitel, 2024). For this, a generative language is proposed to respect what the young individuals are thinking by relying more on subjunctive talk – using what if, might be, perhaps; and modal talk – with the usage of would, could, may etc. to create conceptual openings for critique and imagination (Warren et al., 2020). The authors also highlight the practice of using multiple historical and ideological voices within a text for the same purpose. Modern STEAM practice has also realized that no words are inherently neutral but rather carry with them compressed histories and potential futurities, thus promoting dialogical reasoning to ensure that the distilled meaning can be derived. Dahal (2022) contextualizes this in the context of Nepal with the help of Vedic metaphors to rebel against the hegemonic narrow understanding of disciplines towards a higher learning realm.

Devkota is seen to have recognized the uselessness of hegemonic language and prefer the language of nature. He starts by recognizing that nature is not an object to be studied but an orator capable of communication, “तिमी पहाडलाई लाटा भन्दछौ, म भन्छु वाचाल ।” – “*You call the mountains mute, but orators do I call them*”. To drive the attention of the readers towards propaganda created through words, he identifies deep-seated corruption in the use of moral and spiritual bankrupt language to domesticate and deceive the general public. He despises the fact that the unsophisticated folk swallow this “black poison”, taking it for elixir, as the leaders dance on a platform of lies – “जब निमुखा दुनियाँ कालो जहर पिउँदछ, पिउँछ कानले, र अमृत भनिठानेर”; “*When the unsophisticated folk quaff off black poison with their ears taking it for ambrosia*”. He also recognizes that the use of “civilization” and “innovation” in the vocabulary often serves as a hidden economic rationale ignoring the cultural heritage and spiritual legacy that an individual possesses as he states “*Your progression is regression to me*” while challenging the “*Highly learned*”. Devkota is against this act of erasing subjective and cultural nuances which he depicts by saying, “तिमी चतुर छौ, वाचाल ! तिम्रो शुद्ध गणित सूत्र हरहमेशा चलिरहेको छ” – “*Clever and eloquent you are! Your formulas are ever precise*”. Rather, he proposes an alternative way of speaking that is rooted in nature, intuition, and moral indignation by utilizing the ineffable-unspoken language and using the language of the “sixth sense” – an intuitive or gut feeling beyond that of the five senses: “म बोल्दछु तिनसँग, जस्तो बोल्दछन् ती मसँग एक भाषा, साथी ! जो लेखिन्न, छापिन्न, बोलिन्न, बुझाइन्न, सुनाइन्न ।” – “*I commune with them as they do with me. In such a language, friend, As is never written, nor ever printed, nor ever spoken, Unintelligible, ineffable all.*”

Integrating Epistemic Horizons

A key takeaway so far is that the need for an integrated epistemic system which respects multiple ways of knowing is felt by the contemporary researchers which is also observed in



Devkota's "Lunatic". Yet, it is comparatively very easy to find lapses in an existing system than providing an alternative which can not only address the shortcomings, but simultaneously substitute the function of the pre-existing system. The goal of modern practices in STEAM is to prioritize wisdom-inquiry where the acquisition of knowledge is a secondary activity used to facilitate the primary task of resolving problems of living and realizing what is of value in life (Maxwell, 2019a). Hunter-Doniger (2018) has stated that the final aim of academic enterprise is to transform from knowledge-inquiry to wisdom-inquiry. So far, the dominant model of academics has been focused on acquiring objective knowledge through knowledge-inquiry which has granted humanity vast technological power without the wisdom to use it responsibly, leading to numerous global crises (Maxwell, 2019b). The future lies on the capacity to realize what is of value in life for oneself and others by learning how to live. This is possible through wisdom-inquiry where learning is not preparation for life but life itself (Warren et al., 2020). In this final section of the article, I discuss how integrating multiple epistemic horizons could be rooted in our own culture and thus be promoted in supplement to STEAM ideologies.

