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Memory Rewriting as a Method of Inquiry: When Returning Becomes Collective Healing

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Abstract

Writing is collective healing to build a community. We, five Vietnamese bodies, enquire, how can individual memories be collective healing to rewrite a better future of education? We borrow Nhat Hanh's philosophy to touch on our suffering to heal and Barad's returning as a multiplicity of processes for reconnecting with the pastpresentfuture. We use the recollection of individual memories to share critical incidents of past experiences to build a collective community for healing purposes. We have demonstrated our deep commitment to creating a resilient system in retelling stories and rewriting for hope for educational change through this process.

Keywords

returning, memory rewriting, collective healing, Thich Nhat Hanh, Karen Barad

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Memory Rewriting as a Method of Inquiry: When Returning Becomes Collective Healing

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Writing is collective healing to build a community. We, five Vietnamese bodies, enquire, how can individual memories be collective healing to rewrite a better future of education? We borrow Nhat Hanh's philosophy to touch on our suffering to heal and Barad's returning as a multiplicity of processes for reconnecting with the pastpresentfuture. We use the recollection of individual memories to share critical incidents of past experiences to build a collective community for healing purposes. We have demonstrated our deep commitment to creating a resilient system in retelling stories and rewriting for hope for educational change through this process.

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Writing is collective healing to build a community together despite different spaces and times (Pentón Herrera et al., 2021; Trinh & Pentón Herrera, 2021). Writing about self (Le, 2021; Trinh, 2020a, 2021a) to understand and connect to a larger historical and political context is part of a lifelong journey in finding a way to un/relearn our roots, identities, histories, and languages in a transnational educational context (Trinh, 2020b). Therefore, we – five individual Vietnamese bodies, voices, religions, genders, and sexualities – come together to recall and rewrite our memories and co-construct a global yet deeply personal connection to our Vietnamese-ness. While rewriting individually and collaboratively across disciplines (i.e., language education, gender studies, finance, and peace studies), we together ask a question:

How can individual memories be collective healing to rewrite a better future of education?

Drawing from both the West (Karen Barad) and the East (Thich Nhat Hanh) perspectives, we delve deeper into our memories and use these memories as part of our qualitative inquiry to think, write, and explore how our (past) memories might contribute to the development of (future) education. We put past and future in parentheses because as Barad (2014) argues, “there is no moving beyond, no leaving the ‘old’ behind. There is no absolute boundary between here-now and there-then” (p. 168). Therefore, in this paper, the pastpresentfuture comes together without any inseparability. Further, when we think about the inseparability of special events in our lives, we do not write what is or what was, “but what is *not yet, to come*” (St. Pierre, 2021, p. 163, emphasis in original). We write to return and rewrite these unique experiences to explore the hidden truth that is not yet known but invites exploration, empathy, and understanding from individual and collective situatedness (Davies & Gannon, 2005; Haraway, 1988).

While writing and thinking in different spaces and times (one of us was in the U.S, the other two in Canada, the rest in Vietnam during COVID-19), we used Facebook for communication and Google Docs to transcend our thinking onto the same space. Writing this paper was like knitting the memories together. We are no longer separate individuals, but we exist in an “ongoing iteratively intra-active reconfiguring” (Barad, 2012, p. 77). In this shared space, we aim to explore a more meaningful way to learn from, think with, feel with, and sit with emotions and feelings intertwined with one another, to create, as Barad (2014) says, “a thick web of its specificities” (p. 176), which will ultimately help us heal from our unforgettably, yet embedded, moments of personal lives. Our paper is thus special in that beautiful sense.

This work is unusual and unique as it stands out of the traditional humanist qualitative research that normalizes our thinking and doing of qualitative research studies. A traditional research report is constituted of research problems, research questions, literature review, data collection and analyses, and the superiority of humans to the materials (St. Pierre, 2021). However, in this paper, we write to make this work out-of-category and the focus of our writing uses personal memories as the core material. Our writing is upheld by our recollection of memories. We aim to present the process of memory recollection through writing as inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005; St. Pierre, 2018). By doing so, we conceptualize the writing and rewriting of memories as a qualitative inquiry approach. Recalling personal memories and writing memories happens simultaneously followed by the rewriting. This process entails courageousness to revisit past experiences, moments, and emotions across times, places, and spaces that might be traumatic to us as writers and visitors to our old memories. Our work with personal memories exemplifies and adds into the research field how qualitative inquiry researchers can write up the report by immersing into non-human materials.

Thinking with Thinkers

Trauma travels through our bodies, across places, spaces, and times, opening the door to explore our personal lives (Henson, 2020). Laying the very first step to bring us together into a shared space, we decided to come back to our Vietnamese-ness; our roots, our country, our quê hương,¹ to explore and then think from within. In academic writing, a theoretical framework can be used to name this section, but we were wondering if this phrase sounds too academic, too Western; we wanted to stay true to our hearts, something we inherit from our ancestors. We therefore decided to honor the names of the thinkers we chose to think with in this paper. We will first start with teacher (Thầy) Thich Nhat Hanh and then follow with Karen Barad.

