



Post Fellowship Reporting - Project Summary

Report Title: Vietnam: My Life As a VLL (Vietnamese Language Learner) **Name:** Michael Ryan Maxwell

Other Team Members:

Program: EL Education Program

Trip Dates: 11/30/-0001 - 11/30/-0001

Location Visited: Vietnam

Post Fellowship Reporting Template: PFR Template 01

Project Summary: During the month of July, I spent a month studying, traveling and researching in Vietnam. As a large number of my students speak Vietnamese -- and an even larger amount of students are second language learners -- I decided to build off my knowledge of Spanish and put myself in the shoes of my students by learning Vietnamese, studying the culture and customs that make up the language.

And study I did. Arriving in Hanoi I spent 8 hours a day for 10 days working on my Vietnamese in an intensive language course. After these days spent studying basic grammar, tones and pronunciation in the mornings and making conversation in the street with Hanoians, I traveled and began the second part of my expedition.

During the second part of the expedition, I devoted my time to deepening my language skills and interviewing veterans of the American-Vietnamese War. To deepen my students knowledge of this conflict, I brought an audio recorder and recorded the true life stories of veterans from Hanoi, Thai Binh, Hoi An and the Mekong Delta.

Career Impact: There were many personal challenges I faced and mostly overcame.

In the realm of basic skills, I took on the daunting task of learning a new language. Arriving in Hanoi with only a simple (and incorrect) hello and thank you, I took on the intense studying of a difficult language.

On a more personal emotional level as a researcher for my students, I took on the challenge of interviewing veterans whose lives had been deeply affected by the actions of the government of my country. Interviewing them about their lives, their losses and experiences, more than once I was brought to tears trying to choke out a Vietnamese question. Meanwhile, I was overwhelmed with gratitude for the kindness and open-hearted nature of the Vietnamese people who welcomed me into their homes and arms dozens of times.

Chronicled through my blog (<http://maxwelllearnsvietnamese.blogspot.com>), I learned an entire host of skills and experiences for approaching English as a Second Language. Being placed in the humbling and frustrating setting of needing to learn another language, one so different from my mother-tongue, I gained an entirely firsthand perspective of what it must be like to be a student in class, bewildered by the simple and basic act of communicating.

In addition, doing interviews firsthand, I have gained confidence to bring this inquiry approach to my teaching as we tackle issues in history and social studies.

Classroom/Community Impact: There are so many direct impacts to students and the learning-community at my school.

In brief:

While being moved to a Civics curriculum this year, we will be doing and investigation into the use of chemical weapons like Agent Orange (a recurring theme in my interviews). Students will use these interviews and the stories I have from my travel to base their mock UN Conference on Reparations.

I have become a fervent advocate for students struggling due to language issues. Not only does my new perspective help me to teach these students better, it also allows me to speak from a frame of reference to advocate for them on a leadership level at the school.

Speaking Vietnamese with Vietnamese parents from Da Nang and Saigon has brought a new smile to faces of families who could never speak with any staff at the school!

Taking on the challenges of learning a new language, chronicling that experience is taking form as the basis of the culture of learning

in my ELL class.

My classroom has taken on a much different approach for different students as they face the challenges individual to them.

I am inspired about the authentic learning that can happen when students take on the role of researchers and historians as they will learn from my oral history interview gathering. This puts them more in the center of learning. It also allows them to take advantage of the experts we will bring in and find in the community. Investigation and learning are going hand-in-hand!

Open Response: Students in my ELL course are reading my blog and reflecting on the connections they find in their own experience.

Currently, I am working with a Vietnamese translator to make primary source documents of the veterans. These will be the basis of the research we will do for our final project of the year -- a mock UN Conference Debate on Reparations to the people of Vietnam from the US for the use of chemical weapons during the US-Vietnamese War.

Quote: Governments start wars, not people, never people. - Vietnamese War Veteran in Thai Binh

Photos:



Me Kong Delta



Temple of Literature - 2 Days before Exams



Tones



One Pillar Pagoda



Missing Veterans on TV



Street Scene



My conversation partner...



Ngon = delicious