

Reflections on my first year

Sarah Cadieu, a Con Powell Memorial Scholarship student, shares an account of her first year as a newly qualified Teacher of the Deaf

After completing a full time, on campus, postgraduate course in Deaf Education at the University of Manchester, I thought I had worked at full capacity: living and breathing deaf education 24/7. However, on securing my first job in deaf education as a peripatetic QToD in Rotherham in September 2019, my learning curve would further expand at the speed of light!

Studying at the University of Manchester at the age of 21 (that's really 49 to you and me) I was really putting myself out of my comfort zone. I had been a mainstream teacher for 27 years, so when I unexpectedly, yet gratefully, received the Con Powell Memorial Scholarship from BATOD, an exciting but scary challenge was about to begin.

So grateful to receive this generous funding, I was determined to work as hard as I could to complete the course in one year.

After spending valuable sessions with my tremendously

wise and knowledgeable mentor, Trish Cope; twice weekly lectures with the highly professional, passionate and knowledgeable lecturers, Helen Chilton and Lindsey Jones, and having the support of my newly made and supportive colleagues on the course, I successfully passed the course. Stories about 'Little Billy' from Lindsey made situations real and research about theory of mind from Helen were all fascinating and added to my repertoire of useful knowledge.

I must admit, it was tough to complete in a year, but surplus amounts of adrenaline and motivation got me through it. My newfound knowledge and sense of achievement had changed the way that I would spend the rest of my life.

Throughout the course my confidence and enthusiasm for deaf education, as well as energy, had increased dramatically, and I now felt ready to become an agent of change in the field. After all, Professor Wendy McCracken had instructed us in her very last lecture at Manchester, (and one of our first), before she retired, that we must go out and make changes in the world of deaf education. A huge responsibility that we were all ready and willing to embrace and take on board.

I was lucky to secure a job as a peri in Rotherham starting in September 2019. This was mainly based in secondary schools. The last time I was in a secondary school was in 1986, when I collected my O' level results! My entire teaching career had been spent in the primary mainstream with children as high as a grasshopper (idioms are very important in deaf education!), who sit on chairs that I can barely fit half a cheek on. So, this was my first challenge: acquiring the confidence to walk down corridors with children taller than me and to speak confidently to staff about the newly acquired information that I had gained on the course.

When September finally arrived I was excited, apprehensive and surrounded by a very experienced and knowledgeable team. Everyone buzzed around effectively doing their jobs at full capacity. I was keen and eager to get out into schools, but not quite sure what I would do when I got there. My mentor eased me in gently with a few joint visits and soon my confidence and enthusiasm to fly solo began to emerge.



Sarah passing BSL level 2 with her husband



Winning a competition at Deaf Connections

My lecturer's voices ringing in my ears, I confidently walked into my first secondary school. 'What would Helen say?' 'What would Lindsey do?' Their confidence and status resonated through me. With these invisible icons on my shoulders, I took a deep breath and delivered my first deaf awareness training. I began with much trepidation, but as I spoke my body relaxed and I realised that all the knowledge and advice I was giving would help deaf children in the school, to access the curriculum more readily.

Like a keen puppy I was eager to please but still knew I had so much to learn. The learning curve was immense but a challenge to climb, gradually over time.

My caseload covers nursery children up to key stage 4, so this gave me a range of ages in which to gain experience.

No two days are ever the same, and after 27 years teaching in the same school, this is a grateful change. Putting all the theory into practice was sensational. My confidence at retubing and troubleshooting audiological equipment soon took on new heights. Although I have to admit, silicon ear moulds are notoriously difficult to retube. My family and I attend a wonderful social club, Deaf Connections, in Rotherham, for deaf young people and their families. It is run by volunteers, just like BATOD, and provides a fun and exciting place for children to meet up out of school.

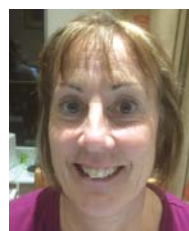
My confidence grew from strength to strength but then in March 2020, Covid- 19/lockdown happened!

My entire way of working changed and with it came yet more new challenges: Zoom, Skype, Teams, Webinars, Virtual this, that and the other. Transitions with children who were at home, writing reports of children I had not seen since January. The list goes on... The work must continue using creativity and resilience, two qualities that I have acquired in abundance over the years.

It was during this period that I attended the BATOD North webinar, organised by wonderful volunteers who also have very busy jobs. More inspirational ideas from Ryan (QToD) and Kim (NDCS' Technology Research Officer) on how to expand the use of technology for deaf children and their families in the future. What an amazing and inspirational way to engage those at home during this period. Within an hour I had subtitles on my videos and the beginning of a video made on PowerPoint.

This webinar also inspired me to share the journey I have taken this year, finding my dream job since qualifying with the University of Manchester as a Teacher of the Deaf. What an amazing new family I have found. I have even inspired my husband to follow in my footsteps. He has secured a place to study deaf education at the University of Manchester in September 2020 over two years. As we have a deaf child and learnt BSL together he is now inspired to take the step.

I hope we are all agents of change.
Superheroes don't all wear masks!



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