Thich Nhat Hanh

Thầy Thich Nhat Hanh is a global spiritual leader, Buddhist monk, Zen master, and peace activist who has traveled widely to teach about mindfulness, peace, healing, transformation, and reconciliation (Thich, 1992). Nhat Hanh’s teaching allows us to sit, walk, and think meditatively to recognize our pain and understand its root causes. A journey to peace starts with the stage of Recognition, in which we become aware of our suffering (Thich, 1999). In the second stage, Encouragement, we look deeply into the nature of our pains to understand the root causes of our suffering. According to Thầy Nhat Hanh, “looking deeply requires courage” (Thich, 1999, p. 38); therefore, this stage demands individuals to be persistent,

¹ Ethan argued that they would not italicize their home language in academic English writing. See more of their discussion in Trinh (2021b).

carefully observing and examining the true nature of their pains. Finally, we come to the stage of Realization, in which we have stopped running away from our pains and start walking on a new path of healing and liberation.

Thầy Nhat Hanh prompts us to begin our work by revisiting memories to touch on our suffering—memories that some of us have (un)consciously hidden at a deep place in our mind so that we could make the sufferings fade away. Therefore, as we *write with* personal stories to self-recognize and grapple with our angst, vulnerability, and pain, we are becoming awakened. Thầy Nhat Hanh shares with us, “our suffering is us, and we need to treat it with kindness and nonviolence” (Thich, 1999, p. 29). In that sense, we do not deny or suppress our feelings but let go of negative thoughts, turning our struggles into opportunities to learn, heal, and grow.

In rewriting, we think with the past/present for self and others to sow the seeds of hope and peace. Each of us engages in this process knowing that our internal transformation – individual healing and peace – is fundamental to building collective peace (Thich, 1999). In thinking with Thầy Nhat Hanh about the roots of violence, we are committed to respecting and validating our Vietnamese culture and challenging Eurocentrism, colonization, and heteronormativity in our writing, teaching, research, and service (Dong, 2021; Le, 2021; Tran & Handford, 2019; Trinh, 2018, 2021b, 2021c). As we recall and re/write our stories, we sew and stitch past-present-future together as *pastpresentfuture*, aiming toward seeing changes in self and (if not too ambitious) proposing changes to education and society as a result of this writing.

Karen Barad

As we are sewing and stitching the *pastpresentfuture* together, we, novice readers, researchers, and writers, want to stay longer to think slowly with Barad’s (2014) returning. As a feminism theorist and a theoretical physicist, Barad states, “There is no moving beyond, no leaving the ‘old’ behind. There is no absolute boundary between here-now and there-then” (p. 168). We are wondering what this perspective means and how it is entangled with Nhat Hanh’s philosophical thinking. As Thầy Nhat Hanh shares, “A teacher cannot give you the truth. The truth is already in you. You only need to open yourself – body, mind, heart – so that his or her teachings will penetrate your own seeds of understanding and enlightenment” (Thich, 1999, p. 35). If so, the seeds of understanding are within us, we do not have to find them anywhere, because the seeds of understanding and enlightenment of/with/for self have never gone but have grown within. As we are thinking with Thầy Nhat Hanh and connecting with Barad, we are curiously inquiring whether there is separability between past, present, and perhaps future because all is one. As Barad positions, “time is out of joint; it is diffracted, broken apart in different directions, non-contemporaneous within self. Each moment is an infinite multiplicity” (p. 169). If so, we are inspired to explore how our stories, despite being read and written differently in different spaces and times, will help us achieve the purpose of this paper: collective healing. We are excited to explore how each moment could be an infinite multiplicity and if it is, what does it look like? To explore each moment, we are going to hone into memory work, an important joint to connect Nhat Hanh’s and Barad’s philosophies together.

Memory Rewriting as a Method of Inquiry

Memory-Work Method

Memory is a praxis of reflection on what has happened in the past and how critical incidents of our lived experiences have imprinted a mark on our mind that changed our lives forever. Haug (1992) states,

Memories are characterized by contradictions and silences as what I have called the “past-self” engages with the “present-self”. Contradictions serve the purpose of non-recognition, denial and repression of past experiences which memories may invoke, while silence is another way of coming to terms with the unacceptable (p. 22).

According to Haug (1987, 2008), memory-work is a method that seeks to explore the ways in which people construct themselves into existing social relations, hence they can reproduce a social formation. This method relies on the recording and analysis of personal memories and stories within a feminist context. For example, memory-work studies have often been concerned with sensitive research topics such as the construction of women’s sexuality in the 1960s, which is the context of Farrar’s (2007) research with a group of four women through their memories of sexual encounters, contraception, and teenage pregnancy.

Memory-work method is structured and guided by the researcher even though it positions participants as co-researchers. There are three iterative and reflexive phases in a process of doing memory-work research (Crawford et al., 1992; Haug, 1987, 2008; Onyx & Small, 2001). Phase 1 is the individual’s reflections indicating the processes of constructions. Phase 2 is a collective examination of memories for which memories are theorized and new meanings can be found. Phase 3 is a recursive process in which the material is provided from both the reflections of memories and the collective discussion of those memories.

