
DISCUSSION

The Emergence of the “I” Reflections on the Use of Qualitative Research Methods in a Master’s Program in Educational Management and Leadership at the VNU University of Education

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Abstract: Qualitative interactive research methods by definition necessitate the conscious and active involvement and participation on the part of both researcher and researched. Using as a point of departure a masters course in educational management and leadership in Hanoi, Vietnam, conducted jointly by Högskolan Dalarna in Sweden and the staff of the University of Education in Hanoi, this article explores several aspects of the qualitative research process as it was conducted by eight Vietnamese educational managers in their masters’ theses. The article focuses in particular on how the qualitative methods contributed to the construction of the informal backstage where an interpersonal dynamic and a reflective dialogue could take place. In this arena, we can view the emergence of the personal “I” of the researcher. The paper concludes with some thoughts on activities of the supervisor.

Keywords: Backstage, ethnography, experience, reflective dialogue, qualitative methods.

1. Prologue: To the context

We arrived at Mrs. T’s school at 6 or so in the evening after driving for what seemed to be hours through the miles and miles of new construction which defines present-day Hanoi. We had spent the day supervising our students at the university and were duly exhausted. Still, the visit to Ms. T’s school was not to be missed: we had been invited to enter the research site of one of our students and to experience, if only

for a few hours, her world and that of her informants - to share the thoughts of some Vietnamese high school students about their research and to respond to their obvious excitement in greeting us, the first foreign teachers to visit their school.

The students - five or six clearly excited young people - met us at the gate of the large high school and escorted us to their well-worn club room. Seated around a u-shaped table waiting for us were their research-mates - 25 tenth to twelfth graders.

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The students were well prepared for our visit and were anxious to present and discuss their work. They told us how they had done their research: they had first thoroughly discussed their topic - what characterized 'the world' of Vietnamese high school students, the problems, hopes, difficulties. They then wrote their fairly lengthy compositions about this world and presented their individual views in a long seminar.

And now we were there on their scene to listen to them - two university teachers from far away Sweden who had been their teacher's teacher for two years. I/We were visibly moved: I sat in front of the young people, gazed and smiled at them, calmed down a bit and somehow found the words: "Chào các em sinh viên, hello everybody... so great to be here with you..." And they, loudly, together, "Hello, teacher..."

The meeting progressed

2. Introduction and focus of this paper

This paper focuses on some aspects of the use of qualitative research methods in a Master's program in Educational Leadership and Management (MELM) conducted by Högskolan Dalarna in Sweden in collaboration with colleagues at the University of Education at the Vietnamese National University in Hanoi Vietnam. My particular concern is to explore how these methods contribute to the construction of a space for a reflective dialogue between researcher and researched and to the emergence of a leadership-oriented "I" on the part of the researcher.

I will regard qualitative research methods as those which purport to discover or uncover the meaning or *verstehen* of social phenomena as these meanings are expressed in natural settings

by various actors. The methods concentrate on a "situated activity that locates the observer in the world"ⁱ and proceed to describe or discuss the activity as performed, explained and understood by the subject(s). The goal of the research is to generate personal and contextualized opinions rather than universal truthsⁱⁱ.

Characteristic of all qualitative methods - semi - and unstructured interviews, participant observation, open-ended surveys, focus groups, conversations and simulation games - is that they necessitate some measure of interaction and/or dialogue between researcher and researched. Both are present and active: the researcher organizes, participates, asks, considers, reacts, reflects, interprets, asks again; she consciously and continuously involves herself on the scene in the production and reproduction of dataⁱⁱⁱ. The researched, termed most often in this paper as respondent, also asks, considers, asks again, disagrees, contemplates, discovers.

In this paper I will explore three aspects of this interaction: first, *'the emergence of "I"*, one result of the face-to-face interaction which involves the selves of both researcher and researched. Second, and related to this, the interaction demands that the researcher switches roles from being a distant observer - characteristic of the use of quantitative methods - to being an actor, subject, participant and partner involved in what I view as a *reflective dialogue* with their several respondents. Interactive qualitative methods encourage and indeed necessitate such a dialogue. Third, the reflective dialogue takes place in what the sociologist Erving Goffman^{iv} many years ago

ⁱ Denzin and Lincoln 2012:7

ⁱⁱ Ortner 2006, Rabinow and Sullivan 1988.

