

# Research Update



Welcome to our latest newsletter sharing some of the research that the **Department for Children and Families at the University of Worcester**, have been involved in over the last few months.

## CONGRATULATIONS to CLASS of 2020!

On 22nd June we joined our graduates from 2020 to celebrate their achievements.

If you missed it, you can see some of the photos from the day on our Facebook page @UWDCF and watch the ceremony [here](#) (Select 22nd June 11:30am ceremony in the list under 'Event posts')



## Supportive Leadership in Schools

The sixth issue of **The Elephant Times** is a collaboration between Tide (the global learning network) and the University of Worcester. It explores the South African concept of Ubuntu and features an article by two of our PhD students, Emma Bailey and Emma Davis with Carla Solvason. It is free to access here: <https://indd.adobe.com/view/b2f8b0e8-2efe-47f1-bb73-9ba0a56f4aeb>



As a continuation from the last newsletter, we have shared further presentations from our conference:

### Signs of Spring: What's awakening in our sector?

This was held w/c 8th February and included presentations by School of Education staff: Janet Harvell, Angela Hodgkins, Nicola Watson, Michelle Malomo, Tracey France and Paul Sheehan, as well as professional partners, specialists, current students and alumni.

This year's conference focussed on what our sectors (health, welfare, education, social work, charity) and professionals have done well during the current climate.

[Tracey France and Paul Sheehan](#) discuss Education Leaders working in collaboration: Learning during the Pandemic.

[Nicola Watson](#) discusses the revised ELGs become statutory in September 2021.

[Michelle Malomo with FDEY Students Hannah Maxell and Elisha Kirby](#) reflect on the module 'playful pedagogy' discussing the reality of playful spaces during the pandemic. Supplementary notes can be found [here](#).

**If you're interested in presenting at our next Partnership Conference, please get in touch with Sam: [s.sutton-tsang@worc.ac.uk](mailto:s.sutton-tsang@worc.ac.uk). It provides a great opportunity to present your research/ work/ practice and for your own professional development.**



## Independent Studies 2020-2021

***Our students completed some fantastic research projects this year, despite all the obstacles that were faced due to Covid-19. The next three pages share some of the findings from those research projects with you.***

### Emily Morris



#### ***How can a school therapy dog be used to support children who are developing their language?***

This research examines the impacts a school therapy dog can have on primary school children who need to develop their speech and language skills, as well as social confidence.

The investigation used observations of interventions between the children and school dog, as well as questionnaires to produce a range of data which could be triangulated. Although these findings cannot be generalised to represent all schools, it is highly likely that similar findings would be found, regardless of setting.

Results from the investigation suggested an overall improvement in the participants confidence and communication skills when they interacted with the therapy dog, with each child seeming to develop the ability to socially interact with their classmates more effectively. Additionally, there were results that suggested that therapy dogs can be used to support both children and adults in overcoming their fear of dogs, general anxiety and behavioural challenges. Thus, the findings suggest that therapy dogs can benefit children's development intellectually, socially and emotionally, assisting them in creating the foundation of skills they need for a socially confident future.

This information can assist educational practitioners in utilising creative intervention methods to support children in their development. Furthermore, the findings can provide childcare settings with the knowledge to understand the benefits of introducing a dog to both pupils and staff, allowing them to make an informed decision. This research fills the gap in literature into the positive impacts of dog-child interactions and will hopefully encourage others to introduce a dog into their setting.

#### **Key References:**

Connell, C., Tepper, D., Landry, O. and Bennett, C. (2019) Dogs in Schools: The Impact of Specific Human–Dog Interactions on Reading Ability in Children Aged 6 to 8 Years. *Anthrozoös*. Volume: 32. Issue: 3 (pp.347-360)

(doi: [10.1080/08927936.2019.1598654](https://doi.org/10.1080/08927936.2019.1598654) )

Mercer, S. (2019) School- based dogs, their use and effectiveness. *The STeP Journal- Student Teacher Perspectives*. Volume: 6. Issue: 1. (pp 38-58) (Accessed: <https://ojs.cumbria.ac.uk/index.php/step/article/download/546/649> )

Zents, C., Fisk, A. and Lauback, C. (2017) Paws for Intervention: Perceptions About the Use of Dogs in Schools. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*. Volume: 12. Issue: 1. (pp.82-98) (doi: [10.1080/15401383.2016.1189371](https://doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2016.1189371) )

## Natalie Timms



### Using electronic observations effectively: What are the benefits and barriers?

My name is Natalie Timms and after 3 years of study at the University of Worcester I have finally (almost) finished. I started my studies in September 2018 initially starting with a 2 year course of foundation degree in early years and finally studying my BA Hons top up in integrated working with children and families. I am a very mature student who has eventually decided what I want to be when I grow up! I'm approaching the grand old age of 45 and have decided that I want to be a teacher. I am due to start my teacher training on a salaried school direct route in September at the setting where I have been employed as

a teaching assistant for the last 4 years.

For my final year at the University of Worcester it was a requirement for the course to complete a dissertation which was a research independent study. I am currently employed as a teaching assistant in a reception class of a primary school in the West Midlands, I decided that I wanted to do a piece of research about observing children, which is very close to my heart. After discussing with my setting and with my independent study supervisor, I decided to research about recording observations electronically as we had recently moved from the paper world of recording observations to the digital world. At that point, I decided to research the following question: Using electronic observations effectively: What are the benefits and barriers?

