

# Hornby Educational Trust

## Non-judgmental Dialogues for Continuing Professional Development

### Vietnam

2022-2023 Alumni Project Report

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# Hornby Alumni Projects

## Project Overview

<b>Title</b>	Non-judgmental Dialogues for Continuing Professional Development
<b>Country</b>	Vietnam
<b>Dates of project</b>	2022-2023

### 1. Background and rationale

What are the main issues in your English teaching and learning context? How did these issues influence your choice of project? Were there also other important contextual factors to consider?

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Teaching has been considered a 'carton' profession (Lortie, 1975), for when the classroom doors are closed behind them, teachers are left isolated from their peers. The time we spend talking to our colleagues about professional matters are mostly restricted to 20 minutes of lunchtime or at unit meetings (where concerns over other matters are considered more important than professional development). Perhaps the only rare time when extended professional conversations happen are during the feedback period that follows a classroom observation session. However, those sessions are normally evaluative and in some cases judgmental, with many teachers decrying that feedback after observation is more of a nightmare than an opportunity to learn. With that in mind, Non-judgmental Dialogues for Continuing Professional Development is an important key to improved teacher professional talks, and it also adds in a dialogic dimension to reflective learning.

The first reason why we believe this project is important to the community of teachers in Vietnam is that it helps promote the awareness of reflective practice, a technique a great number of researchers agree on (Walsh & Mann, 2015) as a powerful tool for professional development. The concept of reflective practice is hardly mentioned in Vietnam; the majority of the opportunities for professional development consists mainly in INSET training courses, which have received criticisms in Vietnam due to the lack of regularity, content being too theoretical and irrelevant to local contexts, and emotional and financial burnout from trying to balance participating in mandatory courses and a hectic teaching schedule (Hamano, 2008; Le, 2019). Even in contexts where teachers are aware of reflective practice, most of the time reflection happens in an individual, written form (i.e., rewatching recorded lessons, teaching journals). Collaborative reflection, which is the focus of this project, is aligned with Dewey's original definition of reflection (Walsh & Mann, 2015); we can all greatly learn from talking to our fellow

teachers.

Another reason why we believe this will be a strong project even though the number of participants is relatively small is the possibility of knowledge cascading. After the project has ended, the participants chosen for the project will then bring the skills (sustainable leadership, reflection and peer-coaching) and knowledge (reflective practice) they acquired from the project and generate a similar project for the teacher community in their own context (i.e., the high school they work for; the language school they work for). Our firm conviction that with a well-designed project, we can create ripples that spread teacher reflection to a wider part of Vietnam.

We have considered the possibility of state schools not accepting 'reflexive teachers' making changes to their classrooms. However, a reflexive teacher is supposed to consider their circumstances (i.e. rules and regulations, dos and don'ts) during the process of reflection, and therefore any courses of action generated as a result of this process will not go against the system as those state-related matters already been taken into account. For example, a teacher wondering how they can help students speak English more in the classroom will have already considered their classroom circumstances and their school's regulations when they reflect towards possible courses of action.

## 2. Project objectives

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The project aims to provide a certain group of teachers with an opportunity to engage in reflective practice in a dialogic manner. After this project, the selected teachers are able to (1) actively reflect on their teaching practices, thereby developing themselves professionally and (2) cascade what they benefit from the course to their colleagues.

## Evaluation

### 1. Project objectives

To what extent do you feel your objectives were met? If they were not met, or only partially met, can you explain why?

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We are confident that both objectives have been largely achieved. All participating teachers, through their written reflections, described the Non-judgmental Dialogue as a unique opportunity to engage in a new, dialogue-focused form of reflection (I will further elaborate on this in the 'Project Impact' part). As for the second objective, the project has gained popularity through word of mouth across various groups in Vietnam, drawing increased interest in the course. In preparation for the second iteration of the Non-judgmental Dialogue in 2024, we hosted an introductory webinar that was warmly received, attracting over 150 registrants.

### 2. Project impact

What was the impact of your project on:

- a) you
- b) your Association(s) / Institution(s)?
- c) the people involved in your project?
- d) the wider community?

