

Sardul Dhesi



Speaking Punjabi, Sardul Dhesi, retired Deputy Principal of City and South College Birmingham, recounts the various stages of his 48-year career in the city, including his time with Birmingham Industrial Language Training Services in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Part of the "Multilingual Memories: Birmingham 1984" project.

Namaste, sat sri akaal, assalaam alaikum.

My mother tongue is Punjabi. I was born in India. I had my first 11 years of education there. After that I came to Bradford. I had my entire secondary school education in Bradford. In 1973 I came to Birmingham, and did a degree in Geography from Birmingham Polytechnic. After that I got a part-time job, my first part-time job in Hall Green, in 1976. I worked there for 2 years. I was inexperienced, I didn't know much, I learned a bit. That was the first time, I think, that ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) was taught in colleges. I think in 1976 Hall Green, Garretts Green and Bournville College were the three colleges where this service started.

In 1978 I went to Garretts Green College for 1 year, where I was a Basic Skills Tutor. In 1979, when the Labour Party was defeated and Margaret Thatcher won, I got a job here at Handsworth College. I also got married in 1979. I also bought my house here in Handsworth and I worked here at Handsworth College. I worked here for 6 years. I learned a lot of skills in ILT that I didn't know. My enthusiasm grew here, my links grew, I learned how to make presentations, how to teach, how to use materials, paper or audio-visual, tape-recorder, how to do the work.

I did my one-year Masters degree on secondment in "Race in Education" from the University of Birmingham in 1986. And after that, it seems that the doors opened more

for me, for my progression, from what I learned from my studies, what I learned from work here. I was also quite active in the trade union. I was the Regional Liaison Officer for Equality for NATFHE (National Association for Teachers in Further and Higher Education) and in those days Birmingham City Council had started an initiative, called the "Race Equality Initiative", that every college should have a senior Equal Opportunities officer, an outreach officer, counselling, and then a number of other posts. I was also quite involved in that. My job then was Senior Lecturer at Hall Green, which I did for two years. And then when the new principal came in, Alan Birks, he kind of gave me a free hand, giving me the freedom to do whatever I wanted, and I would then work with my colleagues like Harmesh who was in Garretts Green. We started opening community centres together, which started to grow in terms of ESOL classes, and basic skills. After that I became Head of Faculty at Hall Green College, I was Head of Faculty for 3 years. Then soon after that I got the post of Assistant Principal. We were 3 Assistant Principals at Hall Green College, in South Birmingham. Then when City College and South Birmingham College merged, I was promoted to Vice Principal. And then a few years later I became Deputy Principal. And in the last few years I, along with others, have also brought Bournville College to South and City College. Now, these days, this college is the biggest college in the West Midlands. But I took my leave from last July, I retired after 48 years. And now I spend time with my grandchild, my family, and my friends.