Realigning with indigenous way of meaning making

In order to address the erasure of indigenous knowledge and way of meaning making by hegemonic practices, Warren et al. (2020) propose an onto-epistemic heterogeneity in the sciences, mathematics, and engineering among other disciplines. Three crucial liberatory forms are proposed to enact the onto-epistemic heterogeneity as "multiplicity": that view disciplines as dynamic and historically developing, "horizontalty": where learning is broader than school and learning environments are not neutral with life – but they are life, and "dialogicality": in which words are living dialogic threads and could be used as possible futurities. By doing so, an epistemic delinking from the colonial matrices of power is achieved which refuses to settle for disciplinary practices, thus promoting alternative ways of meaning making. This onto-epistemic openness positions students as agentic thinkers to imagine, articulate, and reshape disciplinary activity. A new kind of science is thus proposed to be required that makes the implicit assumptions of metaphysical presuppositions in science explicit which facilitate the improvement of science proceedings (Maxwell, 2019b). A simple practice such as renaming conventional colonial terms like "invasive species" to "plants that people lost their relationships with" cater to relational ethics and promote indigenous land-based pedagogies (Warren et al., 2020). This replaces the human-centric mastery of nature with what Burnard & Colucci-Gray (2021) term as "natureculture", where the observer and the observed are always enmeshed and enfolded. This is also a Vedic world-view under the Advaita – non-dual philosophy of life. In the Nepali context, Dahal (2022) addresses hegemonic erasure by metaphorically distinguishing between narrow STEM as "Avidya" – that is full of fundamental blindness or incorrect understanding; and STEAM with "kala" (Arts) as "Vidya" – which has higher learning or clarity. This shift incorporates the inner world of moral values, emotions, and spirituality, which is conventionally excluded by the Western knowledge-inquiry (Taylor & Taylor, 2022).



Devkota on the other hand seems to have found epistemic indigeneity back in 1956. In the very second line of the poem, he strikes the chord of alternate ways of meaning making, “म शब्दलाई देख्दछु! दृश्यलाई सुन्दछु ! बासनालाई स्वाद लिन्छु । आकाशभन्दा पातला कुरालाई छुन्छु । ती कुरा, जसको अस्तित्व लोक मान्दैन जसको आकार संसार जान्दैन !” – “*I visualize sound. I hear the visible. And fragrance I taste. And the ethereal is palpable to me. I touch the objects whose existence the world denies, of whose shape the world is unaware*”. This seems to be his way of meaning-making through forms rooted in animistic relationality, spiritual archetypes, and a subjective logic that defies that of the learned world. He has repeatedly illustrated how the hegemonic structures respond to indigenous or alternate ways of knowing through labeling and institutionalization. In the fourth verse, he narrates that when he was basking in the “*astral light*”, he was labeled as crazy; another time when he returned from the burning-ghats (place of cremation) and contemplated over death for a week, he was said to be “*possessed*”, and when the Buddha seemed to have touched him in his depths, he was again labeled as “*distraught*” – eventually dispatching him to Ranchi in order to neutralize his epistemic challenge. He hints to the animistic beliefs and relational meaning-making through his communion with the “*moonbirds*” – a bird of the dove family said to feed on moonbeams, whose language “*laps the moonlit Ganges shore*”. This communion with non-humans is hinting towards a state of “*becoming-one-with*” the natural world where meaning is individual and always value-laden. Finally, he reclaims the human spirit and concludes his epistemic challenge by asserting the primacy of the inner-world, “*तिम्रो गिदी छ साथी! मेरो मुटु !*” – “*Brains you have, my friend, But the heart is mine*”.

Conclusion

The addition of “A – Arts” in STEM to make it STEAM has discussed the issue of integration in much detail (Yakman, 2008). One of the powerful pedagogies of STEAM along with Inquiry Based Learning, Project Based Learning, and Problem Based learning used in STEAM setting is Arts Based Pedagogy (ABP). ABP is a teaching methodology where any one of the various art forms is integrated with another subject matter to impact student learning (Hunter & Frawley, 2023). Since ABP is often employed to overcome the perception that certain aspects of subjects are dry and abstract, lessons are designed to reduce anxiety, stimulate critical thinking, and create a memory using visual and auditory cues. In this pedagogy, assessment become more performative and collaborative thus highlighting the achievement of learning outcome in much more detail. Using sensory and creative expression, subject matter is explored from multiple perspectives in Arts-Based evaluation (Tsompanaki & Magos, 2022). This multi-modal approach to pedagogy and assessment could be one alternative to understand whether learning outcomes have actually been met or not. Other methods of inquiry that are central to transformative, arts-integrated, decolonial education frameworks are imagination as inquiry and emotion as knowledge. Imagination occurs when two or more ideas combine to form images, that do not yet exist, allowing learners to live beyond themselves and build an



