

EnPOWER

Creating a community of practice and collective ethnography about women leaders in HE in Vietnam



What the project set out to do

- This project has begun to explore the lived experience of women teachers/researchers and leaders in Vietnam higher education through the creation of a community practice.
- We wanted the community of practice to provide a 'safe space' to open up discussions about voice, identity and learning for women teachers/researchers and leaders in HE in Vietnam.
- We chose to use collective ethnographic methods to record the experiences that were shared as they encouraged a freedom of expression which 'brought to life' the shared lived experiences that emerged out of our community of practice.
- We hoped our community of woman teachers/researchers leaders (like everyone attending this symposium) will be able to make use of the materials generated by this project in the wider field of gender and leadership in Vietnamese HE.

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- In phase 1 of the project we held a number of community of practice meetings over several months, both online and in Vietnam. These meetings were loosely organised around project themes e.g. Experiences of working in HE/work/life balance/ reflections on leadership.
- In phase 2 of the study we recruited 6 women working in Vietnamese HE as peer researchers to produce a collective ethnography (Pahl, 2016)
- Each peer researcher contributed individual autoethnographic material which explored their experiences and practice of leadership as a woman working in HE in Vietnam. In addition CoP members contributed to blogs and Padlet invitations.
- The evidence base that emerges from this project provides new insights into how women experience leadership in HE in Vietnam.

What is a community of practice?

- *“Communities of practice are formed by **people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor**: a tribe learning to survive, a band of artists seeking new forms of expression, a group of engineers working on similar problems, a clique of pupils defining their identity in the school, a network of surgeons exploring novel techniques, a gathering of first-time managers helping each other cope. **In a nutshell: communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.**”*
- Etienne Wenger, Communities of practice: a brief introduction

What is autoethnography ?

- Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that allows researchers to draw on their experience to extend understanding about a societal phenomenon they have personally experienced.
- Autoethnography is grounded in postmodern philosophy and is integral to the current debate about reflexivity and voice in social research.
- Autoethnography acknowledges the inextricable link between the personal and the cultural in qualitative research.
- Autoethnography can be very fluid and evolving, and include personal stories and excerpts from interviews, self interviews and images such as those used in the workshops, blogs and Padlets in this project.
- One can argue that autoethnography is more authentic than traditional research approaches, precisely it relies on the researcher's own experiences as told through their 'voice' or chosen means of communication.

Why use a community of practice and autoethnography for this project?

- They capture the experience of working in 'supercomplex' (Barnett, 2015: 238) practice environments like HE.
- They offer ways to explore hidden and evolving spaces around women and leadership in HE.
- They creates opportunities to generate alternative pedagogical knowledges about HE.
- The data collected is 'personally situated, interdisciplinary and diverse and emergent' (Barrett and Bolt, 2007:2) which reflects the complexity and diversity of lived experience of women working in HE.

Our principles and practice were

- Ethical
- Reflexive
- Democratic
- Based on personal narratives
- Relational and includes emotions
- Accessible
- Critical
- Focused on social justice...and aims to make a difference

What do we mean by a collective ethnography?

- Collaborative authoethnography shares all elements of solo autoethnography. Chang, et al. (2013:11) describe it as *'engaging in the study of self, collectively; it is a process and product of an ensemble of performance, not a solo act'*.
- Through our many conversations and discussions in the CoP we were able to find ways to draw insights from the diverse experiences that emerged out of the project
- Collectively, we were able to work with and through our individual autoethnographic accounts to become co-constructors of richer, more multi-layered accounts of how we can understand our personal experience and how we see other's experience (and sense of self) as workers and leaders in HE.
- Writing blogs and sharing our ideas on the Padlets over a period of time enabled us to probe, share and reflect on our shared and yet differing experiences.

Blogs

You can access the blogs produced in the project using this link

- <https://www.bcu.ac.uk/education-and-social-work/research/practitioner-education-research-group/enpower/blog>
- We hope that women in Vietnam HE will continue to add to our collective autoethnography with their thought and ideas using blogs and images via the website.

Sustaining a community of practice and collective ethnography

- Perhaps the greatest strengths of a community of practice and collective autoethnography comes from its focus on relationship building through shared vulnerability, flattening hierarchies, and establishing trust.
- Research colleagues who trust each other begin to see themselves as members of a community of practice and make the shift from individual to collective agency. This is one of the main legacies of this project.
- We have only started this work the project website in Vietnam (as we will be discussing in a later presentation) will continue to provide opportunities for discussing, sharing and recording experiences of women workers and leader in HE in Vietnam.