

NAVSH/BATH SPA UNIVERSITY POSTGRADUATE COURSE FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS IN THE 2019-2020 COURSE

These participants in the 2019-20 NAVSH/Bath Spa University postgraduate course in the education or care experienced children have shared a summary of what they learned from the course and have given some advice for anyone thinking of signing up for the 2021 course. Please note that these participants attended face to face tutor sessions in London and Manchester before the covid pandemic. The 2021 course will be entirely online.

These participants have said they are happy to be put in touch with anyone who would like to discuss their learning and experience of the course. Please email Mike Gorman at postgrad@navsh.org.uk if you would like to make contact with any of these participants. Please give their name and your permission to forward your email address to them.

Wendy

Summary of main learning from the course

Really enjoyed the reading for each assignment as it gives time to reflect on the practice in your virtual school for the area being studied. I looked at best conditions for maximising learning for UASC young people and what the barriers to learning were. This has really helped me reflect on interventions with more researched background and empathy for their situation. I also looked at effects of pre-birth trauma. As a secondary school teacher this gave me time to look at early development and how pre-birth trauma can have lasting impact on a child, suggesting changes in practice in pre-birth care and identification of children at risk but also how we share this learning with all professionals working with these children as they grow.

What advice would you give anyone thinking of applying for this course?

Organisation is key as it is difficult to balance working full time, family life and study required. Chose topics for your assignments that are specific as there is so much research in some areas it is a minefield to hone it to what you really need. Also choose a topic that will make a difference to your working practice or that you have a real interest in.

Tammy

Summary of main learning from the course

I have learned the importance of wider reading around subjects relating to my work and that there is a wealth of resources available to support myself and my team. My learning around attachment and trauma has had a direct impact on my

day to day work and I find myself quoting authors who have inspired me on my course. I now question more and encourage others to do the same. After my first assignment I am also trying to find ways to better record how and what the work of our virtual school achieves.

What advice would you give anyone thinking of applying for this course?

Ensure you have the time and the interest to complete the reading particularly if you work full time. Try and complete assignments with plenty of time for checking and rewrites and don't leave until the last minute. We had a WhatsApp group with the other students which was a great source of support and information.

Clare

Summary of main learning from the course

It has built on my existing knowledge of Looked After Children. It has allowed me time to study research around this area and reflect upon my own practice. It has helped reinforce my own views around this area and encouraged me to implement changes or make adaptations to our current policies and practice.

What advice would you give anyone thinking of applying for this course?

I would recommend this course. At first it can seem overwhelming getting your head around writing at post graduate level but I have surprised myself how much I actually enjoyed the reading and the writing of the assignments. If you work with LAC I would say this course is essential as it gives you the knowledge and understanding of how this group may be feeling and why they may react or behave in certain ways. I have always been passionate about supporting this vulnerable group and have sometimes been met with opposition or barriers but this course has made me even more passionate about providing the best possible chances for our Looked After Children.

Susannah

Summary of main learning from the course

I have learnt how to read and write more critically and this has led to me thinking more widely about various approaches that we adopt in our VS. I have particularly begun to think about the efficacy of schools labelling themselves 'attachment aware' or 'trauma informed'. I have questioned what this actually means in practise and whether it changes what happens on the ground for the young people and children we have care of. I have thought a lot about whether being attachment aware changes the outcomes for young people if staff in school do not know how to translate theory into useable strategies that support both staff and children day to day. My reading has led me to consider the impact that joint working has on children's outcomes. I have also become more aware of the fact that if home isn't

working, school can fail, and if school isn't working, home can fail. I have become aware of a strategy to support the strength between home and school, Social Pedagogy, and I was unaware of this before beginning this study. My reading has also led to a greater understanding of the poor attainment and progress outcomes of Children in Need. I am aware there is a growing concern nationally for these children and I would like to extend our work in my VS to include this cohort if at all possible.

What advice would you give anyone thinking of applying for this course?

Be prepared to put the hours in - it is a postgraduate course with a high expectation of study and standards and learning this was quite a shock to the system! You will learn a lot and develop your own practice if you read widely but to keep on top of the reading, little and often was the only manageable strategy I found. Also, connect with a few of the people you will meet so you can compare notes and bolster each other when you feel daunted. It is worth the effort in the end.