The three foci of memory-work capture the significance of the duality of self and also illustrate the connection of the self and the social that emphasize intersubjectivity in memory-work research. Crawford et al. (1992) note that situated in the heart of memory-work studies, memories appear as subjectively significant events, which are “subsequently constructed, play an important part in the construction of *self*” (p. 37, emphasis by us) – the self that has always existed within the researcher. It is the body, dreams, and our imagination about the world (St. Pierre, 2018). The self is socially constructed through critical reflection in multiple forms and manifestations (Le, 2021; Trinh, 2021c). Through the reflexive work, memories could be used as organic and primary data that could potentially keep the authenticity and purity of the memory-work research.

Memory Rewriting as Healing Practice

Central to this study is the writing praxis through which we could write from our recollection of memories. We do not see writing in this study simply as an approach to write down what we experienced personally and individually in the past. Instead, writing here is a method of inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Writing and rewriting are ways of understanding contemplatively about ourselves and our purposes as educators and educational researchers who share the same belief in education for self and social change.

Rewriting is becoming.
Rewriting is unfolding.

Rewriting is returning.
 Rewriting is healing.

And in this space, rewriting through memories recollection is a seed of inquiry
 planted, watered, and grown within us.

Therefore, we humbly call this approach *memory rewriting* as a way of building collective healing across spaces and times for we understand the importance of unfolding our vulnerabilities through the scars from/of our experiences. Memory rewriting for healing requires courage and trust among us as researchers and writers so we can be assured that we have a safe and caring space to share, heal, and love one another. Once we are healed, we take a critical step to continue our work in our spaces.

In this paper, we experiment with a non-traditional approach to inquiry in order to produce knowledge differently – that is, to revisit our memory and rewrite for change. It is necessary for us to trouble our pre-existing knowledge about data and data collection (St. Pierre, 2013, 2018). Data in this study are in our memories and emotions that are interwoven in our stories, which are written and rewritten. Data hence are reconceptualized to become transgressive, meaning that data are “un-codeable, excessive, out-of-control, out-of-category” (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 179). When we revisit our memories, we do not get entangled in the search for accuracy since the value of memory data is never about certainty and the absolute truth. The meaning of memory data would always be contingent and evolving as we ourselves are always *becoming* (St. Pierre, 2013).

Thus, we rewrite data.

By rewriting data, we are fictionalizing data using *ficto-criticism* (Blaikie, 2021; Stewart, 2016), a creative form of writing that blends facts and fictions into “live composition” (Blaikie, 2021, p. 550). The facts are our personal lived experiences that we narrate during our recollection of memories, and the critical incidents that appear in our memories are retold from our voices as storytellers. Fictions braiding into the rewriting of personal narratives are what we want to write in the hope of potential changes in the futures of education. In rewriting, we write our hopes, which are how things should be changed by contemplative acts of educators (Le et al., 2020a, 2020b). It is a process of recalling the memories, acknowledging and embracing the emotions that come with these memories, reflecting, and writing to journey toward healing and peace.

Seeds of Inquiry

Ethan’s Story: Loss of Home Language

My memories are always hidden in quê hương where the mother tongue, the Vietnamese language, is buried (Trinh, 2021b). Writing this memory starts with a blank page because I did not have enough memories to come back to. I copied, deleted, revised, deleted, and did nothing. I paused too long on my own section of this paper because I did not know where to get started. Perhaps, my identities were buried with my language when I left my quê hương for an English-speaking country back then.

The first time I held an English language book in hand I was 5 years old. I was too excited to put it down. There were nights I flipped through pages and tried to pronounce the words in the book. I listened to the cassette tapes repeatedly until the magnetic film could not run any longer. I was blown away with the images and concepts that I had never seen in my life (e.g., cars, zoos, and Mickey mouse, to name a few). I was so excited by the blond hair and

pretty characters in the book and wished I would become those characters and speak English fluently. But my mom said, *always be careful about what you wish for*.

Time flies, I am now in an English-speaking country, the one I made a wish for since I was a child. However, I no longer find joy as I used to. The wishes of growing up fast and communicating in a foreign language other than my mother tongue, Vietnamese, have brought me deep regret of taking Vietnamese culture and language for granted. The fact that I am thinking and writing in a language other than Vietnamese has always troubled me. I did not find joy at all. At the same time, I do not have enough language to write in Vietnamese as I used to. I am stuck within my language.

Someone cut my tongue and threw it away.

Who cut my tongue?

Ethan's Rewriting

I am writing to slowly return to find the time I lost my language. I am learning to trace back what caused the roots. I come to this space to face my suffering. My language is my identity. My language is my *quê hương*. Because if I lost my language, I lost everything.

I am rewriting my story by focusing on the present moment. I am currently teaching students to become teachers at a diverse institution in the United States. In my class, I emphasize the importance of appreciating and validating one's culture and language because that is our own identities. However, deep down in my heart, I was washed away with English standards and thinking. My tongues were held and trained to teach and speak English only. I have nowhere to return (to). I am neither here nor there. I am living an in-between life as I am shuttling my memories without knowing a concrete place to call *home*.

