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## Global CLE Leader Makes First Visit to Viet Nam

**By Frank and Melissa Bloch**

*Frank Bloch is Professor of Law Emeritus at Vanderbilt University (Tennessee, USA) and a leader in the international clinical education movement, most notably as one of the founding members of the Global Alliance for Justice Education. He and his wife Melissa visited Hanoi in February 2012.*

Practically every time we met someone new during our recent three-week visit to Viet Nam, we were asked: "Is this your first visit to our country?" For Frank, the answer was 'Yes'; he came to Viet Nam to work with BABSEA CLE's Vietnamese partners after learning about their CLE programs at recent international meetings of the Global Alliance for Justice Education (GAJE). Having worked in clinical legal education internationally for many years, this visit gave him the opportunity to deepen that experience. For Melissa, the answer was "No, I was here once before"; in 1997, she came to Viet Nam with a team of doctors with Operation Smile to write about their experience performing reconstructive plastic surgery for children with facial deformities. This visit gave her the opportunity to see Viet Nam again from a different perspective.



# BRIDGING BORDERS

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**FRANK:** It was especially important to me to be able to help bring Viet Nam into the global clinical community. So we decided that I would talk at each school about a book I published recently called “The Global Clinical Movement: Educating Lawyers for Social Justice” (Oxford University Press 2011). The book describes the global reach of clinical legal education, explains the social justice mission of CLE, and describes the emergence of a vibrant clinical movement worldwide. I saw right away that Vietnamese law teachers and law students are in a wonderful position to contribute to that movement with strong community-focused clinics taking hold around the country at the very time that Viet Nam is looking to modernize its system of legal education and make it more socially relevant. We also decided that I would help conduct workshops for faculty and students on writing about CLE in various formats, from academic books and articles to manuals and other practical materials that can be used in clinical courses. One of BABSEA CLE’s projects with its Vietnamese partners is to produce a manual for clinical teachers and their students -- an important part of clinical scholarship.

**MELISSA:** I was very impressed by the commitment of the BABSEA CLE team to realizing their immediate and long-term goals

with their law school partners in Viet Nam. The intensity and thoroughness of the preparation for and execution of the workshops was contagious and invigorating. Translation presented special challenges, and the translators not only made communication possible but also brought attention to nuances in words that made all the difference. Clearly, all of this was felt and appreciated by the students, faculty and deans who were most welcoming and gracious to all of us. I was particularly



struck by the positive personal and professional relationships that existed among the participants and those that developed quickly with newcomers. As a guest and observer I felt included and honored to be part of the team.

**FRANK:** One of the strengths of the global clinical movement is its respect for local and regional differences in approaches to clinical education. GAJE, for example, encourages cross-national and international cooperation and exchanges, but always with the idea that we learn not only from

what we do in common but also from what we do – and how we see things – differently. We therefore began each workshop with an open discussion of what role clinical scholarship can, and should, play in Vietnamese legal education. We could then focus on topics that would be of interest in Viet Nam, and on what might be written about Viet Nam that would be of interest to clinicians in other parts of the world. We also worked on the new manual. In true BABSEA CLE fashion, most of the sessions were highly interactive – using lots of small group exercises and role-play. Everyone participated with interest and enthusiasm (which was great, since some of the “students” were teachers) and it was a real pleasure for me, as a clinical teacher, to join in the fun.

**MELISSA:** My previous experience in Can Tho, 15 years ago, was very different. The surgeons at the hospital where I worked needed to learn new techniques from the medical volunteers; the facilities and equipment were inadequate to meet the needs of the patients. Now there is a new hospital staffed by trained surgeons. On this visit I observed a change in the relationships between people of different cultures and world experience: the gap has lessened. I sensed a new openness, breadth of education, and an ease of communication. Young people are becoming equipped to make progress in their own country and the world, and they know it