

Facebook Live Interview with Gabriela
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Where did you do your undergrad?

I did it at UBC, I was a mature student because I had already completed an undergrad previously and I went to UBC to take all my linguistics prerequisites.

What was your experience like applying to UBC and what were your most valuable experiences?

Volunteering. For better or worse, grades matter. Linguistics is hard, it's like math sounds. I had an A- average which was on the low end. But I did a lot of volunteering and I volunteered with the UBC Aphasia mentors group. I had one of the head professors at UBC be my mentor, Barbara Purbess, and she wrote a letter of reference for me. I also worked with Janet Worker at UBC's inference studies center so because this was going to be my second career, I wanted to make sure that it was something that really resonated with me. And I wanted to make sure that I got in. A lot of my friends also worked or volunteered at Monarch house, worked with kids with special needs, or worked with older adults. Showing that you have an interest in the population you want to work with goes a long way.

Do grades and experience both matter?

Yes, I think they are leaning away from grades being the be all end all because they were getting a lot of research-focused students, but they didn't make the best clinicians necessarily. They want to see that you have experience working with people, because being an SLP, you need to build relationships with families and with your clients. I think that they're trying to make that skill more valuable and more important.

Were you accepted the first time you applied?

No so I didn't even apply to UBC the first time which is I think it hurt a lot of people's feelings because I was volunteering there but I had spoken to again like I did a lot of informational interviews with SLP's and audiologists and talked to them about their education and I was told that you know you UBC didn't offer a lot of clinical experience, it was a more theoretical program. So my first time my first application process I only applied to U of T and McGill and I didn't get either of them which was like you know hard to swallow but then I did another year of prereqs to make sure I had all the UBC credits that I needed and then applied to UBC and got in.

For you personally in terms of the stress and dealing with that stress of getting in, was there anything in particular that helped you?

This going to sound really stupid but kind of just believing that it was going to work. And then again, I have a friend who was in my class who finally got it in her fourth time. She applied for four years and didn't get in and each one of those years, she got more work experience. She

worked as an SLPA and worked with adults and kids again building that repertoire so: try and try again. We're all really smart and if you keep in mind that like you know UBC generally they get 300 applications you know they let in 10% of those people it's hard so don't give up. You wouldn't be doing this if you weren't intelligent and driven so keep that.

Since you did end up doing your masters at UBC did you take AUDI 402?

Yeah it's an online course no matter where you are so I'm not gonna lie it's a stressful course it's set up horribly in my class evaluation I actually offered to read like to reorg and reformat the course because when you actually take it I don't know how many people have taken it but it's like insanely hard to read it's terribly formatted it's horrible but it's not bad. My suggestion if it's possible take it in the summer when you don't have a lot of coursework. I did that and I came out and it's like my proud is great I had a 77% in that class and I was like really happy about that because it's a lot of memorization.

You said that it wasn't your first crack at an undergraduate degree what made you choose SLP?

I was working in public relations and marketing which was great in my 20s, I got to have so much fun but I wanted to do something that was that was more meaningful. And I have a couple of experiences with grand-parents one of whom had in SLP of them didn't and my boyfriend at the time he has a lifelong stutter, so I knew I wanted to get into healthcare. I was thinking about medicine and then he was like "what about speech pathology?" so I looked into it. It really resonated with me. I liked the idea of building relationships with people working together one on one or in small groups. I did a lot of informational interviews; I bugged a lot of SLP's I was like "hey like what's it like? Tell me about it" and yeah that's how I got into it.

So now that you do work in a school setting what's that like? Have you ever worked in private practice?

Yeah so I went into SL P thinking I'm going to work with older adults older adults or underserved that's the population to work with and that is my dream population to work with however I wanted to live up north and there are no adults SLP positions outside of Prince George, in case anyone is interested in coming up here we're fighting for it but it doesn't exist. So, I ended up really loving my school placements so when this opportunity came up I applied I jumped at it and it's been really great. I've also done a little bit of teletherapy for a friend's private practice, so I've done some on like Tele health assessments which is interesting but mostly yeah I've been focused on school.

With teletherapy, how do you find that? What are some of the challenges especially with kids?

I'm not going to lie I hate it I hate it a lot. I like I'm just I'm one of those people that like I like to be with my clients like we're very likely hug we you know we work together we run around so teletherapy was really hard. I also didn't have a lot of pick-up which made it kind of disheartening for me. I did a lot of like home programming but not a lot of teletherapy. I think the really hard thing specifically I'm thinking about one student that I work with he had a lot of language issues so we'd be working on something, and his mom would give the answer. I think

that actually happens quite a bit so then you have to have that hard conversation with the parent being like you know "I'm here to talk to Johnny, you're actually not helping him if you're answering questions for him". So that was challenging. The kids that I did have for teletherapy, the families were on it. It was great. I think the challenge is not having that in person feeling. For kids with attention issues, this makes it that much harder. It can also be tough for kids who see screens as a fun thing and not a learning tool. But don't not do it just because I said so.

Tell me about your experience in public schools

So I have I have four schools that I work at. Three elementary schools and one high school. There's only two SLP's here so we kind of divvy up the work and we do it on a block system so in September-December, January-spring break, and then April-the end of the school year. What I've learned from you know my first couple of years is my case limits. I had less kids this year but my first year I had over 110 kids so trying to see all of them makes it really hard to give adequate therapy. This year what I did is an RTI pyramid you guys know RTI is? It's response to intervention so tier one is class-based instruction universal instruction that everybody gets. Tier 2 is a bit more focused and targeted, but it'll be small groups generally and then tier three are the kids that really need intensive intervention. And I had done it my first year but I didn't stick to it as well as I should have so this year I took charge of my caseload much more and really focused on my doing a lot more class based intervention with my lower tier kids so working collaboratively with teachers and which allowed me more time to spend one to one or in small groups with those tier 3 kids that need the support.

