

**Title:****Giving up and Getting Lost in Hanoi: playing with creative research methods in transnational contexts**

Alex Kendall\*, Tran Quynh Ngoc Bui+, Thi Hoang Yen Duong\*\*, Thi Thuy Trang Kieu\*\*, Louise Lambert\*, Tan Huynh^, Kim Anh Le\*\*, Thi Thu Lieu Le+, Nguyen Duc Hanh Luu^, Stuart Mitchell\*, Thi Thanh Hai Pham\*\*, Thanh Trung Nguyen+, Thi Thu Trang Nguyen+, Hoang Cam Tu Tran^,

\* Birmingham City University

+ Ho Chi Minh City University of Education

^ Nguyen Tat Thanh University

\*\* VNU University of Education

**Abstract:**

In this paper we share our experiences of working with creative research methods to explore HE teacher ‘becomings’ across a transnational education partnership between four universities, three in Vietnam and one in the UK. The work forms the qualitative phase of a two-year British Council Vietnam funded project. This phase of our research was concerned with HE teachers’ stories about their career trajectories, their concept making about professional learning and the value of post qualitative research methods to collaborative research across substantially contrasting social, cultural and economic settings. Drawing on ideas from post-qualitative research practices we read, talked, walked and made together in a range of face to face and digitally mediated events that opened up conversations about methodology and generated a common body of shared empirical material about HE teachers ‘becomings’. We “followed the contours” (after Mazzei 2017) of Brinkman’s (2014) concept of “abduction” and Maclure’s (2014) notion of “hot spots” to interact with our materials in ways that challenge more orthodox approaches to qualitative research that centre on the primacy

of data and coding. This approach encouraged us to relinquish the certainties, the ‘giving up’ in our title, of orthodox qualitative research traditions and disorientate ourselves, getting purposefully lost (after Lather 2007), in ways that foregrounded the socio-cultural and linguistic diversity of our research partnership. We share the outcomes, on-goings and provocations of our work and the significance for both HE workforce development and international teaching and research partnerships.

**Keywords: HE Teacher Development, TNHE, post-qualitative concepts, creative methods, practitioner educator**

**This work was supported by a Higher Education Partnerships grant from the British Council Vietnam Higher Education Partnership Grant**

Commented [AK1]: Funder is correct

### **Introduction (300 words)**

In this paper we share our experiences of working with creative research methods that draw on ideas from post-qualitative theory to explore higher education teacher ‘becomings’ across a transnational education partnership between four universities, three in Vietnam and one in the UK. The work forms the qualitative phase of a two-year British Council Vietnam funded project focused on building collaborative communities of practice to support researcher development and trans-national HIGHER education partnership (TNHE) building. The project aimed to explore the everyday *becoming, doing and making* of higher education practices and to pay careful attention to the political, social, cultural and economic factors that pattern and frame HE interactions across international borders. This phase of our research was

concerned with HE teachers' stories about their career trajectories, their concept making about professional learning and the value of creative, post qualitative methods as a strategy for embracing complexity and inviting new insights and provocations about working across substantially contrasting social, cultural and economic settings.

Drawing on ideas from post-qualitative research practices we *read, talked, walked* and *made* together in a range of face to face and digitally mediated events that prompted conversations about methodology and generated a common body of shared empirical material about HE teachers *becomings*. We “followed the contours” (after Mazzei 2017) of Brinkman’s (2014) concept of “abduction” and Maclure’s (2014) notion of “hot spots” to interact with the materials we created in ways that challenge more orthodox approaches to qualitative research dependent as they are upon the primacy of ‘data’ and ‘coding’. This approach encouraged us to relinquish the certainties, the ‘giving up’, in our title, of orthodox qualitative research traditions and disorientate ourselves, getting purposefully lost (after Lather, ), in ways that foregrounded the socio-cultural and linguistic diversity of our research partnership. We share the outcomes, on-goings and provocations of our work and the significance for HE workforce development IN international teaching and research partnerships.

### **TNE is not a neutral space: teacher becomings in context**

Whilst development of transnational education higher education (TNHE) partnerships continue to be strategically important to universities across the globe, whether as ‘importers’ or ‘exporters’, little empirical work has been undertaken to map the landscape or understand socio-cultural cost/benefit (Wilkins and Juusola 2018: 71) for

academics or students. As such the field is dominated by mythological debates that focus on the meta dynamics of import/export relations and perceived impacts on ‘stake-holders’. In attempting a ground-clearing mapping of this research terrain Wilkins and Juusola (2018) identify and unpick what they describe as ‘five prevalent myths’ of TNHE: that TNHE acts as a form of neo-colonialism; the trend for establishing international branch campuses is decreasing; distance/online/MOOC programmes will threaten other forms of TNHE; quality standards in TNHE are lower than at the home country campuses; the student experience and student satisfaction is lower in TNHE than at home country campuses. In so doing they argue for more nuanced accounts of TNHE that both pay attention to the complexity and hybridity that inevitably emerges from the fusing of diverse cultures and practices, and challenge the dominance of ‘home country’ perspectives - by which they tend to mean those of the *exporting country* which is inevitably economically developed and most often North American or Western European - in sense making about the nature and value propositions of TNHE. We draw out of this call to action the specific imperative to better understand higher education teacher development within TNHE partnerships, discussion of which is almost entirely absent from the mainstream literature.