What evidence do you have to demonstrate this?

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The Non-judgmental Dialogue project, designed to foster open, reflective, and dialogic engagement among educators, has had a profound impact on various levels, including personal, institutional, and community spheres.

On a personal level, the project significantly deepened my understanding of dialogic engagement and enriched my professional and personal growth. My involvement as a speaker, understander, and mediator provided me with a comprehensive experience of the project's dynamics. Engaging as a speaker allowed me to express my own educational challenges and insights, which was both liberating and enlightening. As an understander, I had the opportunity to empathize deeply with my peers, resonating with their experiences and realizing that I was not alone in the complexities of the teaching profession. This role particularly emphasized the

power of being heard and the profound connection it fosters among participants.

Moreover, serving as a mediator overseeing both online and offline Non-judgmental groups gave me invaluable insight into the art of deep listening. This role allowed me to witness firsthand the transformational impact of providing a space where educators can share freely without judgment. It highlighted the critical importance of supportive communication in professional development. This experience was particularly poignant as it underscored the isolation often felt by educators. Unlike other professions where colleagues can interact throughout the day, teachers frequently find themselves isolated once the classroom doors close. The project thus not only provided a platform for professional dialogue but also broke the solitude barrier, offering a rare space for teachers to engage in meaningful exchanges outside of their classrooms.

At an institutional level, the project has fostered a significant collaboration between the group 'People of TESOL,' which I administer, and VietTESOL, the official teacher association in Vietnam. This partnership has been instrumental in disseminating the principles of the Non-judgmental Dialogue throughout the teaching community in Vietnam. By combining resources and networks, we have been able to promote the project's methods and ideals extensively, enhancing the professional development of educators across the region and reinforcing our collective commitment to innovative educational practices.

The impact on participants has been particularly striking, as evidenced by their personal reflections on their experiences. Educators involved in the project have reported experiencing transformative changes in both their personal and professional lives. They felt genuinely heard and understood, which empowered them to share their professional challenges more openly and collaborate on solutions.

One participant described the project as "a place where speakers can feel totally heard and understanders can find themselves in the speakers' stories," highlighting the deep empathetic connections formed during the dialogues. Another noted the liberating aspect of the project: "One thing that amazed me about CD is how it allows teachers to be honest while being heard". This sentiment was echoed by another participant who appreciated the safe space created: "Where I can share the difficulties that I am facing freely without worrying about being rejected, criticized or looked down upon".

Moreover, the practical applications of the experiences gained from the dialogues were significant. For instance, a participant shared how the sessions led to professional innovation: "After the CD session, in an attempt to improve the situation, I proposed implementing the Flipped Classroom model and began experimenting with it within my own classroom". Another participant reflected on personal growth: "The conversations during CD session helped me start a new chapter of my life. Rather than staying reserved, I started to learn to have confidence in my abilities to love myself and to cultivate positive thinking".

These testimonials underscore the project's effectiveness in promoting not just professional innovation but also personal growth, as participants navigated through shared challenges and discovered new paths in their teaching careers and personal development. Mann's (2002) quote best summarised the project and its meaningful impact on the professional development of teachers in the project:

'In the end, it is perhaps a simple human choice: to live on, possibly in a professional world of half-understandings and mutual misunderstandings, or to create an opportunity to talk our way into fuller understandings of ourselves, our discourses and our possibilities.' (Mann, 2002, p.391)

### 3. Sharing with a wider audience

Who did you share information about the project with? Why, when, and how did you do this?

What reactions did you get?

Do you have any further plans for sharing more widely?

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The Non-judgmental Dialogue project has not only had a transformative impact locally but has also captured the attention of the international educational community, allowing us to share our innovative methodologies and insights across global platforms.

In 2023, we presented the project at the British Council's ASEAN Teaching English Online Conference. This platform was selected due to its extensive reach and influence among educators across the ASEAN region, making it an ideal setting to showcase innovative educational practices. The following year, we took the project to an even larger stage at the TESOL International Conference held in Tampa, Florida. This conference, one of the largest gatherings for English language teachers worldwide, provided an exceptional opportunity to share our work with a diverse and expansive audience. The feedback from these international exposures was incredibly positive. Educators from various countries, including Syria, Japan, Russia, and Indonesia, expressed keen interest in the project. Many were motivated to explore how they could adapt similar dialogue-based approaches within their own teaching practices. Their responses underscored the global relevance and adaptability of the Non-judgmental Dialogue techniques in fostering empathy and understanding in educational settings.