understanding of alternative perspectives (Dawson & Lee, 2018). Thus, imagination acts more like a rigorous form of intellectual work to bring the “as is” world into an “as if” space to collectively explore new meanings and solutions to real-world problems than just a frivolous escape which is the conventional take. Imagination could also be a tool for wisdom-inquiry where problems of living are sought imaginatively, critically, and creatively (Maxwell, 2019a). Ultimately, imagination could be a site for conjuring visions of the thriving future where students could project themselves into a realm by imagining who they might be and what a better world should ethically become (Burnard & Colucci-Gray, 2021). Dougiamas (1998) has challenged the Western rationalist myth prioritizing cold reasons by asserting that affect and intellect are mutually dependent and that emotions are legitimate seats of knowledge. Dawson & Lee (2018) also support this and refer affective learning to the social, cultural, and emotional skills that shape the individual’s way of knowing. Emotions such as anger, grief, and fear can lead to analytical breakthroughs as well during analysis (Daza & Huckaby, 2014) and thus could be used as an epistemic tool. Dahal (2022) has mentioned that transformative education emphasizes on the integration of hands-on, heads-on, and hearts-on learning to educate the whole person. Thus, an emotional and imaginative method of inquiry in conjunction with arts-based pedagogy could be a new framework for STEAM.

Re-reading of just one literary piece, “The Lunatic”, from the Nepali literature has demonstrated that emotional and imaginative methods of inquiry have been utilized by Devkota. From this conceptual paper, I have initiated the possibility of utilizing Nepali literature as hermeneutic text that could serve as a culturally rooted device for meaning making. Since it was the scope of this article to discuss upon a possible theoretical foundation for utilizing Nepali literature into STEAM practice, further inquiry and research is obviously necessary to refine and solidify the understanding. Future research on the instruction model for arts-integrated STEAM pedagogy using “The Lunatic” could pave way to philosophizing through “The Lunatic” for transformative STEAM learning. With these two research areas underway, a synesthetic imagination in “The Lunatic” could be discussed further to derive a model for interdisciplinary creativity that could finally lead to a cognitive and creative framework.

Transparency Statement: The authors confirm that this study has been conducted with honesty and in full adherence to ethical guidelines.

Funding: The study received no external funding.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares there is no conflict of interest.



References

- Burnard, P., & Colucci-Gray, L. (2021). Reframing STEAM by Posthumanizing Transdisciplinary Education: Towards an Understanding of How Sciences and Arts Meet and Matter for Sustainable Futures. *Convergence Education Review*, 7(2), 1-29.
- Dahal, N. (2022). Transformative STEAM education as a praxis-driven orientation. *Journal of STEAM Education*, 5(2), 167-180. <https://doi.org/10.55290/steam.1098153>
- Dawson, K., & Lee, B. K. (2018). *Drama-based pedagogy: Activating learning across the curriculum*. Intellect.
- Daza, S. L., & Huckaby, M. F. (2014). Terra Incognita: Em-Bodied Data Analysis. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20(6), 801-810. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800414530264>
- Devkota, L. P. (1956). *Pagal*. Retrieved 7 1, 2026, from kavitakosh.org: https://kavitakosh.org/kk/%E0%A4%AA%E0%A4%BE%E0%A4%97%E0%A4%B2_/_%E0%A4%B2%E0%A4%95%E0%A5%8D%E0%A4%B7%E0%A5%8D%E0%A4%AE%E0%A5%80%E0%A4%AA%E0%A5%8D%E0%A4%B0%E0%A4%B8%E0%A4%BE%E0%A4%A6_%E0%A4%A6%E0%A5%87%E0%A4%B5%E0%A4%95%E0%A5%8B%E0%A4%9F%E0%A4%BE
- Devkota, L. P. (n.d.). The Lunatic. Flax-Golden Tales.
- Dougiamas, M. (1998). A Journey into Constructivism.
- Espinoza, M. (2009). A case study of the production of educational sanctuary in one migrant classroom. *Pedagogies: An International Journal*, 4(1), 44-62.
- Harari, Y. N. (2015). *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*. Harper Collins.
- Harari, Y. N. (2016). *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*. HarperCollins.
- Hunter, L., & Frawley, E. (2023). Engaging Students Using an Arts-Based Pedagogy: Teaching and Learning Sociological Theory through Film, Art, and Music. *Teaching Sociology*, 5(1), 13-25. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0092055X221096657>
- Hunter-Doniger, T. (2018). Art Infusion: Ideal conditions for STEAM. *Art Education*, 71(2), 22-27.
- Kizhukarakkatu, J. A. (2025). Pedagogical approaches in STEAM education: Fostering innovation and creativity in the classroom. In *Transformative Approaches to STEAM Integration in Modern Education* (pp. 79-102). IGI Global Scientific Publishing.
- Le Grange, L. (2016). Decolonizing the university curriculum. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 30(2), 1-12.
- Liao, C. (2016). From interdisciplinary to transdisciplinary: An arts-integrated approach to STEAM education. *ART education*, 69(6), 44-49.
- Lopez, A. E., & Singh, H. (2024). Introduction: Decolonizing Education as Site of Possibilities and Contestations. In A. E. Lopez, & H. Singh (Eds.), *Decolonizing Educational Knowledge* (pp. 1-8). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Luitel, B. C. (2013). Mathematics as an im/pure knowledge system: Symbiosis,(w) holism and synergy in mathematics education. *International Journal of Science and Mathematics Education*, 11(1), 65-87. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10763-012-9366-8>
- Maxwell, N. (2019a). From Knowledge-Inquiry to Wisdom-Inquiry: A New Paradigm for Academia. *Paradigm Explorer*, 129(2019/1), 3-7.