Is there anything that you wish you could have known before you started your practice?

That you're gonna finish school and feel like you don't know anything. You go through your undergrad you feel like "OK I'm feeling pretty good", you go through your Masters and you're like "OK yeah I've learned how to do all these different things, I know the theories of it" and then you start working and you're like "oh crap like I actually now I have to deal with people and how am I going to actually teach someone how to make categories or tell a story?" It's a constant learning process and I wish I had known not to feel overwhelmed going into my practice.

Going back to working with kids, do you work with a lot of kids who have other developmental disorders like for example autism?

Yeah I have a lot of kids on my caseload who have autism, I have some complex medical kids on my caseload, I have kids who have FASD so fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, kids who have just general behavior issues that haven't been diagnosed, I have kids with CP so cerebral palsy, kids have DLD so developmental language disorder or speech and articulation issues.

Are you continually learning in this profession and do attitudes and techniques change?

I do a lot of continued education, I don't know how you wouldn't because yes I'm a relatively new SLP but again you come out of school with these theoretical frameworks and ideas of how should be done but like what does that actually look like in practice? Or there's like 17 different

ways to treat phonology disorders so like let me learn more about them! Our college of speech and hearing professionals says that in you have three years to get 45 continuing education credits and in a year I got 80. You are continuously learning and maybe it's partly that impostor syndrome but there's so many opportunities to learn things. Things do change especially in medical SLP but then also you get like new programming and new ideas and new things to try out for school based or preschool as well so yes you will always learn. BC speech and hearing as well as SAC they do annual conferences so it's actually super fun and then ISAAC which is the International Association for AAC they do every I think every two years they do a conference so there's these opportunities to meet up with your classmates and talk to people around the world who are doing different things.

What do you think that incoming SLP's should contribute or bring to the table?

Well I think as clinicians we need to bring one thing that is relationship building. No one is going to want to work with you if they don't trust you if they don't feel comfortable with you. Like making your patients their families feel comfortable that is like my number one thing. I don't care if in a session we don't work on your "r" sound if you're not feeling up to it, if I'm a safe adult that you feel comfortable with, I've won. It's hard when you've had a stroke and you got aphasia and you're feeling like you're losing some of your identity if I come in and I'm like "Today Mr Smith we're going to be working on this" and I don't build a rapport with you, you're not going to work with me. So I think our number one goal is to build relationships so that's my advice. As a profession, I think we have to advocate for our profession and our patients like 100% more. If we break it down, our job is to talk and listen and if we're not talking to build our profession up and get the recognition that SLP and audiologists deserve...because you know we're in the disability act for example. I think federally there's a disability act and SLP's and audiologists are lobbying to get speech and hearing recognized as a disability. But we work with invisible disabilities, so people don't really recognize how important loss of communication is. So that's our job, to make everybody know. If you look at what's being done in Australia, the UK, NZ they're structurally so much more advanced than we are when it comes to helping people with communication issues. That's where I think we should go and that's actually one of my pet projects is to really help build policy you know eventually for speech and hearing in Canada in BC. For our patients they often can't advocate on their own behalf and that's what we should do. So put on your social worker hat, put on your loud-mouth hat.

Did you have to reapply to UBC in order to do more courses after graduating?

After my first BA I did at Saint Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia I came back to BC and wanted to go back to school. I just applied as an unclassified student because it was past the time, so I just applied it took like 2 seconds.

How did you learn the skills that you didn't learn in your graduate program?

Yeah again like a lot of continued education. I am not afraid to ask questions I am also not afraid to say that I don't know something. I do have mentors so my clinical educators I am still in contact with a number of them and with my friends from my program as well. Speechpathology.com is a website that you pay like \$100 a year for and it just has a lot of

webinars and stuff so I watched a lot of webinars. I still read a lot of journal articles you know a lot of the stuff that they don't teach you is actually how to implement things so some of that is trial and error. You're like "OK so I know that you know there's an intervention targeting narrative and I've never done it before I'm going to give it a try" and then you do it a few times and then you get to know it. A lot of it is just not being afraid to look like an idiot.

How would you suggest finding volunteer and shadowing opportunities during times like this?

Yes well that may be a little tough but informational interviews can be done online now so if you want to talk to SLPS you can do that. I'm not sure about SFU but if you contact UBC and ask for volunteer opportunities they might have some. Linguistics Departments at both universities should have volunteer opportunities. Actually call monarch house, call different organizations like the Down syndrome Institute in Burnaby, give them a call and see if they need volunteers. Just because COVID is happening doesn't mean that people don't still need help so it might be that they're a bit stricter or that you know you might have to wait a little longer for opportunities. But put yourself out there! I was just thinking about Burnaby hospital there's a hospital on like 25th, they're amazing about shadowing it's usually like three or four months wait list so it might be a little bit longer but you can go and shadow them for a couple of hours to 1/2 day and they're fantastic. I would contact them and I would contact VCH. It's hard but throw your fishing line out there and something will come back.

What is the biggest piece of advice that you can give to students who want to be an SLP?

Do it. It's yeah it's really great don't be turned off by potentially not getting into your program again it took my friend four years and she got in. It's a very rewarding profession and it's really fun. Yeah so just do it!