In the Vietnamese context where we locate our conversation TNHE has been patterned and framed by *Đổi Mới* (Open Door policy) which marked a ‘watershed moment’ (Trinh, 2018) for Vietnam as it shifted “from a bureaucratically centralised planned economy to a multi-sector economy operating under a market mechanism with state management and a socialist orientation” (Dang, 2009: 10). Tracing the development of TNHE in Vietnam Trinh argues that whilst Vietnam has exercised some autonomy in the way TNHE has been shaped it is more often “featured as a

receiver and importer of international education” (2018:73) and what Trinh calls “model borrowing” (ibid). As such Trinh suggests *Đổi Mới* “has continued to enter a new and complex form of imperialism from inner-circle countries through its internationalization policies” (ibid: 75) this is characterised, her research suggests, by the kinds of contentions that Wilkins and Juusola argue to be mythological. In this paper we do not intend to settle these debates but instead to draw attention to the ways in which they too are defined by the discourses of ‘home country’ higher education – quality, standards, parity of esteem, language hierarchies, global citizenship - which has a colonising effect of fixing discussion, and more importantly critique, within the dominant epistemological traditions that pattern and frame higher education within those (usually Western) countries. This closes down opportunities for generation of alternative, situated HE cultures and, by extension, the imagining of new, contextualised ‘grounded pedagogies’ (Kendall and Hopkins, 2109), that might grow out of them.

Perhaps this surfaces most pertinently in relation to language, where participants in Vietnamese TNHE (students and teachers) must often come to know higher education and its associated practices and identities through the medium of dominant ‘world languages’ (English, French, German, Spanish). In the same way Vietnamese academics may be doubly disadvantaged in an academic economy of peer-reviewed publishing where prestige publishing outlets are largely rooted in those same languages and the ‘home country’ cultures of which they are a part. This generates a paradox for both students and academics whereby academic success is predicated on becoming ‘other’ to local, vernacular ways of doing, thinking and ‘becoming’ in the academy to create hierarchies that reproduce and reinforce global inequalities and

work against the development of high quality, sustainable, grounded academic cultures – illustrating what Trinh (2018:75) describes as “a new and complex form of imperialism from inner-circle countries.”

This has significant outcomes for teachers working in the sector. Thi Kim Anh’s 2016 investigation of the formation of academic identities in Vietnamese research universities found that whilst a ‘desire for an affinity with global disciplinary communities’ was reported by academics across disciplines “academics working in the applied sciences, particularly teacher education, were the least globally engaged, reporting meagre links with international scholarly networks. Typically, in the field of teacher education, an understanding of the need to mark out intellectual territory through publishing research findings in peer-refereed journals was acknowledged, but it was an attainment that was also considered to be wholly out of reach in practical terms.” (2016:3). The paradox of ‘new imperialist’ cultures might be seen to play out most significantly then in applied fields like teacher education where the primary audience for a country’s academic outputs might be its own constituency of teachers, educators and academics working in, and leading, its schools, colleges and universities, but where the performance of academic identity makes linguistic demands that renders the outputs of academic work inaccessible to sectors of the community where it might have most relevance and, crucially, impact.

This separation of research and practice is not unique to countries like Vietnam and plays out, albeit with a different nuance, in the UK. Following the UK’s 2014 national Research Excellence Framework assessment exercise only 27% of eligible staff working in the discipline of Education in UK Universities were included in their

institutional submissions and a bifurcation was observed (Pollard 2015) between those actively involved in research in education and those engaged in the everyday business of educating teachers.

### **Practicing Differently**

In this paper we respond to Wilkins and Juusola's call for more nuanced TNHE research. We put to work concepts and strategies from post qualitative research practices that force us to be self-conscious about the ontological and epistemological traces and effects of new (and old) practices to challenge and undo the certainties of imported models of higher education and in so doing offer new opportunities for re-imagining teacher becomings beyond the 'new imperialism' impulses of model-borrowing that Trinh notices above. Our work focuses on HE teacher education as an opportunity space for teachers and students to opening up new possibilities for HE practices and pedagogies in the Vietnamese context and effect context sensitive change across disciplines and the academic cultures of different types of institutions.

We draw on work undertaken as part of a two-year British Council funded project, *Teaching and Learning Together* (TLT). The project brought together academics and doctoral students from four university partners, a large modern university in the Midlands of England, two state funded Universities with national remits for Education in the South and North of Vietnam, and a new, private University with a focus on applied and vocational learning in the South of Vietnam. TLT explored practitioner educator development in the context of a shared commitment to preparing newly qualifying practitioners graduating from our programmes to respond to fast-

changing, hyper complex futures in Vietnam, UK and a wider global context. Both countries have seen significant expansion of higher education in the past two decades, as a consequence both countries have seen substantial growth in the number of academic staff joining the Higher Education workforce (see Le Thi and Hayden, 2017 for a detailed discussion of the expansion of the HE sector in Vietnam). In tandem Transnational Education (TNE) has become increasingly important to both capacity building (Vietnam) and income diversification (Vietnam and the UK) creating imperatives for institutions in both countries to generate new partnerships and collaborations. Our partnership has grown out of this complex interaction of global-local (glo-cal?) drivers.

