Doing science with the wonder in the child's eyes

Tam-Tri Le

*Centre for Interdisciplinary Social Research
Phenikaa University, Hanoi, Vietnam*

Written in Ho Chi Minh city, on June 10th, 2021

OSF Preprints, DOI: 10.31219/osf.io/hj6ke

Many people got inspiration for their life work from something they experienced as a child. It does not have to be a massive or shocking event. Sometimes the most seemingly mundane moments can be the wonder in a child's eyes.

Due to my family's situation, I spent a lot of time of my childhood playing alone. I only had a few plastic animals, cartoon figures, and several toy trucks to play with for years. Needless to say, such limited external stimulation quickly led to boredom. And so, I often went into the world within my mind to play there, sitting or lying still, just thinking and daydreaming. Those were my precious moments.

To gather 'resources' for building my inner fantasy world, I read geography, biology, space exploration, and natural environmental books from my father's bookshelf as well as a lot of comics that my mother could borrow from a bookstore near her workplace. I learned about the shapes, colors, patterns, and structures to build scenery; and personalities and human interactions to build characters and stories. I could completely get lost in my own beautiful imaginary adventures on demand; and from a young age, my dreams usually brought me to exotic places with interesting and detailed storylines (which I daresay, probably better than most b-movies nowadays).

Thanks to my earlier efforts in reading, I did quite well at school. But just like many other kids, somehow the joy of exploration slowly faded away. Somewhere along the way, knowledge and thoughts stopped being about mystery, beauty, curiosity, and creativity; but simply facts or even worse – grades.

During my graduate school years, I often wandered around the mountainous or empty beach areas of southern Japan, wondering if I would truly find in real-life scientific work the awe of knowing and creating. To fill in the emotional void, pursuing various forms of art helps tremendously; but they are not my main job.

Then, I met and have been working with a special scientist – Dr. Quan-Hoang Vuong. He showed us not only the 'what to know' but 'how to know' aspects of doing science, such as through obtaining a national-level overview by constructing a database [1], or through realizing the deeper philosophy behind an experienced view on research activity [2]. But especially, what my emotion could catch before my rational mind was when he shared his perspective about how we, in a sense, are just trying to return to that natural wonder in the child's eyes of ours.

Most fortunately, I am currently working on and contributing to the development of Mindsponge theory [3,4] – a framework of how the mind learns, creates, and changes. With it, I can again go inside my mind as an observer, a constructor, and an adventurer. The products of such endeavor are not only subjectively beautiful, but are also socially useful (for example, our studies have helped further the understanding of suicidal ideation [5] and children’s reading motivation [6]).

I am glad to get back with my purest desire, ‘working’ on the inner pursuit of wonder.

References

1. Vuong, Q.-H., et al. (2018). An open database of productivity in Vietnam’s social sciences and humanities for public use. *Scientific Data*, 5, 180188. <https://doi.org/10.1038/sdata.2018.188>
2. Vuong, Q.-H. (2018). The (ir)rational consideration of the cost of science in transition economies. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 2(1), 5. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-017-0281-4>
3. Vuong, Q. H. (2016). Global Mindset as the Integration of Emerging Socio-Cultural Values Through Mindsponge Processes: A Transition Economy Perspective. In J. Kuada (Ed.), *Global Mindsets: Exploration and Perspectives* (pp. 109–126). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315736396-8>
4. Vuong, Q. H., & Napier, N. K. (2015). Acculturation and global mindsponge: An emerging market perspective. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 49, 354–367. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2015.06.003>
5. Nguyen, M.-H., et al. (2021). Alice in Suicideland: Exploring the Suicidal Ideation Mechanism through the Sense of Connectedness and Help-Seeking Behaviors. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(7), 3681. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18073681>
6. Vuong, Q.-H., Nguyen, M.-H., & Le, T.-T. (2021). Home Scholarly Culture, Book Selection Reason, and Academic Performance: Pathways to Book Reading Interest among Secondary School Students. *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education*, 11(2), 468–495. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ejihpe11020034>