



Changes and challenges in deaf education – my experiences

Ted Moore explores how deaf education has changed – from how to categorise deaf children to the new challenges of today

I started teaching in the 1960s, initially in a Secondary Modern School and then a Grammar School, and I began to think about the future. Where was I heading? I was always ambitious and couldn't see my future as tied specifically to subject based institutions.

With these thoughts milling around in my head I went to a neighbourhood party where I had a chat with Ken Pegg who happened to be Head of The City Lit in London which specialised in the education of deaf school leavers and adults. He said that there was a post going at Hawkswood School for Deaf Children – a primary day school – not very far from home. After mulling it over I decided to visit and then if all seemed well I would apply. I thought it over and duly applied. There being no other applicants, I got the job – despite only a few weeks in primary schools during my initial teacher training!

I was naivety personified. It took me several days to realise that every time I turned my back to write on the blackboard (no smartboards or OHPs then) the children

were communicating with each other through sign, no doubt saying uncomplimentary things about me. But while the days ahead were challenging they were also very enjoyable.

Up to this point 'handicapped' children had been categorised e.g. deaf, partially hearing, blind, partially sighted, epileptic, physically handicapped, maladjusted, delicate, etc stemming from the 1944 Education Act. In addition, the terms often used in public at the time with associated connotative meanings – 'deaf mutes', 'deaf and dumb', disabled, Deaf and hearing-impaired were also still prevalent. But these terms did not seem as archaic as in the 'Soviet Union: defectology, idiots, imbeciles and the ineducable. In the years that followed quite heated discussions often took place too about the meanings of integration and inclusion.

The school was very new, so we had soundproofed rooms and the latest group aids, although these did have their shortcomings. I was teaching a class one day – children in a semicircle with headphones on – and one of the girls was rocking about rhythmically. "What are you doing, Mary?" I asked. "Music!" she replied. And indeed the group aid had tuned into Radio 1.

By the end of the 1970s Overhead Projectors began to be used in schools and they proved highly successful for deaf children in as much as the teacher could face the children at all times. Advantages on both sides!

The teaching day was short due to the limited provision within the area. Some children were travelling for an hour and a half one way.

But the day was intensive with 8 to 12 children in a class, who had a huge range of hearing loss and academic ability. There was also no teaching assistant support in the majority of classrooms. Meals were taken with the children (a good basis for language development) and lunch time clubs were squeezed in too.

One tried very hard to meet individual needs, so the provision of worksheets was pretty important. Inevitably one learnt how to cope with typewriters, and Banda, Roneo and Gestetner machines (plus corrective fluid!).

Moving to Partially Hearing Units (PHUs) in the late 1970s and early 1980s was again a huge learning experience. Difficulties arose over



Hawkswood School – Ted Moore and his class

perceptions of integration (not yet inclusion) but Unit provision for 'partially hearing' children expanded rapidly, partly as a result of equality issues but also because of the improvements in technology e.g. radio and post aural hearing aids.. This led eventually to the Warnock Report (1978) and subsequent Education Act of 1981 which espoused the integration philosophy, attempted to look at children individually, rather than categorising them according to their major 'disability', and introduced 'statementing' (including the paperwork!). I then had a one year stint in Further Education (FE) where efforts were being made to help school leavers find employment. There were YTS schemes which were useful for some, but for others the schemes were comparatively short and ill managed. One manager asked me if their deaf apprentice used Braille.

So in the mid-1980s special services for deaf and partially sighted/blind children were being developed, often under the heading of 'sensory'. This involved lumping together services for a range of 'handicaps' but reflected the on-going difficulties of funding. I moved into a management role (Deputy Head of Service) but also had a case load – mainly with school leavers. This was a great experience, enabling me to see the political aspects of running a service and coping with the ups and downs supplied by the Local Education Authority and Government.

Particular strengths of this service were having a full time secretary, hearing aid technicians and an FE support department. The local special school for deaf children had closed a short time before – a national trend – but we had Units for the 'partially hearing' all over the county. These were well run but the on-going problems of viable and compatible numbers in year groups, huge disparities in intellectual/academic capabilities and variations in schools' willingness and abilities to integrate young deaf children into their classes were major issues.

I had reached this stage by dint of experience and qualifications. I am very grateful that most of my training was fully funded. I received a salary plus travel expenses for the initial ToD qualification (London), one year full time. This course enabled me to begin to understand the complexities of provision particularly in relationship to teaching practice. I was able to have experience in a primary school unit, a secondary school for the deaf, and an infant unit. We also did some sessions in another primary unit – a group activity whereby each of us had to teach a lesson in front of other members of the course!

Subsequently I did another course – a two-year part time diploma: Advanced Study of the Education of Deaf and Partially Hearing Children. I found this quite tough but extremely useful. It involved weekly travel and examinations but we did get time out for revision at the end of the course.

Two years later I was seconded to do an MA in the

Education and Psychology of children with Special Educational Needs. Very enlightening and fully funded! Being able to devote oneself to full time study was of major significance. It seems a great pity that full time courses with full funding have dwindled away, particularly for those with family commitments.

Eventually I became a Head of Service in a county authority. Past experience helped enormously. There had previously been no overall service and I had to start from scratch. After managing to get a desk, paper and a telephone line I then pushed for the employment of a secretary and a hearing aid technician. Also of significance was the development and use of computers/laptops and fax machines. No training, but we muddled along – some more successfully than others!

In addition I also became involved in BATOD at this time and in due course I became President. The participation in the Association allowed me to keep up to date with national trends and to share ideas (plus arguments!) with others in similar positions.

I retired from employment in 2002 but continued to be involved with BATOD committees until 2008. It has been difficult to let go of the education scene (foolish!) entirely and I have been a school governor in a number of institutions from the time I left until the present day. In addition I have been involved with my local Parent Partnership/SENDIASS organisations and the Ewing and Ovingdean Hall Foundations charities.

Some people think I should have therapy for addiction, but my interest in the education of deaf children and young people remains strong and I continue to try to support the drive to improve the understanding of hearing loss to the wider community.

Ted Moore is a former president of BATOD and former Head of Oxfordshire Sensory Support Service.

An addendum highlighting some of the many political changes and developments over the last 25 years is available on the Association Magazine section of the BATOD website.

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