

Reflections on the inaugural meeting of BATOD in 1976

David Braybrook reflects on the nature, speed and extent of change over BATOD's 40 years

The year that BATOD was created was also the 100th anniversary of Alexander Graham Bell's invention of the telephone. To mark that event the editor of the "Bicentennial Monograph of Hearing Impairment: Trends in the USA"¹ wrote:

"To renew ties with the past need not always be daydreaming. It may be tapping old sources of strength for new tasks."

My memory of the inaugural meeting was that it was a positive celebratory occasion. There were inevitably some tensions given the National College of Teachers of the Deaf (NCTD) was the larger organisation and had successfully led the profession prior to the formation of the Society of Teachers of the Deaf (STD). Six years previously (1969) the Department of Education and Science in Education Survey "Peripatetic Teachers of the Deaf"² identified that "experienced Teachers of the Deaf in special schools have been attracted to peripatetic work and many have responded with enthusiasm to its demands. Nevertheless it is little understood and criticism has at times been heavy."

Looking back, the mid-70s was a pivotal period in the development of the profession and in the furtherance of its work. There was a sense that as a profession we were moving into a new era and that the thoughts and writings of a previous generation, while still well regarded, were beginning to be replaced by a new thinking and new practices. The work of the Ewings³, Sibley Haycock⁴, Agnes Lack⁵, MM Lewis⁶ and Edith Whetnall⁷ which had served deaf children and the profession well were beginning to be replaced by Van Uden's work on the oral maternal reflective method⁸, the emergence of various sign systems, the development of Total Communication and auditory-oral approaches. Also at that time a major and much awaited change was on the horizon. The Warnock Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People⁹ had been established and in its report, two years later, was to change the context, language and thinking by creating a new concept and structure for children and young people with special educational needs.

The report with its over 200 recommendations and the resultant 1981 Education Act set a new agenda for the forthcoming decade. Wilfred Brennan in 1982 in his book "Changing Special Education"¹⁰ wrote in detail about the post-Warnock period.

"Teachers in ordinary schools must lose their fear of children with special needs and those in special schools learn to admit that for some of their pupils the ordinary

school might be a more appropriate place for their special education. Parents of normal children must lose their fear that the presence of children with special needs in the school will be a disadvantage for their own children." (This is a quote from 1982 and shows how far we have come; this language now seems shocking!)

It is hard now to recall what the baseline was at that time for developing integrated practice. It is not surprising that the Teachers of the Deaf led the way in integration given the history of deaf children having been included in ordinary schools since 1907. However, as in life, not everything moves forward as we would wish. Brennan also wrote in 1982 that "Educationalists, careers officers and employers must seek new opportunities for young people in further education, in training and in employment." While the achievements, academic opportunities and careers of deaf young people have vastly changed since the early eighties there remain today funding issues in relation to accessing further and higher education, in accessing apprenticeships and ensuring a wide range of employment opportunities.

The medical, audiological and technical advances, not least the introduction of cochlear implants in the late seventies, and the greater understanding of early language acquisition and language development as a result of research in the field of linguistics accelerated massive change in the nature of the work and in the provision for deaf children. The societal change, heralded by Warnock, supported this and in the nineties inclusion seemed to herald a realistic goal. So much so that in 2003 the government created a Ministerial Working Party, on which I sat, to consider the future role of special schools. There was a genuine feeling by government and others that special schools had had their day and perhaps, like Italy, we should move to a totally inclusive model. Thirteen years on special schools are a major resource in our diverse and some would say fragmented system of educational provision. We may now only have twenty-one special schools for deaf children and young people compared with over 80 in the 1970s but they provide valuable and valued provision for deaf children especially for those who have complex needs.