I am focusing on the present to rewrite and rethink with the students so that they can rewrite their own stories. I shared with students that I am in the journey of coming back to learn and relearn about Vietnamese history, culture, and language. Even though my memories about my language, my *quê hương*, my identities are faint and become subtly described, or as Park (2021) describes, "a path of convergence and divergence" (p. xviii), I am still empowered to believe that the journey of coming back to find the lost identities is a lifetime project that involves self-recognition, self-actualization, and courage to speak the truth. Once we start to unfold the myths within, we start to come home.

Giang's Story: A Boy in My Life

Throughout my life as a gay boy in Vietnam, I have encountered boys and men who left some impression on my childhood memories. Some are my suffering as they treated me cruelly due to my gay sexual performances whilst others appeared as a gift to my life for being kind to me. I present this piece of my writing as a reminiscence of a boy who was my classmate at a junior school in Vietnam. He was a nightmare to me in my schooling experience.

When I was a schoolboy, I was often physically and sexually assaulted by other boys in my class due to my gay sexual performances. I was bullied in many offensive ways by them, sometimes by other girls too; they were heterosexual and heteronormative, making them belong to the dominant cultural groups that I never belonged to.

I still remember his name – *the* boy whose role affected my life as a gay boy in Vietnam, though to what extent I was not sure until now. I can assure you that he did have a role to play in my past experience as a gay schoolboy at a junior school. At that time, I was very innocent and vulnerable to those with power over me, a queer and weak boy in their eyes. I recalled the time when he and I were at the bicycle parking lots after class ended. Only two of us were there

at noon on a boiling hot sunny day. I was drenched by the heat. He pushed me to a corner and knocked me down to the burning ground. He started tearing out my white shirt.

Buttons fell off.
 He scratched my chest.
 He bit me on the neck.
 He went down to my pants.
 I screamed out loud but no one was there to hear me.
 I was frightened by his violence.
 I was left there under the heat of the sun at noon.
 He left.
 Leaving me ashamed,
 Leaving me naked
 Cruelly...
 I cried for help,
 but no one cared for what had just happened.
 To me or with me.
 No one cared and they would just laugh.

To date, the images of school spaces, the school yard, the parking lots are still so real to me. It was tough and painful to remember, but it is important to write, think, and live with these memories.

Giang's Rewriting

It is true to say that my memories would not change, and honestly, I am so fed up with suffering in silence for myself. I have found a need to look to my past with gratitude and respect for whosoever has sustained me on this journey. I am learning critically, contemplatively, introspectively, and retrospectively from my lived experiences that have built who I am now as a critical gay scholar.

I have found a need to write, as when I write I feel that I have a life and the power to control it. I echo what Richardson (2001) says about writing as a method of inquiry: that "no writing is untainted by human hands, pure, objective, and innocent" (p. 34). If writing was about a person's suffering and dark sides, how could it not be untainted? But it is necessary to recall those dark memories so we can move forward to continue our writing for a better life. I will not write this for myself. I am rewriting this for my child. It is tough for a gay man in Vietnam to have a child, and of course, for a gay man, raising a child is a challenge. I may adopt a child. Regardless of gender identities my child will identify with, I hope they will not experience what I did. I hope my child will be loved, protected, and most importantly, heard. What happened to me should not happen to my child or any child if they are not straight, failing to conform to what people and the entire society expect them to be and become.

Dear my child,
 My future child, I wish you not to listen to my story
 My story is dark and full of cruelty that they did to me
 My story is my sufferings as I was born "abnormal" they said
 My story should not be your story
 My future child, I wish you not to be left alone like I was
 Your story must be better than mine, with laughter, not tears
 Your story must be written by you not by others not by me

Your story must be a light of my story

Ha's Story: Finding Peace

I recall memories of an incident of religious violence and racism when I studied at a predominantly White Christian school in the U.S. The incident was the tipping point that broke my silence and led me on a journey of exploring peace processes and how to be grounded in my cultural values and history.

It was during a morning Bible class in my first year in the United States. At one point, several White students started telling me my “culture is sinful.” Looking straight at me, they said they felt bad for my Buddhist grandmother who would be going to hell for not knowing God.

I was shocked and hurt.

These students were proudly assuming their culture and beliefs were superior to mine and acting as if my grandmother's life had no value because her faith was different from theirs. After collecting myself, I loudly asked, “If God is White and speaks English, would you think my grandma would understand what He is preaching? Or would He look like a tourist in Vietnam? Then, how do you tell me my grandma would go to hell for not knowing God!” The whole class went oddly silent. The teacher looked uneasy then simply continued the class with another topic. That day, I learned to not simply accept everything that I was being taught.

A happy ending to that story is at the end of my second year, I was awarded a school medal given to one student who demonstrates not only outstanding Christian characteristics (which my school defines as being of service to others) but also a strong desire to learn about Christianity. I was the first non-Christian and the first international student to win this award. A teacher said I persistently questioned what I was being taught and did so with a sincere curiosity. Truthfully, it was a combination of Christian, Buddhist, and my Vietnamese traditional teachings that taught me to walk on a trans-cultural journey where I transformed conflicts into opportunities to learn and grow instead of dwelling on hatred and anger. I was determined to not denounce religions just because I experienced religious violence, but rather explore how religions can be used as tools to build peace. The incident also made me realize there was so much about my culture that I was not aware of. That day, I became determined to develop a nuanced understanding of my history to heal my present-self and nurture my future-self.