ⁱⁱⁱ My perspective has been affected by Carrithers, Collins and Luke's *The Category of the Person* (1985).

^{iv} Goffman 1959.

defined as the backstage. Based on his view of social life as a theater where actors perform their various roles, Goffman differentiated between roles played in front and back stages. The backstage encourages open and informal discussions - discussions which are searching and spontaneous and vaguely incomplete. Opposed to this is the more formal front stage - a public arena where formal more normative performances are held.

My purpose here is to explore these three processes as they emerge in the research activities of students enrolled in a masters' program in educational management and leadership (MELM) where qualitative methods were employed. I will also reflect upon how my activities supervisor affected these processes.

To place this paper and the masters' program in its particular context, I will begin with some comments on the *đổi mới* reforms initiated by the Vietnamese government in 1986 and specified and carried out at many intervals since then. I then introduce the Master's program in Educational Leadership and Management, the MELM, and conclude with a review of eight MELM masters' theses and how the students' use of qualitative methods encouraged the emergence of the 'I' of both researcher and researched^v.

3. The larger context: *Đổi mới*, renovation and reform in post-war Vietnam

The MELM program can be seen as an aspect of the Vietnamese government's overall program for "renovation", *đổi mới*, which can

^v My particular task in the program was to introduce qualitative interactive methodologies and to supervise the students as they conducted the research for their master's theses. I was thus directly concerned with the practice or "doing" of what many students regarded as new, unfamiliar and often somewhat suspect methods.

be summarized roughly by the drastic switch in the early 1990s from a planned to a socialist, globally oriented market economy. To make this switch and to be able to successfully compete in the world market, Vietnamese policy makers were and are aware of the need to revamp the educational system. They thus introduced a wide range of policies which aimed to reform all educational institutions and to create the competencies which were/are needed to improve the quality of education and training in all fields.

An important turning point in the process of *doi moi* occurred in 2007 when the government and the Party officially decentralized the educational establishment and granted some measure of autonomy to schools, colleges and universities. The change meant that some decisions were to be made locally and were to be based on local needs^{vi}. Closely related to this was the fact that state subsidies both now and in the past have not been adequate to fulfill local needs or to satisfy government requirements and have had to be supplemented by locally raised funds. This meant that school leaders and community leaders were obliged to identify and mobilize local assets in order to cover their expenses; they were also accountable for school finances and for in-house training of their staffs. Classroom teachers and specific classroom practices were also targeted; teachers were obligated to introduce "student-centered teaching methods", to promote "critical thinking" and to use IT more often and more effectively. Many MELM students, all of whom were school leaders and none were classroom teachers, were thus anxious to find ways to train their teachers to move from more classroom procedures whereby "teacher talks and students

^{vi} The term "socialization" was often heard in this context. The term is used in Vietnam to mean the mobilization of broad local support for needed programs.

listen” to student-teacher dialogues and students’ active participation in classroom activities^{vii}.

Moreover, the school managers were faced with an additional problem - how to deal with the fact that students as well as teachers could now choose among a variety of schools. This often led to competition for both able teachers and bright students. MELM students often pointed out that in order to attract and retain both good teachers and good students, they had to create a good ‘brand name’ for their schools. How to accomplish this - how to attract and retain good staff and good students - was a recurrent problem for them and in several cases the subject of the research for their masters’ theses.

4. The local context: MELM program: goals, curriculum, participants

The goal of the MELM program was two-fold: to introduce a variety of cutting edge concepts and practices in educational management and leadership and to challenge the students to consider or debate or at times *test* the usefulness of these concepts in their local contexts. The curriculum was thereby meant to be a point of departure for the students to reflect on their own experience in the local context or circumstances and - in the spirit of action research - a starting point for probing local practices and (perhaps) initiating locally defined change. However the MELM program never promised a cure or solution to the school managers’ problems. What it offered instead was a new perspective, a space for deliberation

and an opportunity to engage in a reflective dialogue with us and with each other about local problems and concerns^{viii}.

