

Moving from mainstream with the Con Powell Scholarship

Ryan Brewer describes how this scholarship has aided his training to be a QToD

After a period in the insurance industry, followed by six years as a primary school teacher, I can safely say teaching is the profession for me! Like many, during my time as a teacher, I have been privileged enough to work with children of various ages, from a wide variety of backgrounds and all with their own individual learning needs. As my time in the classroom has progressed, I have developed an interest in the provision offered to children with specific needs. Moreover, during 2017, I developed an interest in hearing loss and how trained professionals can help deaf children within the classroom.

My interest became even keener in 2017 when a child with Mosaic Down Syndrome and a mild hearing loss joined my class. Working with this child and his 1:1 teaching assistant was, without doubt, one of the most rewarding periods during my time as teacher; this is down to the progress I observed him make as a result of the hard work of his 1:1 TA, his family and wider school staff. In particular, the development of his expressive and receptive language further generated my interest in deaf education. Nonetheless, I soon realised that, although the work I had completed in the past with children with a mild hearing loss had been positive, the development and progress of those children could have been accelerated if I was to undertake specialist training. After applying for and being accepted for a place on The University of Manchester's Deaf Education Post-Graduate Diploma Course my enthusiasm for providing quality access to education for all children, through diagnostic meaningful support, quality teaching and effective advice quickly grew.

Whilst writing my course application I came across BATOD and subscribed in order to access the materials made available to members, so that I could improve my (quite basic!) knowledge of deaf education. Luckily, my current employer was kind enough to support me through my qualification; allowing me to work part-time for the 2018-19 academic year and also (importantly) honouring the two months of placement as a Teacher of the Deaf (ToD) required in order to complete the qualification. Whilst discussing these arrangements with the Head of Course at The University of Manchester, as well as through a brief email exchange welcoming me to BATOD with the head of the organisation, Paul Simpson, I was made aware of the Con Powell Memorial Scholarship. The scholarship provides full funding of the course fees for the MQ, as well as support from colleagues in the field of Deaf Education to students embarking on a ToD course. Whilst I was fully committed to the work, travel and financial commitments associated with undertaking the course prior to my application, the Con Powell Scholarship was understandably an appealing scheme to apply for!

By mid-May 2018 I was extremely lucky to be awarded a full Con Powell Scholarship, further cementing my commitment to a future career in deaf education.

Since starting the PGDip Deaf Education course at The University of Manchester in September 2018, my horizons have certainly been expanded. As a teacher, I saw myself as reasonably clued up on subjects such as 'language' and 'assessment'; however, I soon realised this was not the case – especially in the context of deaf young people. In the past few months, my insight into the world of deaf education has grown significantly, despite still being at the very beginning of my journey as a ToD. Importantly, I already feel that I recognise the importance of key factors in the education of deaf children, including: appropriate amplification; early recognition and intervention; the important role of parents; and effective language assessment.

My practical skills have also developed significantly in a relatively short space of time. As someone who was somewhat disengaged by science during my school days, my brief time in deaf education has captured my scientific imagination – particularly through audiology. As a result of the excellent audiological facilities available at The University of Manchester – coupled with one-on-one tutorials I have accessed through my Con Powell Scholarship – I have quickly developed my confidence around the use, operation and analysis of audiological equipment such as test boxes and radio aids – something that I now know are essential to my future role as a ToD!

As the New Year approaches I am now preparing for my first teaching practice as a ToD. Whilst on one hand the thought of being the 'mentee' seems alien (after mentoring several mainstream student teachers myself in recent years), on the other hand I feel incredibly motivated to get going in January and put into practice the wealth of knowledge I have gained in the last few months. Looking further into the future, I have decided to complete the full Masters in Deaf Education programme, as a result of my enjoyment of my PGDip course so far! Ultimately, my move into Deaf Education has so far been one that I in no way regret, opening me up to a whole new world of purposeful, effective education. ■



Ryan Brewer is a trainee Teacher of the Deaf at the University of Manchester.

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