The project was undertaken in two phases. In phase one we undertook a cross partnership e-survey, the first of its kind in Vietnam, inviting respondents to share their experiences of and perspectives on their own learning and development as practitioner educators and in phase two we embarked on a seven month phase of (post) qualitative work within, between and across our institutions. This involved three project team workshops (one in the UK, one in Hanoi, one in Ho Chi Minh City) involving the core project team, two staff and two PhD students from each institution, 16 in total, a synchronous digitally mediated workshop across the four institutions involving a wider group of participants (40 additional participants) recruited by open invitation from across our institutional network and twenty paired walking intra-views around our four campuses and the city streets beyond at the preference of participants. It is this second phase of the project that we explore in this paper. This phase of our research was concerned with our becoming as HE teachers' and practitioner educators, our stories about our career trajectories, our concept making about our



professional learning and the value of post qualitative research methods in collaborative research across substantially contrasting social, cultural and economic settings. With exploration of HE teacher becomings as our shared focus we read together to contextualise post-qualitative research practices for our work, chose and shared symbolic objects, crafted and materialised river journeys and lanterns and wrote, walked, talked and read and talked and read and wrote. Through these processes we co-constructed a vast quantity of empirical materials that we ‘hung out’ with (Somerville and Powell 2018, after Haraway) and ‘intra-acted’ with to explore teacher becomings in TNHE partnerships.

### **Doing TNHE differently: working with/in ‘the posts’**

We mobilise the concept of ‘teacher becomings’ to evoke ‘post perspectives’ that signal a preference for understanding HE teacher development with a rhizomic logic, as always already ‘in the making’, ‘in flux’ and a commitment to research practices which accept and embrace fluid ways of knowing, doing and being. We locate our work in the “swampy lowlands of practice” where

“problems are messy and confusing and incapable of technical solution. The irony of this situation is that the problems of the high ground tend to be relatively unimportant to individuals or to society at large, however great their technical interest may be, while in the swamp lie the problems of greatest human concern. The practitioner is confronted with a choice. Shall he [sic] remain on the high ground where he [sic] can solve relatively unimportant problems according to his [sic] standards of rigor, or

shall he [sic] descend to the swamp of important problems where he [sic] cannot be rigorous in any way he [sic] knows how to describe? (Schon, 1983)".

We happily "descend to the swamp", as a muddy, mucky, murky space within which to surrender the clarity of the high ground of traditional qualitative research and its insistence on distinctions, delineations and binaries that position and separate us from each other, our research environments, participants in our research, how we come to know what we know and the making and mattering of research data. This kind of arboreal logic (after Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), linear, fixed, mono-directional is poorly adapted to the environment of the swamp which demands 'rhizomatic' thinking that is adaptive and responsive to the dynamic opacity of the environment, thinking roots that grow continuously and horizontally putting out new lateral and adventitious shoots at intervals, adapted and adapting to the challenging, milieu of the swamp. Unlike thinking with trees/arbour, thinking in rhizomes allows us to imagine with multiplicity, mobilising a shift beyond stable modernist precepts towards the (present) continuous and dynamic 'and...and...and' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 27) cultures of the posts.

We understand our swampy environ as 'assemblage', that is to say a constellation of always already intra-acting elements (Strom, 2015) where each element "jointly contributes to the enacted practices as they continuously interact with one another" (Strom, 2015:2). A space within which we are both entangled and implicated, our research work is not an origin, a 'before' that instigates a linear pathway where we shape and control the conditions of our enquiry, but an opening, a series of "agential

cuts” (Barad, 2007:815) or entry points that we make in the ‘constellation’ of HE teacher education.

To be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence. Existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not preexist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating. Which is not to say that emergence happens once and for all, as an event or as a process that takes place according to some external measure of space and of time, but rather iteratively reconfigured through each intra-action, thereby making it impossible to differentiate in any absolute sense between creation and renewal, beginning and returning, continuity and discontinuity, here and there, past and future. (Barad, 2017).

In the context of TNHE keeping these ideas in play forces us to remain alert to the ways in which our becoming identities as British, Vietnamese, mono-lingual speakers of English, multi-lingual English/Vietnamese, gendered, racialised, cultured bodies, intersect and collide to position us in particular kinds of ways to each other, higher education practices, our students and the work we do individually and collectively and keeps us attentive to the ethics of becoming and working together:

Ethics is therefore not about right responses to a radically exteriorized other, but about responsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities of becoming, of which we are a part. Ethics is about mattering, about taking account of the entangled materializations of which we are part, including new configurations, new subjectivities, new possibilities. (Barad, 2009)

And so we invoke, in the words of our title, Lather’s call for purposeful disorientation to ‘get lost’ as both an impulse of surrender, challenging ourselves to give up the certainties and proxy rigours of the ‘high ground’ and “...as a way to do our work...political value of not being so sure, the stammering knowing, that embraces a ‘getting lost’...Materialise practices that don’t yet exist – non-authoritarian, staging, confessional, where no one is in command central about the meaning that is going to be made, [where we accept the] limits of knowing and [the] complications of doing.” (Lather 2015).