All of the 119 MELM students were experienced school managers currently employed as middle - or higher level managers, either administrative or academic, at a university or college or community educational center. Several were high school department heads; others held a variety of managerial roles - as managers of university departments, university administrators with managerial duties, managers of colleges of vocational training or pre-school education, and managers of community education and training centers. Because current MoET policy maintains that all school managers are required to hold a Master’s degree in educational management to keep their jobs, most of our students were granted leave with pay from their school districts to participate in MELM.

A constant focus in the MELM program was the local experience of the students in their various capacities as school managers. Their experience was primary: to complete each of the six theoretical courses, the students were required to submit an assignment which applied the course material in the living context of their schools. The MELM curriculum thus emphasized the students’ double roles - as managers who were focused on the daily operation of their schools and as potential leaders who would or could initiate some kind of change.

This emphasis on the personal experience of the school managers differed from the Vietnamese educational system where

^{vii} These changes were a persistent topic of in-service courses, workshops and discussions among teachers as well as school managers. At one such seminar in the College of Pre-school Education in HoChiMinh city, we were moved by the teachers’ enthusiasm for change and their acknowledgement of the difficulties involved in this switch.

^{viii} My use of the term “concerns” here is deliberate. After long and heated discussions/debates among the MELM Swedish team, we agreed that “concerns” provided the students with more space for deliberation than “questions” and was clearly less negative than “problems”.

educational goals and practices are closely described and defined by the Ministry of Education and Training, the MoET. Initially MELM students (as educational managers everywhere!) were inclined to downplay their own experience and to dwell instead on fulfilling the directives announced by the Ministry. Still, personal experience did affect their research concerns: as I mentioned above, many MELM students were concerned with the problem of teacher retention in market-oriented socialist Vietnam where students and teachers are free to choose schools and where schools compete for both good teachers and bright students. Others, in particular managers of vocational schools were determined to find ways to breach the often lamented serious lack of correspondence between the content of courses given in their vocational colleges and the needs of local employers. Thus while the managers were obligated to apply the general policies, MELM insisted that they were to do so in the local context and based on local experience^{ix}.

In addition to MoET policies, the students consistently referred to the importance of education for the national development in Vietnam. Not uncommon in all nation states, education was seen as the panacea which would move the nation from what many students referred to as the “backward” Vietnamese past to a modern present and a more “developed” future. In every thesis, the students point out that their main task as educators was to promote ‘processes of modernization and industrialization’ and to thereby move Vietnam into a future where the country is “integrated” in the world economy. Thus MELM students’ interests reflected an audible national narrative focused on

“development”, one which referred to the slogans, ideas and hopes of HỒ Chí Minh and iterated constantly by the Party and the government.

Still, while the MELM program acknowledged the centrality of policy and the importance of education for national development, where MELM clearly differed was in the approach to research and research methods. Rather than traditional quantitative methods, MELM students were expected to use interactive, qualitative methods to conduct their research. Together with their staff and other stakeholders, they were to employ these methods to create a space where they could reflect and deliberate on their local experience and explore their own organizations with their staff. From here they could proceed to identify, initiate, test and reflect upon some activities to address the problems they had identified.

The use of qualitative methods presented some difficulties for the students. No longer permitted to be distant collectors of statistics, the students were now active participants in the research process; their persons/selves were directly involved, visible and audible. Each student-researcher had to become a subjective and engaged “I”, no longer an impersonal “the researcher”.

How the students managed this process is my focus in the following sections of this paper. By taking a close look at the masters’ theses of eight MELM students, I will explore whether and how they managed to emerge as ‘I’ in the process of ‘doing’ qualitative methods.

5. Practicing qualitative methods: some comments on the students’ “doing”

Aside from the (few) students who were employed by international NGOs, no students

^{ix} See Lipsky, M. 2010, 1980, for an interesting analysis of street-level bureaucrats, no doubt the position of the managers.

had conducted interviews and fewer still recognized the value of first hand ethnography - detailed observations or descriptions of their schools or workplaces as both they and their various respondents viewed them. In spite of several discussions about ethnography, particularly Geertz's concept of "thick description"^x the first draft of their background chapters, which we originally termed "diagnosis"^{xi}, rarely contained information of this kind. As is typical of students of education worldwide, most students tended to refer automatically and uncritically to MoET's documents and other governmental policies. Instead of collecting open-ended ethnographic data, they proceeded to distribute an extensive, non-tested multiple choice questionnaire whose results they neatly tallied and presented as data.

