

## **And then there were two**

### **Returning to work with the help of the MTPT Project**

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My second baby Emilia arrived in a far simpler way than her older sister, who caught us unaware at a wedding 150 miles away from our home in Manchester. My maternity year at home with her was generally just as straightforward - a combination perhaps of being a more laid-back second time Mum or being so tired with a toddler and a baby to manage that all standards I once had didn't matter any more. It was also my first experience with a baby that napped for longer than half an hour at a time; she didn't need me to pound the streets of my neighbourhood in the pushchair or tediously drive her around in the car to send her off to sleep.

I'd noticed at around the time Emmy was 6 months old that my reading habits had changed. In the early days, Jojo Moyes and Marian Keyes had kept me company during the endless nights (what she gave me in naps she took away in night feeds). But as time crept on, I re-read Mary Portas' "Work Like a Woman: A Manifesto for Change" and Jenni Murray's "A History of the World in 21 Women." I'd read the first book after returning to work in 2018, curious and slightly terrified at how working parents get the balance of work and home. In Portas' case, she also explored the idea of being successful as a woman without the need of adopting traditionally "masculine" traits of work. I read Jenni Murray's book after having a rare night out at Tring Book Festival. Being a mum of two girls had intensified my interest in girls' empowerment: something I had always cared about suddenly became a lot more personal.

When I read about the MTPT Project and its partnership with the Alban TSA, it felt like a way of getting my head round the return to work whilst exploring a focus that was meaningful and relevant to me. I was instantly sold on the "No guilt, no pressure" policy because I was conscious that my time at home was precious but at times exhausting and complicated. The coaching aspect of the accreditation had the most impact. Coaching sessions took place over the phone, once the girls had gone to bed (most of the time), allowed me to set the agenda around my return to work with my coach. In one session, we talked about my fears around having forgotten how to teach in an engaging and relevant way. In another, we explored why I don't see myself as a future leader. After months of being in mum-mode, I was struck by how invested in I felt during those conversations. An hour of just me - no crying, no feeding, no snack-providing, no Peppa Pig.

I also began to create professional development opportunities of my own to run alongside the coaching. This didn't prove to be too difficult to fit around a baby as it could include listening to relevant podcasts, reading educational literature or online work. My aim was to explore what opportunities specifically exist to empower girls in our schools. I've had mixed results with this mainly because I must be one of the few people that find resources like Twitter inspiring but completely overwhelming. So my profile, "Mrs A Casby, English teacher and Mum of girls" currently remains a bit dormant, but my aim is to come back to it in the future and use it to continue the work at Sandringham. I did, however, have far better luck in more familiar surroundings of reading and finished "10% Braver: Inspiring Women to Lead Education" in one sitting. The stories and accounts of Mums (and Dads) who have made leadership work for them without compromising their values were incredibly powerful.

One of the more memorable moments of the project was arranging a visit to the English Faculty of my local secondary school. Having to bring Emmy in with me made this a fairly unique experience. She drew a bit of a crowd from the students on my tour of the school and my meetings with the Director of English and SEN Co-ordinator were interrupted repeatedly by her crawling to any printer or computer cables she could find. But I enjoyed having those types of conversations again about education and exchanging ideas on approaches. I am also really grateful to Tring School for being so open-minded about my visit and for supporting this part of the professional development.

I've decided to pause my work on the accreditation for now. We're all still adjusting to working through COVID and the challenges it brings but being able to prepare for my return to work in this way has been really valuable. Although I know I'll always feel some sort of guilt around home and work, there might be a "10% braver" version of myself somewhere in the future who can do both well and with confidence.

Jump forward to the Autumn term and the Christmas holidays are in sight. It's not been an easy term, but we've all somehow managed to get to this point, testament in my eyes to the resilience and adaptability of the teachers in our country. My experience has probably been similar to anyone who has been adjusting to being back in school after such a long time away. The dynamic at home for me has interestingly shifted. My husband, like so many others, is now working permanently from home, so is taking charge of the nursery run. This has allowed me precious time to get in to school earlier than I'm contracted to start. Squeezing in as many hours as I can at school reduces the hours I have to do at home. "The Second Shift" begins when I pick up the girls from nursery and ends when they go to bed at 7.30pm. And this is when my working day starts up again, hurriedly eating dinner before opening my laptop or getting out a set of assessments to mark.

This is nothing new to the Mums and Dads who have been balancing work and home in this way over the years, but to me, this is new and pretty exhausting territory. I particularly find it hard making time for the things I know will make me a better Mum, a better teacher; exercise, a phonecall with a friend or reading a book. Because by fitting in a run in the evening, something from school will inevitably be put on hold and will need to be caught up in a lunch hour – a time I have always enjoyed as a way of catching up with colleagues. But I'm learning it's about compromise and organization and just doing the best you can. When those Fridays roll round and I get a day at home, I remember what I'm doing it all for. I'm lucky I can do the job I love and spend time with the family I adore and for that I'm truly grateful.