We shift paradigms (see Figure 1) and begin to try and mis-recognise ourselves to re-know our researcher identities and what it might mean to research without the orientating tools of method and the certainties of traditional qualitative paradigms that privilege a humanist Cartesian logic.

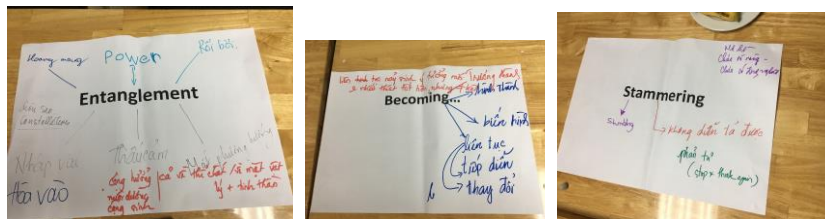
Figure 1. Shifting Paradigms

Research (positivist)	Re-thinking with ‘post-qualitative’ ideas
Real worlds	Assemblages
Seeking out truths	Noticing becomings

Knowledge is fixed, knowable and easily transferable between contexts	Knowledge is contingent and dynamic
Researcher is objective and distinct from the field of study	Researcher is entangled in the field of study (there is no 'before' the research)
Data is recognisable and researchers do things with it e.g. code and classify	'Data' is not 'extractable' or 'code-able' but does things to researchers - <i>affects, glows</i> (hot spots)
Participants are Individual actors (humanist)	Participants are entangled and part of collective/constellation
Researchers are neutral bystanders (avoiding bias) aim to be - certain, impartial, validate	Researchers are 'world-makers' - implicated in the research - Nomads, Flaneurs, bricoleurs
Researchers make sense of data, present findings, conclusions and make recommendations	Researchers stutter and stammer

After Maclure we try on and try out new researcher/practitioner identities as flaneurs, nomads and bricoleurs. Drawing on all of our collective language resources we 'trans-language' our concepts . Translanguaging speaks to the deployment of linguistic and wider semiotic resources in superdiverse, dynamic transnational spaces (Bradley et al 2017) and we stutter, stammer, laugh and get frustrated as we try to make new

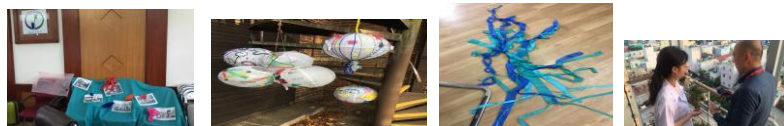
concepts mean and matter in English and Vietnamese, *glow/chói sáng*, *hot spots/điểm  
loé sáng*; *abduct/bắt ngờ*,



where there is no tradition of working with the posts in educational research but  
where the collision of, imported models (see O’Leary and Wood, 2016 on the force  
and prevalence of the standardised neo-liberal Global Education Reform Movement  
in HE) compete with traditional discourses of Confucian principles of education to  
create moments of discursive dislocation that open up productive betwixt and between  
spaces.

### Giving up data, working without method

We give up ‘data’. We give up method. But we make and talk and walk. We produce  
lanterns, share and curate objects that seem symbolically important to us as we  
consider our careers and trajectories as teachers in higher education. Take pictures,  
record our narratives, write individually and collectively in preparation for, and in  
response to, our research encounters.



And we worry about giving up traditional forms of data and the reassurances of a controlled method. What does research without data, without method look like, feel like? We share the kinds of ‘data anxieties’ that Banerjee and Blaise’s express in relation to their qualitative work in Hong Kong, “All of a sudden I have a horrible feeling in the pit of my stomach...” (Banerjee and Blaise 2017:51). What kind of ‘data’ would we produce in our workshops and ‘what will be able to ‘do’ with it’ we worried? As we often do in moments of ‘methodological crisis’ we turn to the wisdom of Elizabeth St Pierre to read out our anxieties, ‘read, read and do the next thing’ (2015) is her ever sensible retort to questions about ‘how to’ in post research. St Pierre reminds us that “words embed you in a particular discursive and material structure. Derrida wrote that when you use a concept you bring with it the entire structure in which it is thinkable. So if you use the word “individual,” you situate yourself in a human-centred structure. If you think the “researcher begins a study,” then you think the researcher exists before the study, ahead of language and materiality, that the researcher is not always already in the middle of everything, in the middle of many different studies that have already begun that she might continue.” (2015:15). This, in turn, reminds us that our concerns about data, what it should *be like*, what it should *do*, are purely epistemological in nature, that our fears are the discursive work of what Deleuze and Guattari might call ‘molar’ epistemes pulling us in to the striated spaces of a scientific research rationale that is constituting of the new imperialism we are seeking to work against. Youngblood-Jackson notes the ‘affect’ of method and the way it re-produces what she calls a ‘doer’ psyche that generates an in/out, systematic/unsystematic binary by which to recognise good/bad, reliable/unreliable research;