As supervisors we were not satisfied; while we agreed that the information was useful as a general background, what we sought was here-and-now ethnography based on the students' experience - their views of the rules and roles being played out, their descriptions of the sights and sounds of the school scene and detailed comments from individuals and staff and others about what might 'actually' be going on^{xii}.

To accomplish this - to find out what was 'going on', the students were to use interactive methods - perhaps some participant observation, certainly semi-structured individual and group or focus interviews, essays and life stories, visual materials, and perhaps simulated events or 'stories'. We emphasized the importance of 'voice' and urged the students to include the informants' actual words

and comments in their final texts. The resultant ethnography might be "thin" - simple descriptions of people and places and events, or, it might (hopefully) be "thick" - combinations of views, various interpretations of events, comments and questions and arguments. What we sought was the meaning ("verstehen") of events or conditions as understood and explained by the several participants.

To find or disclose this they would have to create a space, what I refer to below as a "backstage", for a dialogue wherein they and their informants-respondents could discuss, relate, contemplate and compare their various experiences^{xiii}. A central activity was reflection - the need to look back, to reflect upon their methods, their activities and roles as participants. To do this they would have to engage in what is essentially an "I" centered activity.

Initially, the students were rather wary of this personal involvement: few dared to use the pronoun "I" as they wrote. Their reluctance, they explained, related to their understanding of the "scientific" and the "objective": the personal, they explained, is by definition subjective and thus cannot be scientific. But as the students began to utilize various qualitative methods - individual and group interviews, life stories, simulated events and coaching, they found themselves being actors, participants, a subject among subjects. They asked and listened, asked again, compared one informant's answers with others in the group, injected some personal experience, and in doing all of this, created the space for a reflective dialogue.

^x See Geertz 1973.

^{xi} The research framework was to begin with a *diagnosis*, continue with the collection of data or *action*, and conclude with thesis writing or *reflection*.

^{xii} The research context was to be considered a 'field' as is common in anthropological studies. See Amit 2000 and of course Malinowski 1922.

^{xiii} Ortner summarizes this in her research with Sherpa mountain climbers in Katmandu. She writes: "... the practice of ethnography itself [is] committed to understanding the view of another, and, more importantly - a *practice* organized to gain such an understanding." Ortner 1999: 203. Italics mine.

One method which seemed particularly suited to the construction of such a dialogue was the use of simulated events or stories. Several students pointed out that reading or discussing their fictionalized “stories” gave them and their informants a space to compare their work or work situation with those in the stories, to reflect upon differences and similarities and to consider possible changes. Here again, the ‘I’ emerged, now in the context of comparing the stories with their personal experience^{xiv}.

It might well be that the focus on the ‘I’ was one consequence of the educational reform and the concomitant decentralization in Vietnam. Both increased the focus on personal effort and commitment of the managers. But more directly related to the emergence of the ‘I’ was MELM’s press toward the personal - the application of qualitative methods and the insistence on face-to-face interaction between them and their various participants.

To summarize: The MELM program introduced a package of methods (interactive, participatory, and comparative) which would provide or create a space for the students and their staff to define, question and reflect upon their experience and to contemplate their school’s constraints and resources. By insisting on participation and the use of qualitative, interactive, ethnographic methods, MELM committed school leaders to look at their experience and the local context, to reflect upon both and to collaborate with their staff to see their schools with new eyes. The ultimate aim was to gain a deeper understanding of what in fact was happening and from there to design and implement change-oriented activities.

^{xiv} See Finlay 2002 on reflexivity in fieldwork.

6. The doing of research: eight managers’ work

I now come to the ethnography on which this paper is based - the research ‘doing’ in the theses of eight MELM students. The theses represent the major themes and concerns of our students. My particular focus is the appearance of the ‘I’ as it emerges in the reflective dialogue and in the activities in the backstage.

I begin with the work of Ms., a teacher of English and the head of the English department in a teachers college in a small city. Ms. A. is convinced that her staff can improve the teaching of English to their students, all of whom are prospective teachers of English, if they improve their knowledge and use of ICT^{xv}. But Ms. A. does not concentrate on how to improve the teaching of ICT (though she tells us that this did in fact happen); she focuses instead on a process which she defines as ‘collaborative learning’ and concentrates on what happens when her fellow teachers interact or ‘collaborate’ to teach themselves ICT.