Tara

Summary of main learning from the course

The course has been thought provoking and allowed me to research topics and take part in academic discussions that I previously wouldn't have been confident in doing. It's given me a deeper insight and understanding into the challenges that children in care face, and some different ways of thinking about situations. I've developed my academic writing skills again, which I did initially struggle with but it's surprising how quickly it returned and it's made me push myself to do something I've always wanted to do but doubted that I could, which has really helped my confidence. The content of the course has made me think about how I look at barriers, and challenge situations. I've since started to frame questions slightly differently, which has made a big difference to my work. I've been able to share some aspects of my learning with the team, which they've been really interested in. Overall, the learning will support how I manage situations, support staff and ultimately improve how I work and support our looked after children.

What advice would you give anyone thinking of applying for this course?

Do it!! The content is interesting and it makes you reflect on your own work and thoughts. The people I met on the first face to face session ended up being a great support network, we all helped each other through and are still in touch now. You think you're busy and won't have time, but because the content is interesting and you can see how it'll impact your practice, you make time and it becomes enjoyable....although I did question this when we got our ILAC call 2 weeks before the first assignment was due! If in any doubt, ask the tutors, everyone was great and incredibly supportive, thank you!!

Sam

Summary of main learning from the course

This course gave the opportunity to learn more about the research on attachment for children in care. This included the chance to begin to question the uncontested nature of attachment theory within social care. I found examining the theoretical perspectives interesting, as a secondary specialist it was clear that much of attachment theory is based on younger children rather than older children / young people. An interest in different perspectives and theoretical backgrounds, and an understanding that one theory cannot claim to explain all of what is a social experience is one thing I will take away from this part of the course. Secondly, a chance to select one area of particular interest and conduct a detailed literature review on this topic. With a background in youth work I chose to look at the impact of extra-curricular activities. The one discovery I made was that the evidence base is small and this led me to conduct a search for what research there is and to combine these into implications for professional practice. Finally, from a personal point of view the chance to gain experience writing at level 7 has been a key learning experience. As a stand-alone course, but one that can lead into a full Masters this course has given me the push I needed. Finding out about the research that has been undertaken into the education of children in care has helped me to understand the process of educational research and to begin to think about possible research for further study.

What advice would you give anyone thinking of applying for this course?

If you have been considering starting a Master's degree, perhaps you have level 7 credits from a PGCE I would say that this course is a great way in. Allow enough time for the reading, and don't panic about the assignments to start with - once you start reading your focus will probably become clearer to you. If you have a particular "passion" or area of expertise make that the focus of the "free choice" assignment - you will likely get a better mark for it if you care deeply and you will certainly enjoy the reading more that way! If you are thinking of continuing on to the full Master's degree, or if you are aiming for a postgraduate certificate / diploma there is the option at the start of the course to ask BSU for accreditation of prior learning (APL) - or accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL). Take this opportunity, if you work with children in care you most likely have enough APEL for a further 30 credits direct from BSU, it's only a few questions and well worth it to get a full 60 credit certificate.

Joanne

Summary of main learning from the course

This course has given me the opportunity to research the role of teaching assistants in the classroom and how PP+ is used on additional adult support. I

have also researched different theories of attachment and the impact of poor attachment in the early years sector.

What advice would you give anyone thinking of applying for this course?

Think carefully about your chosen subject. Don't make it too broad and complete plenty of reading around your chosen subject.

Shannon

Summary of main learning from the course

The purpose of this course is to research the education of care experienced children, with focus on educational attainment and attachment, trauma and learning. In my research, I made the decision to develop my understanding on the way in which full-time alternative provision affects the educational outcomes of looked-after children in secondary education in the first assignment. To summarise, looked after children are significantly over-represented in alternative provisions (AP). And while there are a number of benefits relating to emotional wellbeing, relationships, and closing some academic learning gaps, these provisions often do not prepare children for mainstream education, and children are far less likely to leave year 11 with sufficient qualifications. In the second assignment I explored the ways in which schools can support looked after children with unmet attachment needs, through educational transitions. To summarise, unmet attachment needs in early development have an ongoing impact on looked after child's journey through education. Looked after children are subject to a higher number of changes both within and between provisions compared to the wider cohort and find changes more difficult to manage. This has an impact on children's emotional and academic development, and more needs to be done to centre the child's voice, improve key adult relationships, allow planning between transitions, and enable effective, attachment aware, multi-agency approaches.

