

My journey as a Con Powell Scholarship student

Teresa McCabe describes her experience of training as a Teacher of the Deaf during a global pandemic

Wow! What a rollercoaster ride it has been over the last two years, with a Covid pandemic thrown in for good measure!

My desire to train to become a Qualified Teacher of the Deaf (QToD) began during my role as a primary mainstream class teacher. Year after year I began to see more children and young people (CYP) enter my classroom with varying levels and types of deafness. I realised I lacked the knowledge to support these CYP sufficiently and so began my journey to discover how I could support and teach these children and young people more effectively.

But where and how do I start?

BATOD was the obvious choice, so in 2018 I became a member. This opened up a wealth of resources, information, case studies and updates on the latest technology, which fuelled my interest to learn more. By the middle of 2018 I had enrolled at my local learning centre on a British Sign Language (BSL) Level 1 course. The course helped me to understand an alternative method of communication and form wonderful links with my local Deaf community. Through conversations with colleagues and parents of children who were deaf, I became aware of The Elizabeth Foundation in Portsmouth. I was lucky enough to become a regular volunteer and gained valuable practical experience working directly with children who were deaf. I realised that with specialist support, particularly in the early years when language is beginning to develop, what amazing progress that children who are deaf can achieve.

Finding the right training and support

This led me to investigate various ToD training courses and research on how I might fund my studies. However, due to

my mainstream teaching commitments, I needed a course that would provide some flexibility. The Mary Hare School for the Deaf, in Newbury, provides a blended learning approach including a mix of residentials, online learning and teaching placements; so, in September 2019 I enrolled onto the MA/PG Dip Ed Studies (Teacher of the Deaf) course.

As a member of BATOD I became aware of the Ovingdean Hall Foundation (OHF), which provides opportunities for children who are deaf. The Foundation also supports teachers wishing to train to become Qualified Teachers of the Deaf, through the Con Powell Memorial Scholarship, which is managed by BATOD. The scholarship provides a financial lifeline to teachers who wish to train but whose local authority is not in a position to fund them; this was the position I found myself in.

Upon applying and attending a nerve-wracking interview (aren't they all!), I was very lucky to be awarded a Con Powell Scholarship. This provided financial support to cover the training fees and also connected me with a very experienced mentor who became a massive support over the two years of training.

My first year

The PG Diploma consisted of eight modules (four in each year). In the first year I studied Language and Holistic Development in relation to Deafness, Audiology and I had a teaching placement.

The Audiology module was a mammoth learning curve as I had very little audiological knowledge or experience at that point. I remember in the February half term feeling overwhelmed with the amount of information I needed to understand, and the level of research needed to complete

my assignments. I contacted my Con Powell Scholarship mentor and we arranged to meet in Southampton. She very kindly went through the practical requirements with me and allowed me to practise with audiological equipment. This was immensely helpful, and her support relieved a lot of stress prior to my audiology study weekend at Mary Hare.

The study weekends at Mary Hare were very intense and informative. Putting together my Audiology Portfolio helped me to understand and practise new audiology skills. This made me feel confident in the classroom as I was learning skills from a ToD perspective. In my mainstream teaching role, I created some 'how to' posters to help staff teaching children with cochlear implants, hearing aids and radio aids. The posters were very effective, and staff made sure that they were using strategies and



equipment correctly in the classroom.

The Language and Holistic development modules really opened my eyes to supporting the 'whole child'. The coursework and research developed my knowledge of the impact deafness can have on simple day-to-day routines in the classroom, and this has influenced my practice to be always mindful of the deaf child's needs in all aspects of the school day.

Further research for the Complex Needs and Deafness module helped my understanding of how deafness can be inadvertently overlooked if a child has complex special educational needs and disability. My assignment for this module taught me that careful and varied assessment must be applied to give a 'whole child' approach to achieving the best outcomes. This became even more meaningful when discussing the issue with my Con Powell mentor who shared her extensive experience in this area.