Ha's Rewriting

I am rewriting this for myself and any racialized students who share similar experiences of religious violence and racism at school. The colonial school may tell you your culture is barbaric, that the White men who wrote your textbooks hold the absolute truth.

I hope you will be resilient.

Cultural knowledge is intergenerational wisdom that can support individual and collective healing (Rowe et al., 2019). Your ancestors overcame myriad hardships to pass this wisdom down to you. Learn about it, embrace it, protect it, expand it, and transfer it to future generations. The view of time as linear is largely Eurocentric (Lederach, 2010). In many cultures, time flows backward toward the past and the ancestors. This is not a sight of backwardness but rather a different lens to understand the concept of time and peacebuilding, in which the past is alive and helps guide the current generation toward futures of hope and peace (Lederach, 2010).

If the colonial school teaches violence, question it. Instead of seeking simple answers to complex questions, embrace yourself in a lifelong journey of learning guided by compassion

and altruism (Thich, 2009). Lederach (2010) writes, “Breaking violence requires that people embrace a more fundamental truth: Who we have been, are, and will be emerges and shapes itself in a context of relational interdependency” (p. 35). Therefore, building peace requires individuals to engage with complex histories and (re)build relationships (Lederach, 2010). We may dwell on hatred and the bitterness of our memories, or we may take actions to learn and heal relationships, liberating ourselves from suffering. It has taken me more energy to learn how religions can play a role in peacebuilding than to simply hate and discredit religions altogether. However, this learning journey is the only way I can move toward healing and change.

Lastly, as someone who has been educated in different cultural contexts and education systems, I have learned to not assume any knowledge system is superior. Rather than seeking a dualistic category of truth and realities, I often journey toward the unknown and different imaginaries. la paperson (2017) argues, “colonial schools have a tradition of harboring spaces of anti-colonial resistance” (p. xv), and you and I are “colonist-by-product[s] ... with decolonizing desires” (p. xxiii). Although we are educated within the colonial system, we can imagine and initiate different decolonial futures.

Trang’s Story: A Wounded Child

I was an English teacher in a renowned secondary school in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The teachers, the students, and the parents devoted special attention to academic achievements. My main concern as a teacher was to ensure the students’ performance and the school’s high standards were well matched. In hindsight, it was a shame that students’ physical and mental health did not receive as serious consideration as it deserved.

One year, I had a special grade-6 student called Taylor (pseudonym). I had known him for a while before I became his homeroom teacher. I had taught him in an after-school center, where he was one of the high achievers. I had not worried much about Taylor academically, but I knew he had a history of self-harm acts. I was notified of at least three incidents when he made multiple stabs in his head with the pointed tips of the compasses. It could be in recess time or during a lesson. Those were terrible scenes; he ended up covered in blood. His teachers were confused, and his classmates were scared. I was no different, wondering whether these self-harm acts would ever stop, if they would evolve, and what I should do to prevent further incidents. I had hardly received any training in resolving such emotional crises. I admitted my lack of expertise to his father and suggested that the family seek professional support. Taylor’s father was very open-minded; he followed my suggestion. Later he shared with me that Taylor was diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, which was the result of his absence. At that time, Taylor was living with his mother while his father was studying overseas. But Taylor was more emotionally attached to his father, whose absence took a heavy toll on him. After his visit to a mental health specialist, no incident of the same nature was reported. Taylor’s father shared with me that the psychologist’s record helped accelerate the visa application process for Taylor. The next summer, Taylor reunited with his father. I was kept updated with Taylor’s new life; he seemed to have a great time in school there, which I thought was a happy ending for him.

A while later, I came across a Facebook post by his mother, which read, *My son is smart, but a teacher from his previous school referred him to a psychiatrist*. More disheartening were the insulting comments made by her friends about *that* teacher, the school and even the education system. It saddened me to think that Taylor’s mother and her friends condemned me for suggestions of seeking professional help for her son who had repeatedly conducted self-harm acts. I often recall the mother’s Facebook post and her friends’ comments. Obviously to them, my recommendation was uncalled-for, but was it really unnecessary? If the self-harm

scenes I witnessed had not been the alarm for psychological counselling, what would have been?

Deep inside, I never regret that decision, but I wonder whether Taylor's mother disapproved of my advice because she thought it was wrong or because she was offended by it. I considered a mental health check-up a necessary act which would do little or no harm, but it ensured that his problems, if any, would be detected and attended to in a timely manner.

Trang's Rewriting

I am rewriting for parents who have children with early symptoms of mental health issues but hold a negative attitude towards seeking professional help. The negative attitude of parents will result in delays in mental health care for children. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (2018), over three million Vietnamese children needed mental health services; however, it was worrying that most cases went unnoticed or untreated. More attention has recently focused on the role of stigma in delayed treatment seeking. Stigma is conceptualized as the negative attitudes towards people diagnosed with psychological disorders (Corrigan, 2004).