What advice would you give anyone thinking of applying for this course?

This course has provided me the opportunity to set aside time to focus in depth on areas of my practice that could be developed further and share these ideas with my team and other professionals that I work alongside. I would encourage anyone working with care experienced children to consider applying to the course. The studying is flexible and there is plenty of support available. In addition, there are a great deal of reading and resources that you can access which will enable you to think more critically about how care experienced children engage with education, how attachment and trauma impacts on this, and consider what you can do in your role to improve these experiences.

Jude

Summary of main learning from the course

In my first assignment I researched some of the factors that cause a decline in attainment during KS4 relative to their peers who are not looked after. The factors I considered were the impact of school and placement stability, emotional wellbeing and mental health, the impact of fixed term and permanent exclusions and lack of motivation and aspiration. The second assignment focused on the importance of student-teacher relationships and what that means for practice in secondary schools and further education. I looked at literature that focused on student wellbeing in schools and the impact of wellbeing on student achievement. Both areas of research have been really helpful in preparing some training that I have recently delivered to the supporting social workers who work with foster carers and will also be helpful as I go on to deliver this training to the new Mockingbird constellation of foster carers and other foster carers in our area in September and October. Both are useful to me as I work with schools and further education colleges to challenge them on exclusions of children in care or where they are not paying sufficient attention to the mental health or wellbeing needs of the young people. They have also influenced the use of the PPG with schools and ensuring it is targeted effectively to support keyworker relationships for young people and enhance wellbeing as well as interventions which are focused on academic attainment.

What advice would you give anyone thinking of applying for this course?

Think long and hard about the time you have to commit to the course and the support you will need to complete it. Consider from the outset what difference you hope it will make to your own practice and where you want to apply what you have learnt. This will enable you to target those areas in the research and study that you do.

Amanda

Summary of main learning from the course

I wrote my first essay on the impact permanent exclusions from schools have upon care experienced young people. I encounter these issues on a regular basis in my work and strive to avert them finding suitable alternatives to exclusion. I wrote my second essay on how the COVID crisis has had both a positive and negative impact upon the education of care experienced young people. In my role as Head of Education for the largest fostering charity in the UK, I have written support materials and training for foster carers on supporting young people at the start of lockdown, during the crisis and on returning to school. I have worked hard with Virtual Schools to ensure that Pupil Premium is used to support young people when learning from home.

What advice would you give anyone thinking of applying for this course?

My advice would be to give it a go as it has been a positive experience that has enhanced my work and created networking opportunities. It hasn't taken up as much time as I thought it would. The reading has been enjoyable and relevant to my role. Just leave a lot of time to work on the essays. Don't be disappointed with your grade, especially if you haven't written an essay in a long time. Just work on making progress between the first and second essay.

Nicola

Summary of main learning from the course

The modules focused on research relating to attachment and attainment for care-experienced children. The critical analysis of the literature including policy, guidance and legislation, has allowed me to build evidence across the two modules for the pros and cons of relational approaches and their place in a school environment. With a clearer rationale formulated from the critical reading, I now feel that I am better prepared to work in a support or challenge role with a range of stakeholders (including young people, schools, carers and social workers). I think I have become more reflective in my practice and I hope to be able to encourage that in others to consider the way behaviour in particular, is viewed and responded to in schools. Within the LA, a number of schools are currently participating in the Attachment Aware Schools Programme. I am keen to see the conclusions drawn from the study at a local level.

What advice would you give anyone thinking of applying for this course?

Spread the reading out. Much of the reading and consideration of articles, theories and viewpoints was complex and I found having time to reflect on them properly was difficult when reading several articles in a short space of time. Form a study group. Even if you keep in touch online/remotely, you can discuss and exchange ideas.