Building on this international interest, we have outlined several initiatives to further disseminate the project's findings and expand its impact:

1. Webinars for People of TESOL: We plan to organize a series of webinars for the 23,000 members of the People of TESOL group. These webinars will delve into the core concepts of Non-judgmental Dialogue, discussing its benefits and applications in diverse teaching contexts.
2. Participation in Regional Conferences: Our engagement will continue at regional ASEAN conferences such as CamTESOL and LaoTESOL, and we are looking into further international collaborations to broaden our reach and impact.
3. Continuation of Non-judgmental Dialogues: Despite facing financial constraints, particularly in hiring locations, we are currently in the process of conducting the second session of Non-judgmental Dialogue with a larger group of participants. This demonstrates our commitment to advancing this project and refining our approach based on previous learnings and feedback. These planned activities reflect our ongoing commitment to fostering educational innovation and



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sharing effective practices with a global audience. By continuing to engage educators around the world through various platforms and initiatives, we aim to contribute to a broader shift towards more empathetic and effective educational environments worldwide.



#### 4. Overall reflections

As a result of planning, implementing, and disseminating the project, what did you learn about:

- a) organising / managing a project?
- b) the strengths / weaknesses and future needs of your TA(s) /Institution(s) and / or working context?

Would you do anything differently next time?

Would you like to suggest anything to another alumni planning to undertake a similar project?

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One of the key lessons learned from organizing and managing this project was the complexity involved in coordinating schedules among participants. Assembling a group of six individuals posed significant challenges, especially in terms of finding a suitable time for everyone. For the online sessions, we had to schedule meetings late at night, from 7:00 to 9:00 PM on weekends, which, while feasible, often proved to be exhausting for all involved. The offline group faced even tougher logistical issues, particularly in securing a convenient location. One of our members had to travel 25 kilometers (approximately 15.5 miles) each week by motorbike from a different province, illustrating the commitment required but also the strain such arrangements can place on face-to-face participants. Additionally, the financial burden of securing an affordable meeting space in Ho Chi Minh City—a city known for its high costs—posed another significant hurdle.

This project also brought to light certain weaknesses and areas for future development within our TAs and institutional framework. A notable issue was the challenge faced by some 'Understanders' in fully engaging with the discussions. Inexperienced and less familiar with the context of the conversations, these participants sometimes felt left out, which impacted the overall effectiveness of the dialogues. This experience underscored the need for better alignment of group members based on their professional experiences and contexts to ensure more cohesive and inclusive discussions.

If I were to undertake this project again, I would implement several changes to enhance the planning and execution phases. Firstly, I would launch an initial call for locations, appealing to the community for space donations to alleviate the financial constraints associated with renting meeting rooms. This approach could potentially broaden our options and reduce costs significantly.

For those considering similar projects, I would recommend establishing clear expectations about the time commitment during the recruitment phase. Ensuring that potential members are aware that activities will occur on weekends and require a minimum of five hours per week could streamline scheduling and reduce conflicts. Additionally, when forming groups, it is crucial to consider the professional backgrounds and experiences of participants. Grouping individuals with similar work experiences and contexts can foster a more engaged and balanced



discussion, alleviating some of the challenges we faced with participant inclusion.

By applying these lessons, future projects can not only avoid some of the pitfalls we encountered but also enhance the overall experience and effectiveness of the initiative. Sharing these insights with other alumni planning similar projects can contribute to more successful outcomes and foster a supportive community of practice.

## 5. Next steps

How do you plan to continue and / or build on what has been achieved through this project? Why? How might you begin?

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The second session of the Non-judgmental Dialogue project has already begun in April 2024 with the recruitment phase, building on the foundational success of the inaugural season and integrating key enhancements to deepen its impact.