I found it reassuring to know that I could ask for advice from my mentor at any time. During the residential weekends I was very fortunate to form a brilliant peer-support group with my fellow trainees, which provided us all with a network of friendship and support. This proved to be essential for what was about to come!

My second year and coping with a pandemic

Two weeks into my first placement Covid-19 struck! It felt like the whole world had come to a grinding halt. This massively impacted on my studies and dramatically changed the dynamics of the course delivery, which moved fully to online learning. Not only was I still grappling with the immense content of the course, I now had to become an ICT expert (which I'm not!) with Microsoft Teams being another world to me. My stress levels were very high and my Con Powell mentor provided timely phone calls and emails to help me navigate the course demands.

The greatest challenge in the second year was obtaining practical experience with audiological equipment and access to children to complete my teaching placements. My Con Powell mentor provided amazing support by sending audiological equipment through the post for me to practise with. I was able to retube, carry out listening and visual checks, and I even borrowed a test box to develop a better understanding of gain curves.

As the lockdown months went by, an online peer-support group was set up with other recipients of the Con Powell Scholarship and their mentors from around the country. I think we all found this a brilliant way to openly discuss the challenges we were facing with the mentors and to offer support and encouragement to each other; it certainly helped us not to feel so isolated within our own four walls!

The lifting of the lockdown

What a relief! Time was running out in the academic year and I still needed to complete my teaching placement.



Covid had created many delays and my stress levels were building yet again!

The Elizabeth Foundation was amazing and with its expertise, support and guidance I was able to successfully complete my placement and submit all my portfolios just before the end of the academic year (with two days to spare), phew! My dream became a reality.

As the training course drew to an end, I began the search for my first post as a QToD. It was at this time that two part-time positions grabbed my interest. One was a maternity cover for The Elizabeth Foundation and the other was a peripatetic role for Dorset Hearing Support Service. Both positions were very exciting but also very different in the day-to-day aspects of the job. I felt both positions would really enhance my practice and help develop my new skills by putting theory into practice; so, I took a deep breath and applied for both.

I am so delighted to be writing this next line as I still feel I am dreaming. Finally, after starting my journey in 2018 to retrain as a QToD, meeting amazing people along the way, navigating a very intense training course whilst we all coped with a pandemic, I am very proud to say I now work as a QToD for both The Elizabeth Foundation and the Dorset Hearing Support Service.

It has been a massive journey and learning experience and one that I know will continue as I develop my practice further. Through my two QToD roles I feel that aspects of both roles will enhance and further my knowledge to enable me to provide the best support for the deaf children in my care.



Teresa McCabe is a newly Qualified Teacher of the Deaf working for The Elizabeth Foundation and as a Peripatetic QToD for Dorset Hearing Support Service.

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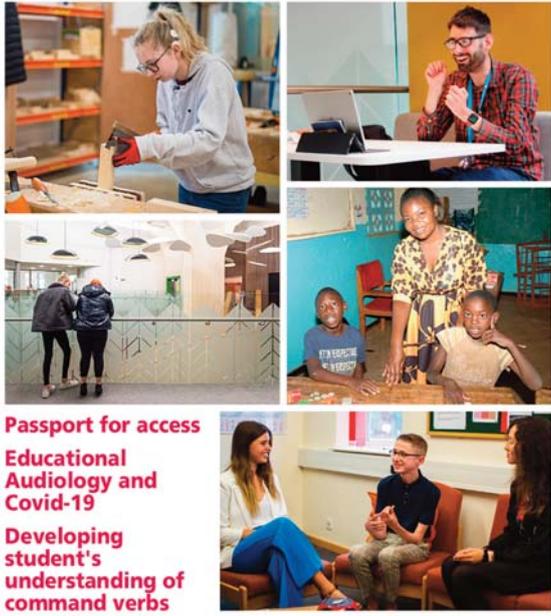
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