Ms. A. conducted her research in three steps: she first observed the student-teachers teach an ordinary lesson without ICT. She then organized several groups who collaborate/discuss how they might improve the lesson with ICT and/or integrate ICT in the lesson. Finally, she asked the teachers to describe and evaluate their pilot lessons when they use ICT.

Most notable was her consistent reflective stance toward her research and her awareness of her self and her input as researcher. She feared that the traditional hierarchical educational structure in Vietnam might interfere with the kinds of critical discussions which are necessary to practice “collaborative learning”. To counteract

^{xv} Both ICT and English are mentioned specifically in MoETs documents as subject areas which need improvement.

this, she insisted that her students continuously reflect upon and analyze their input in the collaboration process, constantly drawing attention to the importance of their persons.

Somewhat similar was the approach of Ms. L. whose concern was the lack of the professional competence of the staff in a poor rural school district. She began her work with visits to classrooms and teachers' meetings and quickly sees that the teachers constantly reiterated old and dull lessons and followed their textbooks without question. This, they admitted quietly, was not only because they are required to do so^{xvi} but because their own subject knowledge is scanty. Most difficult, they admitted, are the "child-centered learning methods" which they are now obligated to use in their classes. Thus, in her thesis work Ms. L. concentrates on finding ways to help her informants - staff and teachers - to improve their teaching methods.

She first gathers the staff - teachers as well as managers - and suggests that they devise and implement a monitoring system to which will "enhance [your] professional development" and will "create a learning atmosphere" in the schools. She then schedules a series of workshops where they are asked to compare their current teaching practices (the "is") with what they would like to do (the "ought-to-be"). To move from here to there, the teachers suggest that they initiate a new monitoring system and a "reward rather than a punishment system" from the school managers. They then proceed to outline the new system and introduced it throughout the district.

Some weeks later Ms. N. returned to the schools and conducted several "reflection

workshops" where the teachers reflect upon and evaluate their new monitoring system and how it has contributed to improving their professional capacity. The teachers are pleased, and comment enthusiastically on their increased capacity for "self-learning". Ms. L. comments on her research:

...The research process inspired to dialogues. At the reflection workshop, one manager pointed out that the conversations in the school began to steer around professional issues such as how to solve a specific exercise instead of discussions about useless things.

Most important is the "reflection workshop". Here Ms. L. included two essential aspects of qualitative methods - the importance of self-analysis and reflection and the insistence on participation and interaction. Here I am reminded of Goffman's discussion of front- and backstage interaction which I mentioned above. While the front stage in this context might be the actual classroom where formal teaching takes place, the backstage consists of the discussions conducted by the teachers in their reflection workshop. Here they formulate, analyze and perhaps criticize their activities in the classroom. What I find important here is the dynamic between the "stages": the teachers move from the formal classroom to the reflective dialogue of the workshop and back to the classroom, all the while commenting on the "self-learning" which is generated by the contrast.

The next thesis, that of Mr. H., also deals with teaching methods in a vocational college in an urban industrial neighborhood. He is the constant target of complaints from local employers who are dissatisfied with the students' competence when they graduate and suspects that the fault might be in the teaching methods used by his staff.

He conducts his research in several stages. He first sends several of his teachers to a nearby

^{xvi} The centrally administered curriculum in Vietnam is based on textbooks. Students everywhere are reading the same texts, taking the same tests on the same day. There is little time for discussion or individual teacher's input.

university to attend a course in student-centered methods. They return, conduct a seminar for their colleagues where they compare the new methods they have learned with the methods currently being used. The colleagues respond negatively; they fear that the new methods will not work because their students are too passive to participate. They also fear that they will “lose control” of their classes with the new methods.

Mr. H. now moves on to stage two: how can he/they change the students’ learning culture from passive to active? He hires an expert teacher who guides the teachers to teach ‘experimental’ lessons. After he and the teachers analyze the new lesson, they move to the actual classrooms and teach the experiments. Their students react positively, participate very actively, and suggest that they re-define the teacher’s role as facilitator. Rather than losing control, Mr. H.s staff report that they “share control” with the students and in doing so, “created happiness in learning”.