For me, looking back, the 1960s was a decade in which the traditional mould began to break. The separateness of the world of deaf education began to be questioned and in the 70s the work began to be more a part of special education and a recognised element of the larger picture of provision. The traditional approaches of formally teaching language and teaching speech began to move towards a model of interaction and acquisition which

led to intense and at times difficult debates as to what communication was and what methods of communication might be, in supporting deaf children in developing language and in their learning. The controversy between the advocates of “oralism” and “manualism” well preceded BATOD and had raged since the Conference of Milan in 1880 and was still very active in the mid-seventies. So much so that the Royal National Institute for the Deaf organised an international, residential seminar in London in 1975, at which I spoke, to discuss the methods of communication currently used in the education of deaf children. Since then as a result of extensive research into Sign, the recognition of BSL and the defining of auditory oral and auditory verbal approaches, the dialogue has become more measured, more evidence-based and more focused on the needs of deaf children and young people and their families than on the views of individual professionals.

The agenda over the last forty years has moved from one of formal teaching and an obsession with methodology to focusing on the academic potential of deaf children and their achievements and ensuring their life opportunities. While I am not now a great defender of Ofsted in its current form, I was in the mid and late nineties a lead inspector for SEN, a contractor and an Ofsted Accredited Trainer (SEN). The existence and implementation of the common inspection framework for all schools brought special schools for the deaf under the same spotlight as all schools which, while initially uncomfortable for some, brought together the provision and finally ended the separateness of the work that was evident in the past. There was also in the nineties a growing interest in collecting, collating and analysing the academic outcomes of deaf children. BATOD, the NDCS, the Ewing Foundation and a close colleague, the late Con Powell, the first President of BATOD, were all actively involved in promoting this work which resulted in a greater focus on improving outcomes of deaf young people and resulted in the creation of the CRIDE surveys.

In 1976 the training of Teachers of the Deaf was in an era of growth and expansion. The opening in 1969 of the course in a college of education, Lady Spencer Churchill College in Oxford, provided only the second such course to the one at Manchester University which Lady Ewing had started in 1921. The opening of Oxford was followed in the 70s by courses opening in Scotland, Wales, London, Birmingham and Hertfordshire and in Leeds in 1992. When I joined the Oxford course as a lecturer in 1973 the course catered for fifty full-time students, half of whom were straight from university or from colleges of education and the other half experienced, seconded teachers. Looking back it was courageous in 1969 to create a teacher training institution to be what was only the second specialist training facility in the country. Being in a college of education enabled the course to be modelled and developed with an emphasis on developing practical teaching and audiological skills as well as providing the academic and theoretical component. It also proved very valuable to students that graduates, new

teachers and experienced teachers all learnt together and were able to share and benefit from each other’s views, knowledge and experiences. Since that time, then, the structure has changed massively with the introduction of part-time and online training and access to specialist higher degrees. However, the funding issues and the lack of secondments has led to difficulties in maintaining the numbers entering the profession as well as the recruiting and training of professionals at the start of their career. The four year graduate course at Manchester University, which started in the seventies, provided while it existed a steady input of able, committed graduates into the profession. The decision to cease the course was a result of the government’s decision to cease end on training and require those entering special education to teach prior to entering specialist roles. I remember attending a meeting with others at the Department of Education when the issue was being consulted on. I enquired what evidence existed to support such a change and recall it was minimal. It was a regrettable political decision which, to my mind, weakened the growth and sustainability of the profession.

So where are we now forty years on? We have, under the guise of choice a wide, diverse, somewhat fragmented structure of educational provision to which an increase in grammar schools may well be added! Lord Blunkett, Education Secretary 1992-2001, wrote recently in a letter to the “Times” (10 September 2016) that an issue “in the proposed grammar school revolution” was the “sparsity within the existing grammar school cohort of children who are academically extremely able but have identifiable special needs.” His letter, to my mind, identifies one of our current dilemmas. How do we ensure equitable access for deaf children to the wide range of provision – single academies, MATs, free schools, studio schools, independent schools, grammar schools, specialist special schools – and how can we create and fund a structure that ensures the specialist support for deaf pupils and the advice and support for parents and professionals?

