

Adapting the Deaf Studies Curriculum

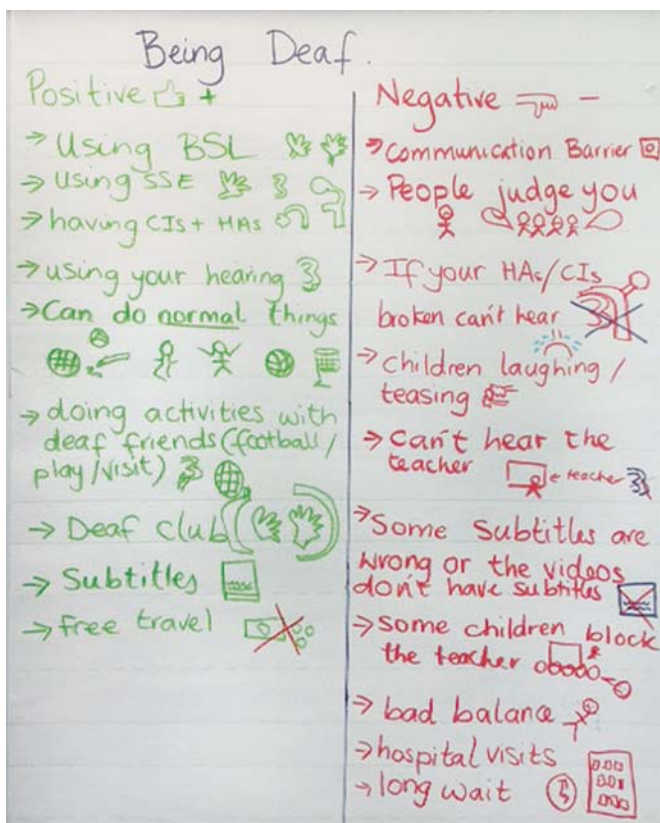
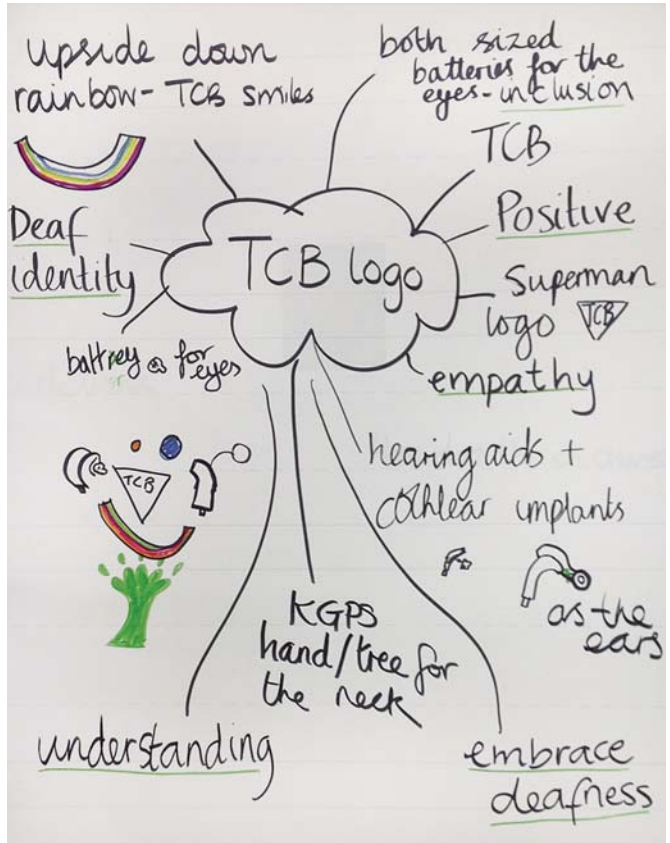
Leanne Chorekdjian-Jojaghaian shares her insight into taking a Holistic Approach to meeting deaf children's needs

Introduction

I work in a Resource Base in a mainstream school which currently supports 16 deaf pupils. I noticed that some of the pupils displayed signs of poor emotional literacy, negative deaf identity and low self-esteem which resulted in undesired behaviours such as refusing to engage in learning and non-compliance. Therefore, the intervention I chose to implement to address these issues was a variation of the Deaf Studies Curriculum (2009) to "assist children in exploring all aspects of their identity" (Drew, 2018). I hoped it would also support positive deaf identity and emotional wellbeing as well as increase confidence and interactions with mainstream peers (NDCS QS7; 2015). I realised that mainstream pupils had access to Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE), but deaf pupils needed a deaf specific PSHE lesson where learning was tailored to their specific needs and related to their deafness.