The next thesis is that of Ms. V. who is the director of education in a large province. She has recently had to increase the number of high schools in her area to comply with the government’s policy. Her problem is that she has had to employ a number of inexperienced principals to manage these high schools. Her concern: how to train these “young managers” to manage their schools.

From the start, she included both the new managers and several experienced managers with their “practical experience” in the research. She conducted individual and group interviews with both young and experienced managers and asked for comments as to how training could be organized and what kinds of capabilities they felt would be useful. She then introduced the “simulated situation” or story method. The experienced managers “presented

stories [which they had written] about typical management situations...to the young high school managers.” The young managers then commented on the situations and indicated how they would or would not have acted had they been involved. As Ms. V. had hoped, reflection-discussion-opinions abounded.

In her text, Ms. V. includes the very lively discussions among the young managers after the presentation of each story. We readers can thereby witness their reactions; we hear what they are saying and that they feel that this is a good training method. The thesis is thus a useful “guidebook for young managers” as one participant pointed out. Most usefully, the method can be replicated in the everyday lives and work of the staff. Simulations of all types - “what would you do if...?” what would happen if...? how would you react to...? trigger questions, initiate discussions and encourage some emotional involvement. Most important is to construct the context of sharing (again backstage) and openly reflect on the learning which ensues.

I move now to the work of Mr. L. who finds that middle level managers in his university are not effective; they are practicing “old fashioned management methods” - probably those used in the former planned economy. For some reason, many have quit and taken jobs elsewhere. His concern: to find ways to upgrade their skills as managers.

He first interviews his managers and asks them to talk about their experiences - how they explain that their staff members quit. The interviewees admit that staff quit because they mistrusted or were ignored by the managers. Ineffective management seems to be the issue. He enlists a coaching master who asks the manager-participants to write stories about some “critical incidents” - difficult experiences

which had occurred in their departments. They then discussed each others stories at length, and suggested what they as individuals would have done in the situation. They also admit how difficult it is for them to talk about their own experiences but agree to apply the method in their own departments. Several weeks later they met to discuss their experiences and pointed out that the method had resulted in "... a new approach - how to learn from their own experiences and other's opinions." Mr. L. concluded that the process of story-discussion-feedback-reflection encouraged the production of new analytic and personal skills. As in several other theses, the move between front and backstage seems to be consciousness-raising and generates self-awareness and a willingness to initiate change.

Now to the work of Ms. H., who is the department head in her college was concerned is the low quality of teaching. To improve this, she focused on introducing new evaluation procedures, convinced that current procedures - an evaluation of one lesson once a year which is prepared in advance and evaluated only by the school principal - contributed nothing to improving teaching methods.

She began her research with a few meetings with teachers to discuss various evaluation instruments. She then asked small groups of both teachers and students (!) to compose their own lists of criteria for evaluating teachers and lessons. The groups then met and discussed the strengths and weaknesses of their own criteria: "Are the criteria suitable?" she asks. They then all moved to classrooms to find out whether they could evaluate the lessons according to the new criteria. The comments were positive: "The teacher is closer and friendlier" say the students; "we learn from each other..."; "my comments help my colleagues".

In addition to a combination of qualitative methods - interviews, group discussions, observations in classrooms - all of which involve participation and personal reactions, we again see the importance of the dialectic: the criteria which were decided upon by the participants are first used as guidelines for teaching and are then questioned, discussed, and then revised. Here there is again the noticeable and creative interplay between the front stage classroom and the backstage discussions, and increased personal involvement in and acknowledgement of the need for change.

The next thesis is that of Ms. H., a teacher of piano at the Hanoi College of Music. Her concern: the lack of opportunity for her students to perform. She begins by recounting a recent trip to a college of music in the US where all students are required to regularly perform a variety of musical styles for a variety of audiences. This differs drastically from Vietnam where only especially gifted students are permitted to perform. Ms. H. maintains that regular performances are valuable for all students; not only do they provide a "useful playground for facilitating student learning," (15), they also contribute to improving the professional development of teachers and increase parents' involvement in their children's musical careers.

