

## **Action Research Paper Reflection**

I started the PCMI/MA-TESL program in January of 2013 and one of the first classes in my schedule was Research Perspectives in Second Language Education. As a new student in the program, I was unsure of what topic to research and decided to look into the effectiveness of Gonzaga's PCMI (Peace Corps Master's International) program in preparing students for their service. I hoped it might provide some insight into what I would expect to encounter in my twenty-seven month Peace Corps experience. Now, after almost two years of service, I have had the opportunity to reevaluate the study. I have used both the results and my personal experiences to refine my questionnaire and interview questions to provide accurate feedback on the PCMI program at Gonzaga University.

As I mentioned above, I was interested in researching the effectiveness of Gonzaga's PCMI/MA-TESL program in preparing students for their Peace Corps service because I was about to embark on my own service in Ecuador. The research data was qualitative and I gathered information through a questionnaire and interviews. I inquired about the program of current and past PCMI students, PCMI/MA-TESL faculty at Gonzaga, and a Peace Corps representative. This method of research aligns with my own personality because I have always been more drawn to having conversations with people over computing numbers, and it was also the most effective way to collect data on the topic. The study provided me with the opportunity to contact current Peace Corps volunteers to find out more about their service. After reviewing the results of the original study, I have determined that my own beliefs align with the opinions of previous PCMI students.

The data that resonated the most with me was the need for Gonzaga to increase communication between its staff and the PCMI students during the twenty-seven months of service. Therefore, in order to determine how the PCMI program at Gonzaga University can improve their communication with students in the field, I refined the questions in the questionnaire to determine how volunteers can receive more support. I added new questions such as how the program can better aid the students during their service and what types of resources would be beneficial for the PCMI students. This feedback will help me gather more concrete data on what past and current PCMI students believe would be beneficial to Gonzaga's program.

Another recommendation that the study showed was the need for more observations or possibly even a practicum to help the PCMI students better prepare themselves for their service. I

completely agree with the data that the questionnaire revealed and I wish that I had taken more opportunities to receive feedback on my own teaching. As new teachers, PCMI students are constantly adapting teaching practices and having some guidance could help them to become better teachers. In order to gather more data on the subject, I added a question to both the student questionnaire and the faculty interview to determine their points of view on the subject. The data also showed that one PCMI student wished there had been more interaction with low proficiency level students. Every Peace Corps location is different and it is impossible to determine what each volunteer will face during his or her service. However, I noticed that most of the TEFL volunteers placed in Ecuador work primarily with low level learners. Having more opportunities to observe lower level classes or to work with low beginner learners could help build the confidence level of the PCMI students and prepare them more effectively for their service abroad.

Finally, the last point that I found interesting was the benefits of the “Course Design and Assessment” course in the MA-TESL program. Peace Corps volunteers are often called upon to find their own projects which might include designing their own courses. For example, I designed a 12-week TOEFL course in which I relied on the help of other volunteers as well as frequently referred back to readings, presentations, and notes from the “Course Design and Assessment” course. The importance of the course was also highlighted in the questionnaire answers. One student expressed the usefulness of learning how to design a course but mentioned that the final portfolio should be based more on a Peace Corps situation. For instance, requiring PCMI students to design a course where the students have a low proficiency level and the resources are limited, might help better prepare them for what they will likely encounter during their service. Again, every Peace Corps situation is different, but I think having PCMI students design a course with limited resources for low-level students would help to prepare them for their real-life service. This type of course would require more creativity which is a skill that is necessary in the Peace Corps. I also added two questions to the end of the student questionnaire where I asked about the resources that were the most useful for the PCMI students while serving abroad and what would be the best way to gain access to those resources. I believe that these additional questions will help guide the PCMI program at Gonzaga University to develop a database for future PCMI students to access.

Even though at first I did not believe that my research was important nor did I think that it would have any real impact on the TESL community, I now see that there could be some benefits from the project. I feel that my two years in Peace Corps have helped me to substantiate the results stated in the study and helped me to refine my questionnaire and interview questions to gather more specific data on the topic. As the PCMI/MA-TESL program continues to grow, data can be collected from more volunteers to further develop the research.

**STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE:**

How long have you been serving in the Peace Corps? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your position/project? \_\_\_\_\_

What aspects of the PCMI program do you feel prepared you the most for your service?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What class(es) at Gonzaga was/were the most applicable to your position?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What did you feel unprepared for? How do you think the program could have better prepared you?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What would have helped you feel more prepared to enter your Peace Corps service?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Do you believe that including more supervised evaluations would have helped better prepare you for your service? Please explain.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Did the information you received during the training period align with the beliefs and techniques taught in the PCMI program?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Do you think you were better prepared for your position than volunteers without training from a Peace Corps Masters International program? In what ways?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How do you think the Gonzaga staff can better support PCMI students while they are serving in the field?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What materials do you believe would be useful to have access to during your service? What would be the best way to access them (e.g. Blackboard, paper copies, E-mail...)?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Please add any comments you have.

**Follow-up Interview Questions:**

These questions are dependent on the participants' answers in the questionnaire but possible interview questions can include:

*In your opinion, why was that class most applicable to your position? Why?*

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*Based on your experience, what do you think can make the PCMI-MA/TESL program at Gonzaga more effective?* \_\_\_\_\_

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*What aspect of the PCMI-MA/TESL program did you find the most useful and applicable to your service in the Peace Corps? Why?* \_\_\_\_\_

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What was your biggest frustration during your service, and do you think the PCMI program can prepare future PCMI students for the problem? If so, how? \_\_\_\_\_

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How can the Gonzaga PCMI program better support PCMI students in the field? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Faculty Interview Questions:**

What classes in the PCMI program do you believe best prepares students for their service in the Peace Corps? Why?

*What do you think the program can do to better prepare the students?*

Do you believe that PCMI students would benefit from more teacher evaluations before starting their service? Please explain, and if so, please offer suggestions for how that might be incorporated into the program.

How do you think the PCMI program staff can better support PCMI students during their service?

How can PCMI students interact more with the Gonzaga MA-TESL community and share their experiences?

*As a professor, what goals and expectations do you have for PCMI students?*

**Peace Corps Representative Questions:**

*Can you please describe the three-month training period for English teacher volunteers?*

*What methodologies do the Peace Corps teach volunteers? Is there one teaching method that the Peace Corps finds to be more useful than others in the field?*

*What aspects of teaching do the Peace Corps focus on during training?*

What areas do Peace Corps volunteers typically struggle with during their service?

*In your opinion, are PCMI volunteers more prepared for their service than other volunteers? If so, in what ways?*