The intervention

I timetabled a weekly 30-45 minute slot for KS1 and KS2 pupils for one term which replaced a weekly guided reading session. The sessions provided a safe and open space for pupils to learn about deafness and have informal and honest discussions about their feelings and issues related to it. I hoped the pupils would gain a deeper understanding of themselves and strategies which would



support them and foster independence to be self-advocates when in their mainstream classes.

I used the Deaf Studies Curriculum (2009) as a starting point which incorporated aspects on Identity, Communication, Communication Technology, History and Deaf Culture, but included my own lessons on vocabulary linked to emotions, labelling emotions, and understanding the emotions of others related to each of the above topics. Initially I established an awareness of the group's identity, emotional understanding of themselves and of others. To improve social inclusion and to truly promote an inclusive environment at school, I focused on lessons which developed belonging. This was to illustrate to the pupils their shared experiences and unify them as belonging to a social group of deaf pupils in the Total Communication Base, but also to assimilate them into the wider mainstream school community. To do this, I established reverse integration groups such as music club and art club to develop effective peer relationships with mainstream friends. As Coombes (2018, 47) states, "Social and emotional development of children is supported and strengthened by having effective peer relationships and developing a positive identity." The reverse integration group delivered assemblies and developed a deaf awareness display to promote deaf awareness across the

school. The display was interactive, and invited mainstream peers to ask questions on anything related to deafness, which the deaf pupils and friends would answer.

To strengthen the social group in the base, I decided it would be a good idea to work collaboratively to design a logo, which represented the Total Communication Base (TCB). The logo would go on our website and around the school to raise awareness of the base, but also to develop a sense of belonging to the base and to each other. Together they designed this logo, which represents a smiley face and relates to their deafness or things special to them in the design. For the neck, they used part of the Kingsbury Green logo (the green hand) to represent their mainstream friends and inclusion across school. Then they wanted the smile to be a rainbow because, "TCB children love to smile and spread rainbow happiness." Next, the ears are a hearing aid and a cochlear implant to represent their assistive listening devices. The nose is the "superman" triangle with "TCB" written in the middle to represent their super strength, determination and resilience. Finally, the eyes are the two types of batteries required by their hearing aids or cochlear implants. The logo was quite powerful at developing a positive shared deaf identity among the children.



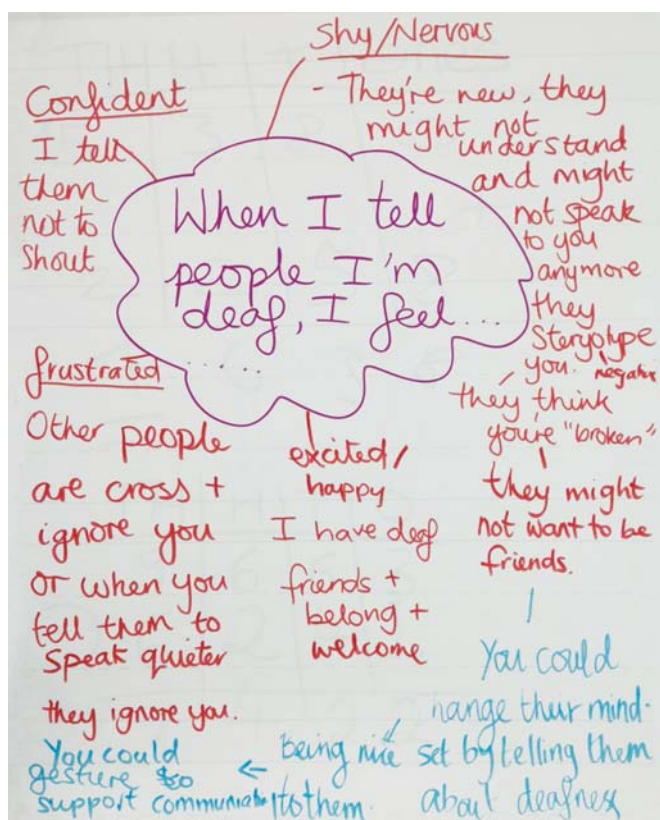
Deaf Awareness corridor display jointly created with the children during one of our sessions. The children wanted to include a section where mainstream children/staff could interact with the display and ask questions which the children from the RB would answer. This was great at developing positive identity, responsibility, ownership and assimilation to a social group.

We attended deaf sports and social events at other schools to develop relationships with other deaf peers in various settings whether they were specialist deaf schools or mainstream schools, like ours, with a base. This was successful at both inspiring the pupils to achieve but also it supported them to assimilate them into the wider community of schools in London with provisions for deaf pupils, which positively promoted their deaf identity.

I invited deaf adults as role models to share their experiences because I wanted to ensure the pupils had exposure to adults who could be positive role models for the future. Additionally I wanted to promote high aspirations to nurture the pupil's deaf identity and pride, which I hoped would contribute to overall emotional wellbeing and mental health.