Her research focuses on how to introduce recitals ("performances") in the formal curriculum of her college. She documents how she introduced this 'intervention' to the college's directors, to teachers and to students and consistently reflects upon her methods and her personal input. She ponders the advantages and disadvantages of working in her own organization, always refers to herself as "I" and includes her reflections on the comments of the various participants. Her description of the

preparations for the students' performances is quite personal and encourages some empathy on the part of the reader. We feel the nervousness and delight of the students, the fear of the parents, and finally, the joy of all participants after the performance.

The final thesis is that of Ms. T. who is a teacher of English and the coordinator of the Youth Union^{xvii} in a high school on the outskirts of Hanoi. Her concerns are the increased violence and lack of "morality" among her students and the lack of understanding on the part of the school authorities for the lives and problems of the young people. She thus will focus on her students and on understanding more "about their lives": "what", she asks, "is happening in the social world of Vietnamese high school students?"

Two concepts frame her work: the notion of empathy and how this might be defined and encouraged, and the young people's definition and understanding of social norms.

Ms. T. used focus groups, student-writing and seminars to provide occasions for all involved - students, teachers and school managers - "to think, talk and discuss and share perceptions and points of view". She first selected 14 students to participate in a focus group and to talk about their problems and how the school might help them. They then wrote compositions about difficult incidents in their lives and discussed their work with each other in a second focus group. Ms. T. now categorized the compositions on the basis of the topics covered and then gave them to several groups of

school personnel who used these as the basis of discussions as to how the school personnel could "help students in their daily lives".

Very significant was Ms. T's use of methods which could create new encounters - first, between students and students, and second, between students and school personnel. Her intention was to loosen the strict boundaries between students and personnel and among students themselves. She points out that "The research encounter encouraged some participants to move from their official views to their views as persons and to "see things with others' eyes". One student concluded: "I hope this kind of talking will be held more often... now I can speak out!"

Ms. T. admits that several school personnel resisted listening to the students. Perhaps their traditional roles as school managers and their views of "teenagers" as a social category obstructed their ability to see the students as individuals and to take their struggles with poverty, fear, sexuality and violence seriously. Ms. T.'s methods, in particular the compositions and the ensuing seminars, provided the school personnel with access to a backstage now peopled by real people - students equipped with high-powered microphones which beeped out a series of personal and experience-based messages which (with Ms. T's gentle prodding) the staff could not ignore. 'Students' thereby became persons and subjects, a collection of individual T's both for school personnel and teachers and for their fellow students.

^{xvii} Ms. T. writes: "the Youth Union has the following features. Firstly, it is a reliable reserve team for the Communist Party of Vietnam. The Youth Union is an organization created by the youth and operated for the youth. The Communist Party directly allocates to the Communist Youth Union to educate young people, to help advanced youth to become union members and help elite members to become members of the Communist Party".

7. Summarizing the themes in the doing of research

What follow are my general comments on the students' research procedures. First, in each

thesis, the interaction between researcher and respondents meant that the person of the researcher - his or her questions, comments, ways of approaching the research site or field, perhaps his/her energy and determination - was an important “engine” for the data produced. While this personal input was sometimes slow in coming in both seminars and in the context of supervision, when involved in their thesis work the students took charge; they organized focus groups, conducted interviews, held seminars, took the initiative and mobilized and activated their colleagues and engaged in a kind of participatory leadership - leadership emerging from and dependent on their active immersion in the research field^{xviii}.

One more word on leadership, one goal of the MELM program: in the summaries, we can identify some moments in the course of their research when the students assumed the role of leaders. Intrinsic to their inquiries - “how can we include regular performance in our music education program?”, “how can we improve support for vocational education?” “how can we train new managers?”- are moments for asking, listening, asking again, clarifying and summarizing - all essential elements in the practice of leadership.

Second, the backstage: in both the course work and the thesis activities, MELM’s insistence on their experience and the use of interactive methods led the students to create the backstage where they could contemplate and reflect upon their own and others’ experience, where they could imagine alternatives and perhaps devise ways to

^{xviii} See Everett and Louis (1981). They point out that qualitative studies are typically “inside”; the researcher is directly involved (“immersed”) with the informant-participants, the data are created in the context of this interaction and subsequently become a “vehicle” (Olsson, personal comment) to contemplate or introduce change.

implement change. Equally important, and I have returned to this several times, is the contrast of the front stage and the creative dialectic which connects them.