“Method is waiting for us, external to us—a form that we aspire toward. In this image of thought, Method becomes voluntary and “common sense”: Everybody knows that if you learn how to conduct inquiry, you can willfully apply it—thus affirming and reproducing it. Method installs itself via a doer who coheres to its Image and believes in its promise to deliver credible, authentic, and trustworthy research. That is, a well-trained qualitative researcher is already presupposed to be recognizable through practices such as “immersion in the field,” “triangulation,” “member checking,” “reflexive journaling,” and so on. Thus, this empirical “I” recognizes itself in its Method. (Youngblood-Jackson, 2017:671)

There is a predatory modality in ‘method is waiting for us,’ method lurking, inhabiting, inflecting an ‘image of thought’ to produce *affects*: anxieties, worries, concerns about encounters with data and what it might/could/should *be like* that lead us back in to the light and certainty of method. This is the logical trick of method we remember. We keep reading...revisiting Banarjee and Blaise who reassure us that

“shaking traditional beliefs that the researcher gives life and meaning to data is a hard thing to do. This new or different relationship that we have with data might feel second-rate or inadequate because the ‘right’ kind of data was not generated or it could seem to be missing altogether.” (Banerjee and Blaise 2017:54) We have learned, they continue, “that breaking traditional research habits is hard...what is required is not just about taking ‘more’ risks but it is also about learning how to relish failing and failing better in order to produce different kinds of research practices (Dewsbury, 2009). For us failing better is



about taking on a less certain style of research practice by opening up ourselves to *more* data disappointments, failures and malfunctions. ((Banerjee and Blaise 2017:58))”

So how to do our work otherwise? To resist the seduction method? We read back through the pages and pages of notes we’ve collected in the ever expanding folders we entitled things like ‘the posts’, reams of reassuring papers, e-folders of PDFs, and an ever expanding word file of quotes and thoughts called things like ‘Sept notes’ that we started ‘at the beginning’ to keep our thinking orderly but which in spite of themselves stumbles and expand beyond names and purpose without apparent reason or focus but following the posts and the concepts of the posts. Concepts, Claire Colebrook says are “intensive and create orientations for thinking” (2017:654). To stem our anxieties we decide to follow the contour of concepts with Mazzei:

Following a contour therefore, thought moves on its own, not according to a given trajectory, fundamentally changing the shape of inquiry as the contour of concepts allow connections to flow and bend. There is no capturing the voice of a participant in a minor inquiry, for such capture arrests thought. Method, on the contrary, follows a trajectory prescribed by inquiry in a major language. For example, capturing voice, congealing it in the form of a transcript, producing an interpretation, all of these fix thought and thereby arrest becoming. (Mazzei, 2017:676).

We “followed the contours” (after Mazzei 2017) of Brinkman’s (2014) concept of “abduction” and Maclure’s (2014) notion of “hot spots” to interact with our myriad of

materials in ways that challenge more orthodox approaches to qualitative research that centre on the primacy of data and coding. “Abduction” suggests Brinkman “is a form of reasoning that is concerned with the relationship between a situation and inquiry. It is neither data-driven nor theory-driven, but breakdown-driven...it occurs in situations of breakdown, surprise, bewilderment, or wonder” (Brinkman, 2014: 724). We became focused on when our materials “did something” (Banerjee and Blaise 2017, Bennett, 2004), points of ‘interference’ (Banerjee and Blaise 2017:58) encounters “glowed” (Maclure) to create affective responses and committed to working “with these interferences, rather than immediately shutting them down as inadequate” (Banerjee and Blaise 2017:58).

#### **Abductive moments: working with hot spots in our materials**

We work with ‘abductive moments’ as ‘hot spots’ (Maclure 2013: 172) in our research process. That is to say moments of recognition, “movement, singularity, emergence” (ibid 171) “gut feelings [that] point to the existence of embodied connections with other people, things and thoughts” (ibid: 172) and make connections that help us to think about teacher becomings within complex HE assemblages. We re-produce as ‘vignettes’ a selection of our hot spots. We playfully and purposefully resist the urge to ‘tidy up’ our vignettes or standardise to keep in play our complex relationships with standard, global forms of academic English (as Vietnamese academics *and* as English academics) and to continue our mobilisation and recognition of trans-language as an ethical imperative for doing cross national academic intra-action differently.

***Vignette 1, Teaching as Entanglement: Learning with learners***

When mentioning about HE identities, we tend to think about ourselves, about ways that we can make ourselves better, different ways of professional development, ways of how we can publish our work, etc. On the other hand, most of time, we forgot our roles as a teacher. Among the hotspots in our lantern making activity that we held, the two moments that strikes our thoughts which make us pause and rethink about our role as HE teacher are “students can play a role in our class” and “if we want to teach the students well, we need to get our students experience something”. The question here is as teachers, have we ever included the students into our teaching, preparing lessons, shaping our identity?