Recent research findings have demonstrated an inverse association between stigma and care seeking (Cheang & Davis, 2014; Corrigan, 2004; Masuda et al., 2012; Picco et al., 2016). People labelled mentally ill were stigmatized more severely than those with other health conditions (Corrigan et al., 2000). To avoid this stigma, parents only seek psychological help when the situation becomes intolerable, whereas normally they would be willing to make arrangements for their ill children to be treated by a physician. However, there are a number of negative ramifications associated with delayed treatment for a mental health disorder. The longer parents wait to have their children's mental health disorder treated, the more complicated it becomes. Children cannot make decisions for themselves; it is up to the parents to provide them with the support they need. Therefore, parents should be one of the first groups to be informed about mental health awareness, so that their children will receive early intervention and appropriate care before irreversible consequences might ensue.

Vuong's Story: My Broken Memory

A long time has passed, but down on memory lane, you and I were still 14. You sat in that tiny corner; your presence was always there. Sadly, I, and especially teachers, did not acknowledge you needed us. As a gay student growing in a small town full of traditional norms, at school, you, other friends, and teachers criticized and punished me physically and emotionally due to my non-traditional sexuality. Many days I just wanted to disappear in this world to stay away from those facets of oppression. Compared with you, I was still very lucky that my parents gave me resources for my development, but you, a special and unique child, were not that privileged. I was your friend, but not a very good one. I often still feel so guilty that I was not aware of the negative impacts of discrimination based on grades, families, and economic levels earlier. I also did not realize that there was a lack of financial support, a family connection, and a yearning to love and be loved behind your stubborn behaviors. If only there had been a psychologist to support your mental health and wellbeing, you would not be in so much pain; and you might live in happiness.

Nobody cared about you, me included. Ultimately, you – alone – left us for heaven without saying goodbye.

I have had an emotional rollercoaster these days, but I am not sure whether it is due to the memory of you or due to the current society atmosphere in relation to the pandemic. But thinking about you reminds me of the importance of happiness and the role of education in creating happiness for students, which, for me, is the most critical goal of education. Sitting in this small room, contemplatively looking back, the emotion in me about that broken memory also recalls Eisner's (1993) notion on the function of schooling, which is to help students do better in life, and what matters outside schools. I know I do not have a time machine to return to the past and change anything, but if I am allowed to rewrite for the future, the following is what I envision.

Vuong's Rewriting

I am rewriting this for not only Vietnamese educators but for all educators in this beautiful world. I would like them to rethink the academic results dominated by the language of competition and performance that is so prevalent in education from the past until present. I rewrite to ask for advancing educational equity (Le et al., 2021) and caring about students' backgrounds, circumstances, and feelings; to support them when they are in need. Students are humans first, so we need to prioritize nurturing and taking care of their feelings and emotions. Educators should support students to attain happiness in education. The importance of caring (Noddings, 1995) in relation to mental health of students, especially marginalized students, should be aware in a profound way among teachers.

I want to ask educators to highlight a message to their students: that everyone has differences and uniqueness and it is wonderful to be different. The holistic education promoting the wholeness of mind, body, spirit connected with the world (hooks, 1994) empowers students and teachers to nurture enthusiasm and creativity in educational spaces (Weil, 2010). I therefore expand my plea to ask for policy change to support students who are struggling with their gender and sexual identities, as a colleague of mine is doing in their work (Trinh, 2022). As being listened to and cared for, students will be more willing to learn, play, and accumulate beautiful memories rather than self-harm (i.e., committing suicide).

Coming Together

We have been given individual spaces for our memory recollection to emerge. Some critical incidents of those personal memories have become essential materials for us to write and rewrite (Le et al., 2020a). The critical memory incidents are "remembered moments perceived to have significantly impacted the trajectory of a person's life" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 280). We have recalled and stitched pieces of our memories of in-between-ness, self-harm, violence, harassment, mental health issues, and religious inquiries together. We have followed what Thày Nhat Hanh advises us, to recognize our suffering and look deeply into our pains. Now, we are all ready for the next stage: healing and liberation with one another.

Revisiting those memories was excruciatingly painful. Our individual memories have helped us realize that memory writing has complicated emotions and feelings inside of each of us. However, as we made a commitment from the beginning, this is a healing space for us. By sharing our (deepest) secrets, we were able to understand the concept of *returning*, because there is no here-now or there-then; nothing goes beyond or underneath, but all are moving within. Our memories now do not exist independently, but they exist "within relations" (Barad, 2012, p. 77). As we are reading/sharing/listening/thinking with each other across spaces and times, we come to realize that there is a seed of hope planted within us. We no longer exist independently, for the process in which our memories exist and move within relationality has nurtured our love unconditionally.

When dealing with those memories, we do not aim to change our past; truly we do not write stories to change our past, as we need to know that what happened has shaped who we are now, and hence we must remember those things that happened and those people who appeared in our life to make things happen (Haug, 1992). We are writing to re-examine those memories that we know are too painful but still invaluable to remember, as they have constituted our worlds and now writing them helps reconstitute ourselves.

