

Hera Shaikh, Childhood, Culture and Education 2008



I graduated from The University of Birmingham in 2008 with a Bachelor of Arts in Childhood, Culture and Education (CCE). Now, three years later, when I reminisce the time I had spent at Birmingham as a student, I have nothing but fond memories. These three years have been a journey for me - a journey that I embarked upon when I joined Birmingham University as a student.

As an international student, choosing a University can be a daunting task. However, for me, an international student from Pakistan, this wasn't a tough decision to make. The University of Birmingham had always been my first choice. With one of the largest international student communities in the UK, Birmingham University had always attracted me. The academics are best in their field, with diverse experiences of working around the globe. Another attraction for me was the city of Birmingham itself. It is a city that is powered by the youth, in its true sense with students from three well-reputed universities in the UK – and a city that buzzes with life because of its shopping, nightlife and entertainment.

Furthermore, the CCE course was a truly amazing experience. For me, the best thing about this course was that it adopted an interdisciplinary approach, combining various elements from Psychology, Sociology, History and Philosophy. It is ideal for students who want to work with children in a variety of settings. The placement in the second year provided us with the unique opportunity of experiencing firsthand what it is like to actually work in the field. I had come directly from college, so I had not had an opportunity to work with children before. Thus, the placement module, where we were not only working in a particular setting of our own choice but also constantly critically reflecting on our experiences, taught me a lot. Besides the academic aspect, I made a lot of friends during my time at Birmingham, owing to the large Pakistani community at the University. I will always cherish the experience of living in Halls during the first year and sharing a house with friends during the second and third years, and I definitely recommend all the first years to stay in on-campus accommodation during the first year at University.

After graduating from Birmingham, I went on to do my MSc. in Comparative and International Education at the University of Oxford. Once again, this was a beautiful course that gave me a thorough grounding in the international aspect of Education and familiarized me with the education systems of the developing world, which is where my interest lies. After the completion of my course, I went back home to Pakistan and started working for a local charity, called The Citizens Foundation (TCF), which has over 700 schools throughout Pakistan and provides basic education to the under privileged children of society. I joined the organization's Academic and Training team as an Assistant Manager. My primary area was English Language, so I had to work with around almost 600 English Language Teachers throughout Pakistan. I was involved in curriculum development for English as well as designing and conducting the In-service and Pre-service training programs for the English Language teachers. This was a unique experience for me, as up till then, I had studied about the problems facing the Education systems of the "developing world" theoretically, but working with TCF gave me the opportunity of witnessing first hand the complexities and the challenges that are involved on the field. Almost a year and a half later, in January 2011, I left TCF to join the Aga Khan University's Institute for Educational Development, where I am currently working as a Research Associate on a project. Very often, one blames the poor state of Education provided in Pakistan's schools, so this study aims to find out more about Teacher Educators - those individuals who prepare the teachers, in public as well as the state run institutes, within Pakistan. It is a beautiful mix of the quantitative and the qualitative research paradigms, where the primary focus is to investigate the classroom practices of the teacher educators who are teaching the B.Ed. and M.Ed. programs in the public and private sectors.

So far, I have had a truly amazing journey, and I hope that this learning journey carries on, and teaches me new things along the way. The experience of Birmingham has had a major part to play in where I am today, in terms of providing the knowledge base as well as the exposure. I would highly recommend the CCE course to students who have career aspirations of working with children, and who wish to have a truly amazing University experience. .