The roles of teachers and students has been evolving over the time. Traditionally, students play a role as a receiver and the teachers are transmitters. In class, the teachers’ responsibility are to stand in front of the students providing information and knowledge. In contrasts, students play as passive learners. This one way relationship now has changed over time. The learning process can be divided into three stages: before class, during class and after class. The students’ entanglement are big obstacle for the teacher who will design the assessment method. In role play activities at the class, both teachers and students have more chance to give feedback with the specific scenarios. With the new learning model, the more learning materials the teachers prepare for their students at home, the less anxiety they will be in the class. In other words, the hot spots reminded the participants about the teachers’ activities. Instead of follow the traditional way, going to class, open the laptop, ask student open the book and then talk continuously about the theory, the concept; the teachers need to change their mind, jump out the box, overcome the framework to make students join and experience. It helped the researchers understand more deeply about the term “entanglement”. If the teachers can

create the environment that students can join as a part of a class or a lesson and a subject and make them feel comfortable to share their thinking, their experience, it can offer opportunities for both of students and teachers to explore themselves. With that being said, the students and teachers are now learning from each other. The teachers can gain more experiences, open up to new way of their lessons, teaching methodology whereas the students may not see their teachers as teachers but could be from different roles such as carers, friends, or family members.

In conclusion, by that way, teachers and students can become as a part of the whole of class, can be very comfortable to talk, to write, to do anything to get the knowledge, to shape and reshape their identities. The roles of the receiver and transmitter from different environment, spaces, and time will shape the identities of HE teachers.

#### ***Vignette 2, Women in the academy***

“Áp lực lớn nhất đối với A bây giờ là A đi học Tiến sỹ thôi. Một áp lực nữa là A là con gái. Kiểu như nếu còn độc thân thì mình xả, kiểu lặn xả vào chuyện công việc, chuyện học hành thì A nghĩ nó không phải là vấn đề đối với A kể cả việc thức hôm thức khuya gì đó không phải là vấn đề đối với A vì thực ra mình tin là mình có khả năng. Nhưng bây giờ gia đình thì...và đôi khi, đặc biệt là khi mình đã xác định gia đình đặt lên trên nên hơi bị mâu thuẫn, kiểu như là A cảm thấy rất căng thẳng, giống như là, nhiều khi mình nhìn rất nhiều các học bổng apply nước ngoài. Mà bây giờ A đã thay đổi quan điểm rồi - nếu là A của mấy năm về trước thì A sẽ sẵn sàng chấp nhận không đi tìm học bổng nữa, và A sẽ sẵn sàng bỏ tiền túi ra nhưng ở thời điểm này A cũng có suy nghĩ như vậy nhưng mình không làm được nữa. Nghĩa là ở thời điểm này A muốn bỏ tiền túi ra đi học nhưng gia đình sẽ níu mình lại.”

The biggest pressure for A (me) now is to study Ph.D. Another pressure is that I'm a woman. If I were single, I would dedicate myself to work and study, even stay up late. I really believe that I have an ability to work and study well. However, currently, I'm married and especially, I always value taking care of my family as the most important thing, sometimes I feel it's a bit conflicting, like I feel very stressful as many times I see there are a lot of international scholarships which I can apply to study abroad. At the moment, I have changed my mind already - if it were me of a few years ago, I would be willing to accept not going to apply to the scholarship for studying abroad, and I would be willing to pay the fee myself but at this time, I also have the thinking like that but I can't do it anymore. It means that at this time, I want to self-fund my further study but my family will hold me back."

Among interviews of 6 participants, the story of a female young lecturer who has just got married really attracted us. She shared that she had a dream to study further for a PhD degree. She had been working very hard and she had a strong belief that she could manage both workload and studying. In order to make the dream of being a PhD candidate become true, she kept looking for an opportunity by applying for scholarship. Moreover, she was also willing to pay the cost herself if necessary. However, after getting married, the ambition put pressure on her. Since then, it has been hard for her to balance her work, study, and family. For her, family now is the priority. Finance also became another issue for her to pursue her goal.

This hot spot greatly attracts us because it may share a common obstacle of married female academics at HE institutions in Vietnam. In fact, married female academics in Vietnam have double shifts. They have not only have to spend times for teaching, researching and community services as any other male colleagues at HE institutions, but also must spend time in taking care of their family.

In this story, because the lecturer valued her family the most important thing, so she also may pay a lot of attention on taking care of her family. This may be an issue related to Vietnamese culture in which married women often tend to spend more time on looking after their family than men. Considering housework has been only women's works which has been still popular in society as well as in thought of every woman despite of advances in the sharing of housework in Vietnamese knowledgeable families in recent years (Nguyen, 2007). That put the female academics under high pressure to find time and strength to complete their work and as well as enhance their professional development. It was reported in Nguyen's research that their multiple roles of being a wife, a mother, and a HE teacher have affected their participation in implementing research activities at Vietnamese HE institutions (Nguyen, 2007). As a result, female HE teachers have been entangled in their public and private identities occasionally which obviously affected on their professionalism.

