

## **Personal Reflective Statement**

**Mr. Richard Wilkinson**

For the past ten months, since February 2004, I have been working at HMP Hewell Grange Open Prison. This is a Category D prison, located in Worcestershire. I have been teaching adult literacy to students' aged 21 and over. The provision for learning at Hewell Grange is contracted by Dudley College so as a consequence I am personally employed directly by Dudley College. The students present in the education department are there through their earning 'the right' to become a member of the educational programmes on offer and they also have to show a willingness to learn, making it an almost truly non-compulsory experience; should the students enter into education however they will be required to attend compulsory subject classes in the mornings followed by optional subjects in the afternoons.

In the mornings the students have to sit compulsory classes in Literacy, Numeracy and Computing. Then in the afternoons the students are given the option to take classes in subjects as diverse as Cookery, Art, Parent Craft, Social and Life Skills or even Outreach classes for part time students who may work mornings in one of the working farms or the maintenance department

There are three 'streams' within the education department, namely ABE, General and Key Skills. Initially I was employed to teach the ABE class literacy. The ABE class' ability ranges from ESOL through the entire Entry-

level range or Entry 1 to Entry 3, so the class has a very wide range of abilities. As part of my development however I have also taken on the teaching of both the General and Key Skills classes when required as well as the afternoon 'options' sessions.

The students are all working towards qualification in these subjects and, specifically in the teaching of my subject of Literacy, the students work towards City & Guilds certificates in each progressive level from Entry Level 1 to Entry Level 3 and then on to Levels 1 and 2 of the national qualifications framework. To do this we do not use a Scheme of Work system but we use Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) for each student. These ILPs are created with the student on entry to education and then they are reviewed at six-weekly review sessions to make sure the students and the learning we are giving them is staying focused.

To this end it will be seen in my personal portfolio and indeed achievement of FENTO standards that there is no Scheme of work being worked to but instead there are copies of ILPs (with names removed) of some of the students studying with me. As an aside to this I am not able to include copies of registers taken; however my own ILP tutor, Tricia Le Gallais has noted that she has observed me taking class registers and duly signed to this effect on my observation sheet (see Profile of FENTO Standards work for reference to this).

When I initially started working at Hewell Grange in the February of 2004 I was understandably doing so with some trepidation as to what to expect from working within the confines of a prison environment. However, both my new colleagues and the student population immediately challenged these preconceptions. My initial ideas and concerns were that firstly the students would be disruptive or even aggressive towards a teacher and secondly that their willingness or ability to learn would be minimal. However as I immediately found out this was not the case.

Initially therefore I was expecting to need and so adopted a somewhat dictatorial teaching style. I quickly learnt within my first teaching session as a reflective educator that this was neither needed nor was it a style I should use. I feel privileged to have worked in this environment with such conscientious learners on the whole who have taught me as much about the art of teaching as I have them about literacy.

There are always some students who may not be as willing to learn for a whole range of reasons, be that a bad phone call the night before where they are powerless to act on it, or previous negative experiences with teaching in their youth, or even no previous education at all. However, this challenge is something I feel I have risen to during my teaching practice and it is something I know I can now deal with in my everyday teaching.

I feel that the PGCE course has helped me in my teaching, and learning about different learning styles and matters concerning classroom management and

'changing the activities' are certainly things I have used in my day-to-day teaching. The concept of reflection also is something I am now totally conversant with and is something that no teacher can go without if their best interests are those of their students and the education being provided. Coupled with this the support of an excellent teaching staff at Hewell Grange has made this whole experience a very fulfilling and successful one. I don't in fact feel I could have learnt more from anyone in the past ten months that I have learnt from my mentor Mrs Chris Fone, so I am truly grateful for that experience.

I know I still have a long way to go in my learning, as a teacher and indeed, this process will be one that I shall continue throughout my working life. I feel very confident of my abilities as a teacher now though and I know my strengths and areas for development. I am a very good communicator in a classroom environment and the students appear to have a good respect for me as 'the teacher'. My interpersonal skills at this level have always been good in previous employment and to this end they have worked well for me as a teacher. My ability to 'think on my feet' has certainly helped me to differentiate to meet the needs of the learners, especially in such mixed ability classes also.

However I do know that I still have a long way to go with my personal subject knowledge and already the wheels are in place for me to go onto my Level 4 subject specialisation qualifications. I do intend to continue in teaching and indeed it has recently been mentioned that if full time contact hours became

available at Hewell Grange the staff and management there would very much like me to continue.

With the obvious financial constraints I will have upon graduating I will be forced to look for other 'full time' employment if this does not arise. In the meantime I have been offered as much substitute teaching work as can be given to me by Hewell Grange and I have already accepted this and plan to continue working at the prison while I can.