- Maxwell, N. (2019b). Wisdom: Object of Study or Basic Aim of Inquiry? In M. Ferrari, & N. M. Weststrate, *The Scientific Study of Personal Wisdom* (pp. 299-322). Springer.
- Mejias, S., Thompson, N., Sedas, R. M., Rosin, M., Soep, E., Peppler, K., . . . Bevan, B. (2021). The trouble with STEAM and why we use it anyway. *Science Education*, 105(2), 209-231. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sce.21605>
- Mignolo, W. D. (2009). Epistemic disobedience, independent thought and de-colonial freedom. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 26(7-8), 1-23.
- Palmer, P. J. (1998). *The Courage to Teach : Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Reps, P., & Senzaki, N. (Eds.). (1998). *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A collection of Zen and Pre-Zen writings*. Tuttle Publishing.
- Sharma, J. (2025, October 20). *Nepal News*. Retrieved January 8, 2026, from [nepalnews.com: https://english.nepalnews.com/s/feature/the-enraged-devkota-and-the-making-of-pagal/](https://english.nepalnews.com/s/feature/the-enraged-devkota-and-the-making-of-pagal/)
- Taylor, E. L., & Taylor, P. C. (2022). Introduction: Transformative STEAM education for sustainable development. In E. L. Taylor, & P. C. Taylor, *Transformative STEAM education for sustainable development: International perspectives and practices* (pp. 3-19). Brill.
- Taylor, P. C. (2014). Constructivism. In *Encyclopedia of Science Education* (pp. 1-8). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-6165-0_102-2
- Taylor, P. C., & Taylor, E. (2019). Transformative STEAM Education for Sustainable Development. *Proceedings of the Science and Mathematics International Conference (SMIC)*, (pp. 1 - 6).
- Thapaliya, P., & Luitel, B. C. (2024). Reflection-on-/in-/for-actions: Deconstructing hegemonic pedagogical culture in science education. *Culture of Science*, 7(1), 64-76. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20966083241241351>
- Timalsina, R. (2024). Reflection of Nepali Modernity in Devkota's Poetry. *JODEM: Journal of Language and Literature*, 15(1), 121-134. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3126/jodem.v15i1.68925>
- Tsompanaki, E., & Magos, K. (2022). Teaching Approaches for Preschool Teachers Through Community Dance During Pandemic. An Art-Based Research. *Review of European Studies*, 14(3), 88-96. <https://doi.org/10.5539/res.v14n3p88>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1993). *'The psychology and pedagogy of children's handicaps' [1924], The collected works of L.S. Vygotsky. The fundamentals of defectology*. (Vol. 2). (A. S. Carton, Ed., J. E. Knox, C. B. Stevens, & R. W. Rieber, Trans.) New York: Plenum Press.
- Warren, B., Vossoughi, S., Rosebery, A. S., Bang, M., & Taylor, E. V. (2020). Multiple ways of knowing*: Re-imagining disciplinary learning. In *Handbook of the cultural foundations of learning* (pp. 277-294). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203774977-19>
- Yakman, G. (2008). STEAM Education: an overview of creating a model of integrative education. *Research Gate*, 1-28.

Views and opinions expressed in this article are the views and opinions of the author(s), *NPRC Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability etc. caused in relation to/arising out of the use of the content.