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Report on my posting with Good Work Foundation

Chris Welander January 2022

Part A

- **what was your motivation for e-volunteering?**

As you know, I originally volunteered to go in person to Sta Lucia but that fell through because of the pandemic and the opportunity came up. I was delighted to do it as it fitted in with my other commitments and because I have a longstanding interest in educational development in SA.

- **was e-volunteering as you imagined it would be – if not how did it differ?**

Pretty much. As someone who had been teaching online for some time, it did not come as much of a shock!

- **placement dates and project**

The plan was to deliver a Teacher Training Course to the students to prepare them for work with GWF or elsewhere. I felt it would be a good idea to include some Current Affairs in it a well given what is going on! There were 13 sessions running from 8/9/21 until 1/12/21.

- **pre placement preparation - were you happy with the information we shared with you during your preparation for this placement? what information did you consider most useful?**

Yes. In my experience the background information from People and Places is always good. The description of the structure of GWF was particularly useful i.e. the different campuses.

- **your experience and work – including what resources you may have sent to the project and to whom – please attach copies of any written resources you may have given to them, and let us know of any others**

Maureen gave me a list of topics which she wanted me to cover and I then sorted out a Scheme of Work which she okayed. It was then integrated into the students' timetable by Cath. It consisted of 9 teacher-led sessions punctuated by 3 student-led sessions (and a half-term). The idea was to give the students opportunities to work independently and present their findings on both Teacher Training topics and

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Current Affairs during the course of the term. Each Session began with a discussion of what was in the news and we then went on and worked on a particular Teacher Training topic e.g. group work. I delivered my sessions using powerpoint presentations and I often sent work to the students to do beforehand via Maureen so that we could have a good discussion.

- **what advice would you give to future e-volunteers, including any technical difficulties you encountered?**

It depends on what you are asked to do. If you are coaching a senior manager or conducting a reading group or teaching a group of students. Each one requires a very different approach. I realized that what I was being asked to do would involve quite a bit of preparation (basically a day) and real engagement on both our parts to work. On the whole the technical side was very well managed by GWF. But you do have to be flexible as things break down. The power supply became unreliable towards the end of the term which meant that we had to move the Sessions to an earlier slot.

- **successes, disappointments and challenges of your placement**

I am pleased to have got the course done! There were many memorable sessions e.g. the first Student-led one was fun; I did not know what to expect but they came up with a couple of very good presentations. I was especially pleased to have covered such challenging topics as Classroom Management and Learning Difficulties. I was disappointed that a few, male, students seemed to absent themselves towards the end without any explanation as they had contributed a great deal to the success of the early sessions. The main challenge, of course, apart from the technical one was to find a way of meeting the students halfway i.e. to understand where they were coming from so that I could come up with effective lessons and they would be able understand what I was saying. It is just a more extreme version of something which we have to do every day in the classroom. I asked for and got a short biography from each of the students at the start and made sure that there were whole class activities involving discussions in each session so that I could pick up how things were going. I simply took great care to talk (and listen) to students in each session. But I am sure there was more I could have done e.g. I regret not getting an interim report from them on the course at half-term. The wearing of masks by the students did not help us get to know each other but they were wonderfully understanding and receptive.

- **what was the highlight of your volunteer experience?**

Some of the discussions I had with the students about, for example, the sexism they experienced and the learning difficulty they had had to overcome. It was just great talking about teaching to such an obviously talented and enthusiastic bunch of people!

- **would you recommend e-volunteering to other people or not? please tell us why**

Yes, absolutely. But for the sort of job I did, I am sure actually being in the classroom with the students would have been better.

- **anything else you would like to share with future volunteers about your placement**

Not really. It's great fun and very worthwhile but make sure you go into it with your eyes open.

Part B

- **in your opinion are there any significant omissions or changes needed in the information we shared with you during your preparation for this placement?**

I could have done with a clearer picture of what exactly the role of the Facilitator is and where I fitted in right from the start.

- **do you have any concerns about the support you received from *people and places* and/or our local partner during your placement?**

It was good to work with such professionals!

- **did you experience any significant technical difficulties? Were they overcome, and if not, what could we have done better to help you?**

I asked for a better microphone so that I could make myself heard and hear what the students were saying in the big classroom. Dianne took it up with Kate but she was unable to source one. I would recommend that no one does what I did without a better microphone in the future i.e. it needs to be sorted out and trialled before next year.

- **your recommendations for the input of future e-volunteers – a particular area of your work which could be continued by others and how would you suggest this could be done?**

A future volunteer could easily take up what I did and make it their own and I would suggest that that is what they do i.e. come up with their own Scheme of Work etc. rather than follow slavishly what I did. The Current Affairs strand, for example, was a good idea but floundered somewhat as time went by and interest waned. They seemed particularly concerned about Classroom Management and especially interested in Learning Difficulties.

I think it was a good partnership all round. I felt I was valued and listened to. I especially appreciated working so closely with Maureen each week – we made a good team!

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