In terms of doing research tasks of women academics at Vietnamese HE institutions, Nguyen (2007) also examined that they must face an issue of gender's prejudice when participating in research activities. Although the women, especially women in academic field prove that they have an ability to complete multi tasks and potential to archive even better results in work, they have not been treated fairly. Particularly, academic women have been now and then underestimated their capacity to do research activities in a comparison with their male colleagues.

Thus, the issue of gender's prejudice has been a critical one that can have impacts not only on doing research activities and other tasks at work, but also the professional development of married female academics at Vietnamese HE institutions. Currently, in almost of Vietnamese HE institutions, there have not been any special policies for the professional development of female academics except the policy of

maternity for lecturers. Therefore, we think that policy makers at institutional and national levels in the context of Vietnamese HE should consider these issues in order to build better professional development policies for married female academics.

### ***Vignette 3, Knowledge Cultures***

The walking intra-views took place in a botanical garden where there happened to be an ‘ice age’ exhibition. One participant wondered ‘if we’d have a more focused conversation if there weren’t woolly mammoths...’.

The notion of being ‘focused’ spoke to a recurring theme across our materials, particularly from those participants with fewer years’ experience in H.E. Eight participants were early career academics who had transitioned from a practice based first career (in teaching or nursing). Their sense of a linear path to the destination of being an academic and the ways in which these were bound up with a distinct researcher identity, resonated across the data. ‘You haven’t got enough experience or age...people make assumptions...’ Characteristics of the professional academic were binaried, a place where particular intellectual behaviours existed and were aspired to. Points of arrival to which issues of time, space and opportunity were barriers. Practice and experiential knowledges were the least privileged in the practice/ research dichotomy and being, or looking, young seemed a gendered fear of not being taken seriously. A ‘bounded’ academic where the intellectual, the ‘researcher’ identity as opposed to the ‘teacher’ identity had credibility in ways which made the embodied and sensory playfulness of the making workshop feel more alien as a means of knowledge production.

The ‘making’ ruptured some of these certainties. In the space of the workshop, being unsure manifested in an initial self-consciousness about making, ‘I was reluctant to do

it until others started taking part' suggested one participant, 'it's a bit scary to start with'. This was in contrast to the subsequent physical enjoyment of working with the materials. The sensory experiences of the workshop; the smearing and smoothing of paint with two hands, the alteration of time to a slowness where one participant acknowledged one could 'slowly get into the small talk' to make connections, share and explore with others. The sense and expectations of *being academic* happening in particular spaces, and collecting and generating data, were disrupted by the novelty of 'research' in the workshop and in outdoors space. A strong sense of possibilities for creative research was evident across the intra-view data and in the lantern making, particularly generated by shifts in time, space and place for experiencing the intersection of multiple ways of thinking, making and remaking academic identities. As one participant noted; 'When you do things differently, you observe differently'.

### **Only connect...**

Our three vignettes 'hot spots' draw out the constellated and intra-acting nature of our becomings within HE assemblages. In contrast to the notion implicit in transactional import/export discourses of TNHE, where discussion of HE practitioner development is notable absent, that HE practice is neutral, technical work, our research draws attention to the deeply situated nature of HE work. Notably the physicality of smearing and smoothing paint, threading, tying, knotting entwining materials opened into explorations of the ways in which binary concepts dominate the structuring of experience, patterning and framing our thinking in ways that have implications for action and our capacity for agency: things teachers do and things students do; the separation of professional from personal lives; how research feels bone fide or not; the disconnect between mothering and the academic life; the vernacular, stammering,



stuttering trans-languaging of bringing lived experience in to being and the reified, standardised languages of academic practice for both our Vietnamese participants and our ‘non-traditional’ UK academics. Inherent in such binaries are varying degrees of winning, losing and risk taking that play out differentially and inequitably for different kinds of subjects where for example the mother as academic juggles competing demands and identities and risks non-conformity in both, or the practitioner turned researcher understands their tacit, experiential knowledge grounded in practice in ‘otherness’ to ‘aspirational’ knowledge regimes of the university. How one is positioned in relation to structuring structures, where in the binary your social, cultural and vocational inheritance lands you, becomes a key factor in shaping outcomes and determining the degree of individual risk you will need to take to make an agentic impact on those outcomes, for example if you are a women, new to dominant, Western forms of academic life and or a non-standard English speaker. By contrast thinking with ‘the posts’ resists exoneration for any of us, implicating us all in the complex entanglements of the HE assemblage. Thinking with ‘becoming’ requires an acceptance of culpability because we become *in relation to* one another, ‘existence is not an individual affair’ (Barad, 2007), thinking about teachers/teaching requires thinking about learners/learning, and becoming not only responsible to one another but enabled to respond,