Impact

Pupils who wouldn't draw themselves wearing hearing aids are now happy and embrace their hearing aids as part of their new deaf identity. They take responsibility for keeping their moulds clean and know basic troubleshooting skills if their hearing aids stop working. Frustration, non-compliance and negative behaviour displayed by some pupils have almost completely disappeared, replaced instead with happiness, new friends and the language needed to express themselves and their emotions more fully. Pupils in the base are more confident to interact and engage with mainstream peers, and feel valued as members of their mainstream class and school. I found that tailoring these sessions to the specific needs of



the pupils in the base ensured a holistic approach to their emotional development as well as their academic development and enjoyment of school.

"Deaf Studies teaches me things I never knew before and helps me manage and understand more about my deafness." Pupil A

"I like learning about sign language and hearing aid." Pupil B

Next steps

These weekly sessions began as a short term intervention, but after seeing how they have positively supported the deaf pupils in our base, Deaf Studies now has a fixed slot on their timetable.

The SEND Code of Practice (2015) states that all agencies involved with deaf children should promote children's wellbeing: my intervention has done just that. I will continue to teach these sessions because I believe teaching deaf children about aspects of their deafness and to support developing a positive deaf identity are just as important as teaching the core subjects. The Equality Act (2010) states that education providers need to plan to remove barriers that may disadvantage deaf children. I believe that poor emotional wellbeing is a barrier to developing a positive identity and relationships with peers



This child drew herself for the first time with hearing aids (circled)

at school. As qualified Teachers of the Deaf, we have an important role to support deaf children in developing a positive identity and maximise any opportunities for them to develop effective peer relationships with both deaf and mainstream peers. The range of experiences I have facilitated will provide the foundations for these children, which will pave the way for their continual positive identity development and future success in their adult lives. ■



Leanne Chorekdjian-Joaghaian completed the ToD course at Mary Hare/University of Hertfordshire. She is Leader of the Total Communication Base at Kingsbury Green Primary School in London.

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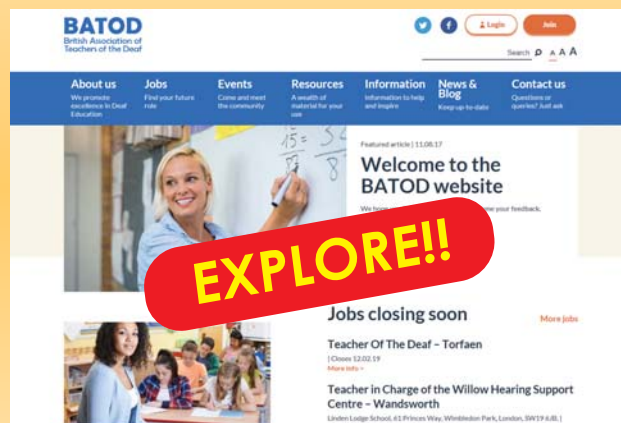
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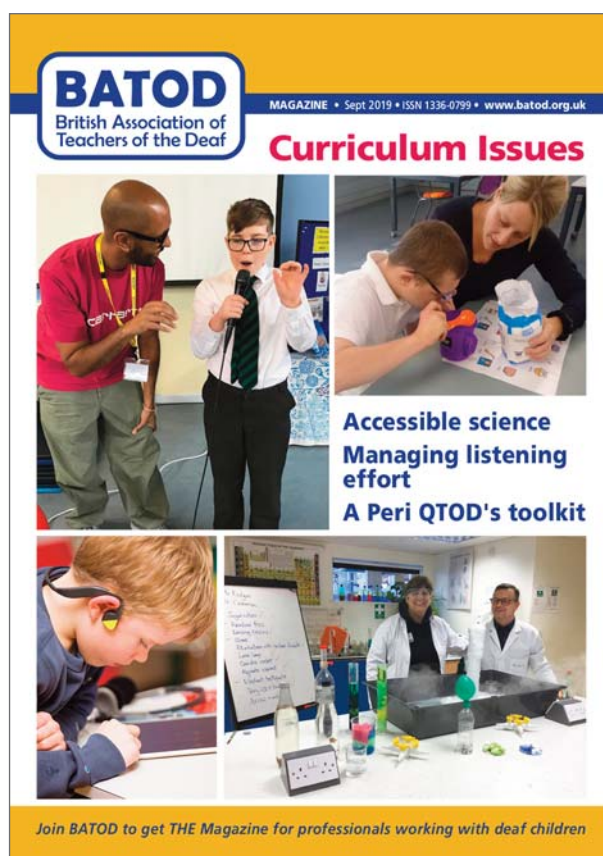


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