

## Harriet Ward, Childhood, Culture and Education, 2010



### Current role

I work for Kirklees Council as a one-to-one SEN teaching assistant at a school and an assistant group leader for out of school clubs for children with complex and profound disabilities. I'm also a support worker and group leader on the Huddersfield Support Group for Autism Playscheme. I have a place on a master's course at Leeds University in Special Education and Disability Studies although I have deferred for a year to gain some more experience and save money for the course!

### What is the best thing about what you are doing now?

I enjoy working with the children as it's a lot of fun especially at the out-of-school clubs. One of the best parts of my job at the out-of-school club is the wide range of professionals that work there. It ranges from speech and language therapists, teachers, social workers, physiotherapists etc. So I gain a lot of insight into different professions. I'm also currently fundraising for the Huddersfield Support Group for Autism Playscheme where I've volunteered for 4 years and will be a paid group leader this year which I'm loving as I've enjoyed planning the fundraising events.

### What first attracted you to the University?

The course attracted me to Birmingham firstly as it covers a lot of different disciplines. It has a mixture of everything I was interested in, sociology, psychology and history modules in relation to childhood and education. The campus is great too and I just got a really good feel from the University on the open day.

### What were the best parts about your time here as a student?

The course was great. It was quite a small group, about 30 of us, so everyone really got on well. Everyone knew each other and supported each other through the course. That was one of the best parts of my time at University because it was a good sized group. The lecturers were always happy to help even when finishing the course, such as helping with my application for my Masters. The lectures were made really interesting too as there's some really good lecturers on the course.

### What did you think of the learning experience within the University?

If you want to go into working with children the child development and psychology modules are valuable. When applying for jobs I also found the professional contexts module has been useful because you learn about all the recent and relevant policies. The modules I found most valuable for myself were the Sociology and Historical Studies subjects. These were Outcast Children: A History of Moral Panics, Equality and Diversity and Gender and Education. They all furthered my interest in these areas which led to my dissertation topic choice and further study interests. Regarding my current work, the Exploring Autistic Spectrum Disorders module was valuable as it gave a good theoretical background to support my practical work.

### Did you find the degree programme at Birmingham challenging or easy?

I found the degree challenging but in a good way. The dissertation was probably the toughest part as it's a long process and you don't really know what to expect until you're doing it. It involves a lot of changes in direction and I found that I really had to keep focusing the topic, taking it from quite a broad topic to something more focused. It is really challenging, and when you have to rework your ideas to get a good focus it can be quite stressful. However, you have support, and once it was finished I realised I had enjoyed it. It's really good being able to choose your own topic to research and you feel really proud when you've got the final product.

### Advice for current students

Everyone feels the same when they're doing the dissertation. When you're doing it you think it's only you that's finding it hard but it's a completely different learning process and I think it's important to remember everyone's going through it and at some point it will all come together!

Also, I'd really recommend taking a module out of main discipline (MOMD). I did a Cultural Theory: analysis and application module from the Culture, Society and Communication (Europe) course. I found it really valuable to do something out of my comfort zone, there was no-one from my course on the module I chose and it was applying theories to something other than education. I found it challenging as there were a lot of new ideas to get around but it felt like an achievement when I got a good mark in it as I knew it wasn't something I found easy. There's also a good choice in second year of MOMD's.