Responsibility, then, is a matter of the ability to respond. Listening for the response of the other and an obligation to be responsive to the other, who is not entirely separate from what we call the self. This way of thinking ontology, epistemology, and ethics together makes for a world that is always already an ethical matter. (Barad, 2007)

### **Towards Concluding: TNHE as an ethical matter**

Towards concluding we make the case that working in TNHE partnerships is always already an ethical matter and that thinking with the posts gives us useful tools for opening honest conversations about the social and cultural complexity of working across international borders, enabling us to think through the issues of implicatedness and responsibility associated with our teacher becomings. At best this has helped those of us involved in the TLT project to set a new agenda for future UK/Vietnam collaborations focussing particularly on grounded pedagogies, women in the academy and academic writing as key focal points for further collaboration and development. It has also cautioned those of us in the UK to ‘become less deadly’ (Franklin-Phipps and Rath, 2018) as agents of exported forms of higher education that privilege Western forms of knowledge making and transacting – forcing us to take account of, and responsibility for, our implicatedness within these relations. We argue that further development of these key dimensions of academic practice are fundamental to ensuring that TNHE has the capacity to be more than a transactional import/export exchange but a meaningfully transformative experience for all participants. We are none of us unchanged by our intra-actions in the TLT project and anticipate that our “deep hanging out” (Somerville and Powell 2018, after Haraway) together will continue to shape and inform our work. In the meantime we remain committed to “occassional breakdowns”, this can be achieved by questioning the taken for granted, by learning to make the obvious dubious (Noblit & Hare, 1988). If the pragmatists are right to insist that knowledge is a kind of doing that results from an

abductive process following a breakdown, we need to learn to defamiliarize ourselves from what we take for granted to come to know it” (Brinkman, 2014:724).

## References

- Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the Universe half-way*. Duke University Press: Durham and London
- Bennett, J. (2004) *The force of things: Steps toward an ecology of matter*. Political Theory Vol. 32 No. 3, June 2004 347-372
- Blackledge, A. and Creese, A., 2017b. Translanguaging in mobility. *The Routledge handbook of migration and language*, pp.31-46.
- Bradley, J., Moore, E., Simpson, J. (2018) Translanguaging space and creative activity: theorising collaborative arts-based learning. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 18 (1) 54-73
- Brinkmann, Svend (2014) ‘Doing without data’ *Qualitative Inquiry* 20(6) 720–725
- Dang, Q. A. (2009). Recent higher education reforms in Vietnam: The role of the World Bank. *Working Papers on University Reform*, 1–116
- Deleuze, G., Guattari, F. (1987). *A Thousand Plateaus* tr. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press
- Franklin-Phipps, A., Rath, C. L. (2018) How to become less deadly: a provocation to the fields of teacher education and educational research, *Parallax*, 24:3, 268-272
- MacLure, M. (2010) The Offence of Theory. *Journal of Education Policy* 25. 277-286
- MacLure, M. (2013) Researching without representation? Language and materiality in post-qualitative methodology, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 26:6, 658-667
- Massumi, B. 1992. *A Users Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.
- Lather, P. (2005). *Getting Lost: Feminist Efforts Toward a Double(d) Science*. State University of New York Press: New York

Lather, P. (2017).

Le Thi Kim Anh. (2016). *Developing the Academy in Vietnam: An investigation of the formation of academic identity by university lecturers in Vietnam*. PhD thesis:

Southern Cross University, Lismore, Australia.

Le Thi, K. A., Hayden, M. (2017) The Road ahead for the higher education sector in Vietnam. *Journal of International and Comparative Education*, 6 (2)77-89.

Maclure, M (2014) Researching beyond representation

Mazzei, L. (2017) 'Following the Contour of Concepts Toward a Minor Inquiry'

*Qualitative Inquiry* 2017, Vol. 23(9) 675–685

Nguyen, T. Tuyet. (2007). Develop a strategy to increase gender equality in activities of scientific research in Vietnamese universities. *Vietnam National University, HaNoi Journal of Science, Social Science and Humanities*, 23 p. 177-184.

O'Leary, Matt and Wood, Phil (2016) *Performance over professional learning and the complexity puzzle: lesson observation in England's further education sector*. *Professional Development in Education*, 43. 1-19

Pollard, A. (2015) Changing Educational Landscapes. *Research Intelligence*, Spring.

Schon, D.A. (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner*. Ashgate

Somerville, M., Powell, S. J. (2019) Thinking posthuman with mud: and children of the Anthropocene, *Educational Philosophy and Theory*. 51-8. 829-840

Strom, K., Martin, A. (2016) Pursuing lines of flight: Enacting equity-based preservice teacher learning in first-year teaching *Policy Futures in Education* Vol. 14(2) 252–273

Trinh, A, N. (2018) 'Local Insights from the Vietnamese Education System: the impacts of imperialism, colonialism, and neo-liberalism of globalization' *The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives* Vol. 17 (3) 2018 67-79

Wilkins, S., Juusola, K. (2018) The benefits and drawbacks of transnational higher

education: Myths and Realities. *The Australian Universities Review*. 60 (2) 68-76.