In preparation for this new season, we maintained a recruitment strategy similar to last year's but introduced a significant new element: an introductory webinar. This webinar provided a comprehensive overview of the project, discussing its objectives, benefits, and participant expectations. It served as a preliminary screening and informational tool, helping potential participants understand what the project entails and aligning their expectations from the outset. Following the webinar, invitations to apply were extended to those who showed interest. To ensure participants have continuous access to necessary resources, the webinar was uploaded to YouTube, where it now serves as an accessible training video for anyone needing to revisit the project's core concepts.

Recognizing the increasing interest and the need to manage group dynamics effectively, we expanded the online groups from one to two this year. This expansion allows for a larger number of participants while ensuring that discussions remain intimate and productive. Additionally, leveraging the experience of past participants, we invited a dedicated member from last year's group to host one of the new groups and some alumni to be Guest Understanders this year. This decision was strategically made to foster a peer-led model, enriching the dialogue through experienced insights and providing new members with seasoned peer role models who embody the project's principles.

The first meeting of this second season, scheduled for mid-May, is designed to orient all participants effectively. It will serve to reintroduce the core principles of Non-judgmental Dialogue, ensuring that both new and returning members start on the same footing. This session is crucial in setting the tone and expectations for the season, aiming to establish a trust-based, open, and collaborative learning environment right from the start.

## Permissions

This report is primarily for the Hornby Trustees and British Council internal review and records. However, we do want to promote your hard work and would like to share what you have done with other Hornby awardees and publicly via the Internet.

- Can you please tick here if you give your permission to share your report?
- Please tick here if you would like your project to be considered for presentation at the 2025 IATEFL conference (the Hornby Trust will select from reports submitted and will support one team member from each of these projects to attend the conference).

Please indicate who would give the presentation if selected:

Khoa Do (I do want my friend Ha Nguyen to present with me, if possible) (Name of presenter)

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**Name**

Khoa Do

**Date**

April 28, 2024

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Expenditure

Were there any **significant differences** from your planned budget? By significant we mean you spent far more than planned, or you were given a donation from a partner that was not expected, for example.

Note any costs below that exceeded the original budget by £200 (below this amount does not need including). Please also tell us what caused these changes in the *Reflection* section below the two tables.

a. local funding

Description	Breakdown	Total cost	Final cost
Rooms for the offline meetings	115.00 GBP per session * 6	690.00 GBP	
<b>Totals:</b>		<b>690.00</b>	

b. Hornby funding

Description	Breakdown	Total cost	Final cost
1. Zoom account for one person	12.00 GBP per month *5	60.00 GBP	
2. Travel and accommodation costs	round-trip tickets: 80.00 GBP*2  Accommodation and meal stipend:  30 GBP/day*4	280.00 GBP	
3. Refreshments and meals	40.00 GBP (including lunches) per session * 6  Dinner at the end of the project: 200GBP	440.00 GBP	

4. Stationery (paper, pens and other related costs)	20.00 GBP	20.00 GBP	
5. Honorariums for participants and team members	15.00 GBP*15	225.00 GBP	
<b>Totals:</b>		<b>1025</b>	

Reflections:

Please share your thoughts here:

## Appendix 2: Planned activity

Review your planned activity below and then reflect on any changes that were needed and explain why these were necessary.

Dates	Description of activities	Duration
April 2023	Call for participants (announced on social media and in the People of TESOL group). Participants are selected based on (1) their willingness to develop themselves professionally, (2) their willingness to work in groups (3) their commitment to the project, and (4) their ability to make changes/cascade their knowledge.	1 month
May 8, 2023	Participants announced	
May 12 2023	Email exchanges and arrangement for the induction day	
May 14 2023	Induction day (both online and offline) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General format of <i>Dialogues</i></li> </ul> Mann's (2002) Group Development Model	
June 2023	The first three meetings are conducted	1 month
July 2023	The last three meetings are conducted	1 month
August 2023	The conclusion of the project – participants submitted their written reflections	

Reflections:

The timeline has been shifted from March – May to April – August for convenience, as the new time frame fits in the summer time in Vietnam.