Here we come together again in order to expose our emotions and feelings to see how each of our stories has influenced one another as part of the memory rewriting/inquiry process. To begin with, Giang and Vuong shared the same sexual identity, which is gay, and they depicted their own memories as gay schoolboys in Vietnam. Their stories were not simply interconnected but inspired one another to expose their common vulnerability (i.e., non-conforming sexual orientation) in writing. Giang and Vuong's rewritings were influenced by one another's writings as they both wrote about equity for future generations, who are their future child(ren), students, and educators. Reading Vuong's story about his childhood gay friend reminded Giang of his own experience of being bullied by the other boy during his schooling. Vuong's writing encouraged Giang to relive his traumatic memory and embark on rewriting for his future – his own son, whose life is hoped to be more peaceful.

For Ha, coming together truly started with moments of vulnerability in which each member felt overwhelmed by their own memories and other members came in with tremendous words of empowerment and wholesome messages. These messages were not to comfort one another but rather to show respect to the dignity and humanness (i.e., vulnerability, insecurities, and pain), which demonstrates a sense of togetherness – that we are in this together and we will heal together. For example, there was a moment in which Giang became emotional after sharing his story. Everyone immediately responded with messages in which we first acknowledged his pains and courageousness in sharing his story. Then, we let Giang and other members know that we were not alone in this journey to find healing and visions of changes.

Trang's confidence in communicating with students' parents was shattered by that Facebook post by Taylor's mother; it haunted her. The experience was too painful for her to dig deeper and question what that story meant for her and how it led to her insecurity. Listening to Giang's moment of vulnerability and witnessing the support within the team urged Trang to revisit that memory. Her willingness to share her story heralded the healing process. It was a relief for her to be acknowledged by the co-authors, most of whom have been teachers, that she had made the right decision in referring the student to a psychologist. Mental health awareness has been a problem worldwide, and Taylor's mother was just a victim of stigmatization with whom Trang crossed paths.

Vuong, who shared his broken memories, has been impacted by Giang's and Trang's stories in this paper. Giang's story reminded Vuong of his scars from suffering countless faces of exploitation by his classmates and teachers. Reflecting on his experience as a young boy, Vuong wrote:

I was in pain, but my hands were so small to touch the freedom, and my knees were not robust enough to run away from that ferocious world ... I was scared and POWERLESS to confront the bullying and persecution at school. (Le et al., 2021, p. 5)

Giang's rewriting shares the same hopes about a world Vuong is looking for, a place where people do not judge other people's genders and backgrounds, and children, students, and educators can enjoy more moments of happiness and peace. Giang's rewriting further motivated Vuong to reconsider having a child because raising a kid has been Vuong's wish for a long time. Trang's story and her rewriting about mental health issues connected with Vuong's

presented opinion that students should be listened to and cared for in terms of mind, body, and spirit. When parents and educators allow children to raise their voices, we can prevent unexpected experiences/memories.

Ethan, who uses *they/them* as gender pronouns, is influenced by each and every story shared as they were reviewing, editing, and commenting in the writing process. They were amazed by the courageousness of Ha when she stood up to question the religious norms and the insult of the classmates, the genuine care of Trang when she advocated for the mental health of her students, the efforts of Vuong when he asked for the educators to embrace all identities of students in the classroom, and the vulnerability of Giang, who used his story to urge for social change and actions to gay children in the future. Each story touched on Ethan's thinking and feeling about reconnecting with Vietnamese identities and social issues that they have forgotten or have not wanted to touch on for quite a long time. This coming-together process has helped Ethan connect their roots and lightened a spark of hope to find the lost home language that they have wished for as they were suffering their *nỗi nhớ quê hương*, or missing home country.

Through our stories, our voices were heard; we paused and reflected on what we wrote and shared with one another. The rewritings were influenced and formed by individual writings since we rewrote our memories to move forward, not to mourn. From writing to rewriting, we are now healed individually and collectively. We each might recall memories individually, but we listened attentively to each other's stories. We were and will be there to care for one another and then move forward with work on rewriting. All of these emotions made us feel that we are reborn. We showed our vulnerabilities and got stronger after rough terrains of struggles and tears. We are now moving to liberate ourselves from sufferings and are (re)learning to think, write, and mediate with one another so that we can prepare ourselves to move to the next stage of our lives: bringing this experience to think with memories in a different space and see how its power can make a difference to the writers/readers.

We embrace our past self through the collectiveness of individual narratives to ask for a plea in rethinking memories as a foundational, essential, and critical step to change education to a better, acceptable, and inclusive place. We are writing to return to those thick memories to open "eyes of awakened understanding" (Thich, 1999, p. 62) to see through ourselves and others so that we grow stronger together. As we are re/writing, we expose ourselves and allow memories to reconstitute our "present-self" (Haug, 1992, p. 22); we use our memories as part of critical storytelling to present our personal experiences as a form of praxis for thinking with theory, context, and actions to build a meaningful future to retell stories with our students, families, and societies (Pentón Herrera & Trinh, 2021). As such, our memories no longer belong to the past, but it is the past-present-future within which hopes, love, and joy are created. After rewritings, we are healed; our inner self finally finds peace. Since hope, love, and peace could be found in our rewritings, we have arrived at the same point we all aimed to reach at the beginning of this joint work/journey. We were wounded children seeking to get healed. Writing is to let it go and rewriting is to let us heal.