The “I” word, inclusion, is no longer in favour or use and we are, to my mind, in danger of deaf children being placed in an ever widening range of provision. This makes equitable access and support difficult for LAs to organise and fund. The SEND Reforms (2014) have sadly not provided the promised cultural changes. Mechanistic changes are in place but for many parents and professionals the reforms have not brought about significant change.

The recent GCSE A-C outcomes for deaf children published by the NDCS in 2015 showed only 36.3% of deaf children left secondary school having hit national GCSE benchmarks compared with 65.3% of their hearing classmates thereby highlighting a disturbingly widening gap. In the eighties, when I was Head of Ovingdean Hall School from 1983-89, the staff and I moved it from providing all-age provision for partially hearing children to secondary provision 11-19 for severely and profoundly deaf children, many of whom had been in units/resource bases at the primary stage. By 1987 pupils were

achieving outcomes which compared favourably with the local comprehensive schools and were in keeping with the national average. This was achieved by recruiting recently qualified young ToDs and experienced subject specialists who were ToDs or willing to train and enabling them to share their knowledge, experience and expertise in the best interests of pupils.

The same NDCS report identifies the lowest ever number of qualified Teachers of the Deaf dropping from 1,031 to 999 at a time of increased number of deaf children identified by LAs currently 40,600, a rise of 13% since 2013.

The shortage of ToDs and the national shortage of

teachers together with the currently difficulty of recruiting heads and deputies and the ageing profile of our profession present very real challenges which question the sustainability of our current structures of provision and ways of delivering specialist support and advice.

Within the work itself so much has changed for the better and deaf children benefit hugely from the audiological and technical resources not dreamt of in the 70s. With the rest of the teaching profession we struggle with the demands of constant change and reduced funding. There is much, to my mind, to play for – opportunities as well as challenges which could and will benefit deaf children and young people and their families in the next decade leading to BATOD's 50th. The strap line of the newly appointed President, Stuart Whyte, BATOD's 20th President "Shaping Practice, Influencing Change" well captures the possibilities and dilemmas we face by being part of a much wider educational canvas and no longer the separate professional world which existed in the 1970s.

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 Awarding Body:

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 Job Title:
 Employer:

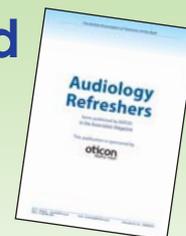
Hearing Status
 Hearing Status: Hearing
 Deaf (Mild)
 Deaf (Moderate)
 Deaf (Severe)
 Deaf (Profound)
 Aid: (Tick all that apply) Unaided
 Baha
 Cochlear Implant
 Hearing Aid
 Preferred Communication Method: Oral
 Sign Supported
 Bilingual

Footnotes

- 1 Robert Frisina (1976) A Bicentennial Monograph of Hearing Impairment: Trend in the USA. AG Bell Association for the Deaf
- 2 Department of Education and Science (1969) Peripatetic Teachers of the Deaf. HMSO
- 3 A.W.E. Ewing (1957) Educational Guidance and the Deaf Child. University of Manchester and A.W.E. and E.C. Ewing (1964) Teaching Deaf Children to Talk. University of Manchester
- 4 G Sibley Haycock (1933) The Teaching of Speech. A.G. Bell Association for the Deaf
- 5 Agnes Lack (1955) Oxford University Press
- 6 M.M. Lewis (1963) Language Through and Personality in Infancy and Childhood. George G Harrap
- 7 Edith Whetnall and D.B. Fry (1964) The Deaf Child. Whitefriars Press
- 8 A. Van Uden (1977) A World of Language for Deaf Children, a maternal reflective method. Swets and Zeitlinger
- 9 Special Educational Needs Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People (1978) HMSO
- 10 Wilfred Brennan (1982) Changing Special Education. Oxford University Press

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