

Week ending 24.4.10

On Monday I was more tired than I had anticipated, the blister on the ball of my foot split, I hobbled to the VSO office for a workshop but felt mentally jaded rather than physically – a walk on the beach is not supposed to be so hard on the brain! The workshop was not essential to my role but I hope I can maybe use it to advise heads when visiting student teachers and I get dragged into their issues. On Tuesday the legs and feet were slightly better; I led a fitness session with the rugby team and survived well, they were not so happy – what I would consider an intense 10 minutes (with ‘Tye’ standards) spread over 25 minutes was too much for them. But the recovery of mine, and James’, legs led us to consider completing the coastal walk to include the north bank also.

The highlight of Wednesday was a Birthday celebration at the British High Commissioner’s residence. There is an annual gathering for the Queen’s birthday held where all volunteers are invited to join other Brits and Gambian ‘stakeholders’. This was a bigger function than the previous events so I had little opportunity to chat with the Commissioner about the rugby he had feared was a non-starter in October. But as there were a large gathering of volunteers we did keep ourselves amused, and well fed and watered. Consequently, Thursday was very hard; my busiest day of the week normally but I had been forced to set up a re-sit examination also. The re-sit should be mentioned for the example of desperation the students demonstrate. I had warned the re-sitters last week then issued a list with a warning that absence without a medical note would incur failure. One of the participants finished remarkably quickly, compared to his peers, and as I marked the paper it seemed to be too good to be true with its success. When I was due to teach his class in the afternoon, a student who had not been present in the morning came and asked how he had performed – I noticed his ID card coincided with the name completed first paper received (but his face didn’t). However, when asked to write his name he could not match the writing on the paper! After getting him to do the test for himself he admitted a reason for the tactical ‘substitution’; it was a story about needing to get a cheque reissued – if he hadn’t been so keen to check his result he would have probably have got away with it. The lesson I have learned is that I won’t administer re-sits to students without an ID card check.

Friday didn’t last as long as I feared. I am going on Trainee Teacher observation trek again next week as fellow VSO, Amy, asked to complete a swap as she was expecting a friend to visit from the UK (didn’t actually make it as there was some silicon in the clouds over Europe – am I missing something but isn’t there silicon in sand {like in North Africa} and if you use propellers on aircraft you wouldn’t have to be grounded?). The team leader of the trek is my boss at the college, but decisions and organisational planning are not his strong points so I had half expected to be sat waiting for him to make a decision at 3 pm before I could think of going home. Fortunately, the rest of the team asserted some control and I left college at 3. I returned to Serrekunda to attend the end of the 40 days mourning/charity of ‘my sister’ – through my ‘adoption’ as a brother to Adama I was there for the end of the ‘wake’. No alcohol passed my lips, but I did drink the three stages of Attaya (sweet green tea) and left with a ‘party bag’ of biscuits, sweets and cake – it was really some small black plastic bags as had the other guests (they’ll take up less space in a landfill site than plastic plates).

A brief review, I know, this week but time is against me prior to the trek. Hopefully, next week I can publish the photos of our little walk.