Finally, the qualitative methods and the necessary interaction moved both researcher and researched into being personal, exploratory and reflective, thus the emergence of the “I” in the context of research.

8. Some final comments: On supervision and the emergence of the “I”

I close with a few words about supervision, my main task in MELM. What most often we supervised the students on a one-to-one basis via e-mail, once at the university in Hanoi, we were often two Swedish supervisors who participated in a form of “collaborative supervision” with one or several students. The collaboration gave us an opportunity to openly share knowledge; we questioned each other as well as the student(s), regularly debated the meaning of some central concepts and often engaged in barely muted energetic disagreements. No doubt some of our differences derived from our different academic backgrounds: mine in both education^{xix} and social anthropology and my colleague’s in business administration and school management. What happened in the course of our often heated discussions was that the students witnessed a serious academic discussion where agreement was less important than the process of getting there and where the arguer/person was less important than the argument/content.

^{xix} My colleague often protested: “Judith, we are not pedagogues and we are not interested in pedagogy”. I was.

Our collaboration sometimes led us to over-supervise, spending long hours with the students in the seminar room and/or at the local coffee shop discussing and dissecting their texts. These sessions - which involved two supervisors, the student and a colleague-translator and many cups of sweet iced coffee - were academically most memorable: intense, critical and productive of learning and, we were told, in the Vietnam academic context, rather unusual.

An important reflection: I suspect that our activities as supervisors was influenced by the Swedish discourse of democracy, gender equality, the belief in open discussion and trust between the participating partners and the importance of well-founded critique. How and whether these values affected the students we cannot know but they did frame the academic discourse we conducted.

I close with some final reflections on why the emergence of the “I”. This was related not only to qualitative methods but also to the very structure of the program. Because the students were constantly questioned as to whether and how the academic discussion and the various concepts could or did or did not relate to their working experience, the program forced an interchange between the generalities in the “out there” curriculum and the particulars of the “in here” personal experience of the students - that can be seen as a fruitful dialectic between front and back stages.

MELM performed no miracles. It did however create an important space for program-implementing school managers to move toward being process-oriented leaders, to reflect on their own and others experience, and to consider alternatives. It might also be that the “I” that we see emerging in these theses is an essential stage in the process of becoming leaders.

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Sự hiện diện của "cái TÔI"

Chia sẻ tri thức và kinh nghiệm qua sử dụng các phương pháp nghiên cứu định tính trong chương trình hợp tác đào tạo Thạc sĩ Quản lý và Lãnh đạo giáo dục tại Trường Đại học Giáo dục, Đại học Quốc gia, Hà Nội

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Tóm tắt: Các phương pháp nghiên cứu định tính mang tính tương tác là rất cần thiết để cuốn hút những người làm nghiên cứu và các đối tượng tham gia nghiên cứu tham gia được một cách tích cực và có ý thức vào quá trình nghiên cứu. Dựa trên thực tiễn hợp tác giảng dạy và hướng dẫn nghiên cứu cho các học viên qua chương trình hợp tác liên kết đào tạo Thạc sĩ Quản lý và Lãnh đạo giáo dục giữa Đại học Höskolan Dalarna, Thụy Điển và Trường Đại học Giáo dục, ĐHQGHN, bài báo trao đổi một số vấn đề về quy trình nghiên cứu định tính đã được tiến hành qua 8 luận văn của các nhà quản lý giáo dục Việt Nam. Bài báo tập trung trình bày về các phương pháp định tính đã xây dựng được “hậu trường” tích cực - nơi có thể tạo ra các đối thoại chia sẻ đầy tư duy, chân thực và sống động. Trong “hậu trường” hay các hoàn cảnh tự nhiên này, chúng ta có thể nhìn thấy được rõ hơn “cái TÔI” của người nghiên cứu. Một số suy nghĩ về các hoạt động hỗ trợ của các giảng viên hướng dẫn được tác giả trình bày như kết luận của bài báo.

Từ khóa: Hậu trường, dân tộc học, kinh nghiệm, đối thoại có tính tư duy cao, các phương pháp nghiên cứu định tính.