

Post Graduate Systemic Thinking and Practice Intermediate Level Training

I was fortunate to attend the University of Derby Postgraduate Certificate Systemic Thinking and Practice intermediate level training during the time of the pandemic. I was initially concerned that I may lose this opportunity because of the impact of the pandemic, fearing the course may have been cancelled. However, following a slight delay, to my delight, the course commenced on the 7th of January 2021.

The course was delivered online via Microsoft Teams. Despite some understandable technology disruption, the course was set out within three modules, interspersed with interesting presenters, workshops, conferences, patch group reflective space, the course was rich in systemic resources, reflection, and leaning.

Module one brought together systemic concepts and made links to practice with attention paid to the research and the development of evidence-based practice and the critical evaluation of "evidence". Module two provided a synthesis of the personal and professional insights gained in Systemic Theory and Practice 1 and 2, alongside developing awareness of personal and professional reflexive processes for the development of rigorous, competent, reflexive practitioners.

Patchwork group and Text Assessments were central to the delivery of the systemic training at the University of Derby. For me the patchwork reflective space was an enriched space that created 'safe uncertainty' (Mason, 2010) as it brought forth familiar and unfamiliarity in my systemic learning.

At the beginning of the course, I had hoped to learn more about systemic thinking and practice, and my knowledge to increase, to inform my practice and how I work with families. Furthermore, to inform the systemic framework in the team I lead and the work with children and their families experiencing mental health difficulties due to their experience of developmental trauma and attachment disruption.

Being an experienced social worker and team manager of a specialist therapeutic social work team, offering therapeutic work to children's young people and their families, evidence-based and systemic practice is integral to the therapeutic framework we work within. Having a keen interest in attachment and trauma, I was inspired by the learning about the research in Attachment-Based Family Therapy (ABFT) Wintersteen, Brown, Diamond, Gallop, Shelef and Levy (2010). The ABFT model, brought about new learning on the treatment of attachment difficulties, particularly drawing on already established evidence on attachment to develop new treatment for adolescent and families presenting with mental health difficulties.

Overall, the course content, readings, and interactions with other learners through the patch group, patchwork assignments, and the independent informal learning and clinical supervision were a catalyst to helping me to think more systemically about how I work with families. For example, noting how my self-confidence in using systemic ideas and thinking to work with families, I witnessed how I was able to use different systemic models to balance client's needs. For example: using Solution focused approach (De Shazer, 1982) allowed me to help families manage risk and create safety. Once the crisis was reduced, we moved into a Narrative approach to allow the family to 'tell their stories, to draw on 'exceptions' and 'unique outcomes' (White and Epston, 1990).

Pivotal learning for me has been the recognition of how my confidence can be impacted when thinking of my age and returning to academic learning after a 10-year gap. However, whilst, these areas have been emotive and challenging, through the systemic and reflective content of the course, exploring Social Graces (Burnham, 2012)

and Cultural Genogram (Hardy and Laszloffy 1995) functioned as an enabler to see 'age' within a socially constructed lens rather than a fixed state of mind.

I feel more skilled and courageous to be more intentional and able to develop a space where the persons and practitioners I work with, can feel safe to talk about oppression and difference. In influencing culturally sensitive practice that is mindful of difference, I have introduced team-based small-scale research to begin the process of exploring children and their families' experience of accessing services, in the hope of helping to increase engagement of children and families from diverse backgrounds, who are less represented within the service.

My learning functioned as a reconnection to self-confidence and practice. It allowed me to recognise my prior learning as a social worker, and how new systemic learning enables me to hold two positions of old and new to co-exist in building on my experience, knowledge, and practice.

For me, I will hold onto my learning from the Post Graduate Certificate Systemic Thinking and Practice Course, as the inspiration to progress to the next chapter in my systemic journey, with the hope to gain a place on the MSc Systemic Psychotherapy.

I would like to thank FPSA for their funding which has helped me complete the second chapter in my systemic journey which has been impactful in both my personal and professional development.