The approaches I considered for this piece of practitioner action research were interpretive and appreciative as my aim was to improve upon my own practice, accumulating and reflecting upon other's knowledge and experience whilst expanding on my own. I identified my participants as colleagues working in reception classes who have the same job role as myself and invited them to be interviewed, thus providing qualitative data. Conversations/interviews with a purpose were held at school at a mutually convenient time when no children or other adults were in the vicinity.

After interviewing all invited participants, I got down to the nitty gritty of analysing the data I collected. I transcribed every interview word for word and then really got involved with understanding what had been said, pulling it apart and then putting it back together again. I then began to identify key themes that emerged from my data as well as using previous literature and key policy documents, otherwise known as triangulation.

Although my research identified that digital platforms take a preference to paper, it has also raised other important points that I had not foreseen. We are all familiar with the ideology of observing children but how can we be sure that we have enough knowledge of a child to be able to assess a moment that is remarkable for them and their point in development accurately? Views collated through both literature and the empirical data suggest that further reflection is required to improve practice. My aim, going forwards is to identify how we can really get to know a child with an emphasis on building positive relationships with parents from the initial meeting and transitioning of the child into school. The theory of Bronfenbrenner and his bio-ecological framework is key to our knowledge of the child. These are particular areas that I wish to improve my understanding so that I can provide the best possible practice for children in my care in readiness for my upcoming teacher training.

### Key Text for Future Reading:

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979) The Ecology of Human Development. Harvard University Press: Cambridge.Mass.



## Leah Baugh



**How can the placement referral system for looked after children and young people be improved to ensure successful matching and create positive outcomes for children and young people in residential settings?**

I used practitioner research taking on an appreciative, interpretivist approach to conduct interviews with practitioners in the field. The data collected from the interviews was then triangulated with data collected from documentary analysis of a sample of placement request forms, placement plans and risk assessments to give rigour to the data.

### My key findings:

The data collected demonstrated that looked after children and young people are often misrepresented in their placement referral forms, whether consciously or otherwise and practitioners expressed their frustrations at being unable to successfully support or safeguard them (or the looked after children and young people already resident) as a result of this.

The child's voice was found to be lost in the process, something practitioners were keen to rectify in order to advocate and promote the rights of the child or young person.

As a result of my research, I have been able to improve my practice, to feel empowered to advocate for the looked after children and young people whom I support and, in the process, become a reflective activist.

### Useful references:

Greatbatch, D. and Tate, S. (2020). *Use of unregulated and unregistered provision for children in care*. [online] Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/865184/](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/865184/Use_of_unregulated_and_unregistered_provision_for_children_in_care.pdf)

[Use of unregulated and unregistered provision for children in care.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/865184/Use_of_unregulated_and_unregistered_provision_for_children_in_care.pdf)

Hart, D., La Valle, I. and Holmes, L. (2015). *The place of residential care in the English child welfare system*. [online] Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/435694/Residential care in the English child welfare system.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/435694/Residential_care_in_the_English_child_welfare_system.pdf)

Holmes, L., Connolly, C., Mortimer, E. and Hevesi, R. (2018). Residential group care as a last resort: Challenging the rhetoric. *Residential Treatment for Children and Youth*. 35 (3), p. 209-224. doi: 10.1080/0886571X.2018.1455562

## Early Years Network

The Early Years Network, based at the University of Worcester, is led by Niki Stobbs and Carla Solvason. It provides opportunity for anyone working in the Early Years sector to come together, exchange knowledge and create a supportive wider 'team'. We managed to meet face to face again on the 24th June 2021 and it was great to be able to unpack the year that has gone and discuss the new assessment framework. We've identified Speech and Language and Behaviour Management as two of the topics that we'd like to discuss in the new academic year, amongst others and we have also planned to make some visits to network member's settings. Exciting times!

We would love you to come and join us next year, if you are interested then please contact Julie Perry at [j.perry@worc.ac.uk](mailto:j.perry@worc.ac.uk)

## ***What just happened??***



### **Calling all Early Childhood Professionals...**

If you have just survived a year in practice, you deserve a medal.

If you managed to complete an Early Childhood BA Degree over the last year, you also deserve a medal.

If you managed both at the same time, you are truly invincible and deserve a small monument in your name, at the very least... so what's the next challenge?

Have you considered a **Masters in Education (Early Childhood) at the University of Worcester**? Not yet? Well, here are some reasons why you should :

- It is fully flexible, you can study just one module at a time in a way that fits around your family and work (and still be finished in 18months).
- It will deepen your understanding of EC pedagogy and approaches to integrated working with children and their families.
- It will develop you as a leader and strengthen your confidence to bring about change.
- It will provide you with the necessary qualification (and academic skills) to teach in FE or HE ... or even prepare you for PhD study.
- There are 2 'step-off' points (resulting in a PGCert or a Diploma) if you are wary about committing to a full MA.
- The EC modules are taught by Dr Carla Solvason and Dr Mandy Duncan, each with bags of experience.

Have any questions or want to know more? Please contact Carla at:

**[c.solvason@worc.ac.uk](mailto:c.solvason@worc.ac.uk)**



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