Collective Healing

For us, collective healing is illustrated in multiple forms in this space. For Giang, the healing appeared when he recognized that we all are "loyal to our sensory roots" (Blaikie, 2021, p. 55), which is Vietnam, our home country, but we wrote to look at it in multiple contexts of being and becoming. He felt touched by invitations and urges of Ethan, Ha, Vuong, and Trang into their memories that were written out from their hearts. For Ha, through the sharing of stories and the exchanges of empowering messages, she came to the realization that she was not alone in this process of healing. Furthermore, Ha saw how everyone's imperfections and

vulnerabilities became a source of power for healing and new imaginations of changes. For Trang, through the unfolding of previously suppressed pains within the team, she came to the realization that we all had painful memories and vulnerable moments. Once we shared our stories in writing and rewriting, we freed ourselves from the burden of keeping those secrets. We felt supported, accepted, and naturally healed as individuals and as a group. For Vuong, the private healing started when he had this opportunity to share and write about his stories and wishes for the future. But the healing, for him, became significantly meaningful when listening together, and feeling each other's happiness, pains, and vulnerabilities. All writings moved Vuong's heart, often making him cry and smile simultaneously. His past markings seemed to be cured when he believed that his friends were around him, listening and supporting him to fight for a better future for children and students. For Ethan, this rewriting is a process of returning and reworking on their lost identities, which helped them practice what Thay Thich Nhat Hanh says: "live more deeply, suffer less, and enjoy life much more" (Thich, 1999, p. 225). As we use Thay Thich Nhat Hanh's teaching philosophy in the three phases, we wrote our pains out, looked deeply into them, and rewrote them to open a path for joyfulness and hope for the future.

After individual healing, collective healing emerges. This collective healing comes from the deep understanding of the interbeing nature in the world – that people's wellbeing is inseparable from one another, and personal peace is the foundation for collective peace (Thich, 1992). Through critical storytelling in this space, we realize that violence exists in different forms in our lives, regardless of spaces and times. However, as we come to realize our suffering, we transform individual suffering to connectivity, to a sense of belonging, and to collective love. The recognition of suffering made loneliness weaken and disappear. Instead, encouragement and supportiveness from one another allowed everyone to feel respected, safe, courageous, and creative to re-imagine a better world and a better future together.

Final Thoughts

We started our writing and rewriting in specific, local, and historical contexts of being, living, and becoming. By doing so, we came to understand that writing and rewriting memories is a unique and personal way to unpack critical moments of our experiences and learn how they have shaped our lives. We chose one incident from our memories that resonates the most with us to write and rewrite. We offered five personal narratives that resonated the most with us since those narratives frame who we are and perhaps who we will become. These incidents have become a crucial part of our lives that we cannot deny. As Richardson (2001) states, "we have the possibility of writing new plots; with new plots come new lives" (p. 37). We reject entrenched cultural stories with the accepted norm by rewriting critical incidents of memories. We reclaim the right to rewrite memories so we can see ourselves and our worlds in the way we wish them to be and become. There, we view (re)writing as becoming.

Rewriting memories is key to this project as it gives foundations to collective healing. Rewriting memories is personal. Rewriting memories is now educational and political. We all see a need to write and rewrite; it is like our personal need to breathe. We trust writing that could take us somewhere we could not go without writing (St. Pierre, 2018). We are rewriting our memories to seek potential changes in self and in education.

Our memories are contextualized and scattered in multiple places, spaces, and times; however, we built a safe and brave space that enabled us to share these memories and become transformed not only by rewriting our stories but also by walking alongside one another during this transformation. We entered a sacred relationship of receiving and honoring each other's stories – a relationship that allowed us to no longer be alone in carrying our pains but started healing from within and extending to others. Specifically, the coming-together creates a

stronger connection among the five of us as memory (re)writers. This unique connection regardless of space, time, and place built the foundation of empowering each individual, celebrating the vibrant group. Respecting and encouraging each other to be ourselves, we together created opportunities to develop our capacities and engage us in creative outlets like poetry and storytelling. Five people from different places and backgrounds saw each other as a source of support, embracing a mindset of hope and conjointly developing their resiliency through the process of writing and rewriting of their memories, which enabled healing within this group and hopefully for those who read this paper.

To conclude our thoughts in this space, we have come together again and again after we reviewed the critical and encouraging comments from the editors and reviewers. The writing and thinking come together and never stop. The past-present-future of stories returns iteratively. The stories never come to an end, but they allow us to relive the moments, with the memory writing and rewriting in qualitative inquiry research. Our work showcases possibilities of working with memories as transgressive data which not only pushes boundaries in qualitative inquiry but also helps the writers as qualitative inquirers return to internal boundaries to rewrite their own memories moving forward.

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The first and second authors shared the equal leadership in this paper to cowrite and cothink with all of the authors in this journey.

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