Participant: T3

Title: How do foster carers and teachers attribute the challenging behaviour of Looked after children?

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Interview: CFB (I)

Interviewee: Participant T3 (P)

Age: 48

Sex: F

Teacher Role and Years: 20 years (current head of early years)

I: Ok, if you don’t if I just start off with gathering some of those demographic details, so if you don’t mind just letting me know how long you’ve been in your current role, your experience with looked after children and your age as well if that’s alright.

P: ok, yep, so we’ll start with the age, I’m 48. I have, I’ve been a qualified teacher for over 20 years and ‘ve been in my role in early years for about the last 8 years. So yeah, erm interesting enough actually the erm the little girl that I’m going to discuss in here is the first looked after child that I’ve had in a group and I had her in nursery so in FS1, so when she was aged 3 and 4, although as early years leader I then sort of had an overseeing eye when she went into foundation stage 2 before she then left.

I: Oh ok, so she was here for a little while?

P: She was here for a while in fact she, she’s just about to adopted so yes.

I: Gosh ok, thank you. Well we start off just simply with just how would you describe that girl, that looked after child.

P: It was really interesting actually because when I first met her she was actually with her birth mother, so we’ve actually witnessed the whole process of her going from being with her birth mother to being with her foster carers, which was very very interesting to see that transition because for her, there were so many positives in it, but you could also see the emotional struggle for her to actually make that adjustment to be with people who were nit mum. She was, she’s very very lively bright chatty girl, really quite physically attached to people, very cuddly very cuddly, we did notice quite a rapid improvement in her academic achievement once she was in foster care, so once she became a looked after child it really did, all those experiences and things really did change for her. Erm. I know sort of the conversations we had with the foster cares was that there were challenging behaviours, lots of erm, challenging routines challenging the expectations, I mean she’d come from a very difficult a difficult time in a very sort of unstable environment so to actually come into this I think it was that sort of bit of a barrier against it but interestingly enough we really then didn’t see that in the setting. But we had a very close relationship with the foster carers that they were able to talk to us about any issues they were having.

I: So, just so I can make sure that I’ve understood, so with some of the challenging behaviours so it wasn’t something you were seeing necessarily in the setting, but the foster carers were seeing. Do you think those same behaviours were occurring when she was with birth mum as well or is this..

P: Yes I think so but I think this obviously the way of dealing with those behaviours was obviously very different very very different, so yeah.

I: ok, so what was she like in school then?

P: In school she was, she struggled a bit with listening and attention, she found some challenges with that in herself. She was, she very much wanted to be involved with everything, she you know it was always “oh what are you doing here” “Wants happening there” as I say she was very vrey affectionate, very affectionate she was actually she was very good with the other children, she had a younger sister who then came to us in our two year old provision, and the care and love that she showed for her sister and for all of the younger children was really really very marked. In terms of her ability so I would say when she came to us she was sort of hovering just below expected in the majority of areas apart from her physical because I think she had been expected to do quite a lot of caring for herself so she could dress herself very well all those independent..

I: yeah, all those self-help...

P: self-care skills year. But erm, in fact by the time she left us at the end of foundation stage one to go to foundation stage two she was pretty much at age-expected, age-related expectations across the board. So yes.

I: And so did you get any instances of more kind of challenging behaviour form her then.

P: erm, I think the only sort of times that we had in terms of challenging behaviour sort of with the move from birth mum to foster carers was, we had a few occasions where she would not necessarily tell us the truth, straight away. So we’d have to kind of dig a bit and say well actually these pencils were they really yours? No ok. but, there was nothing really significant in terms of her behaviour from that point of view. But as I say it was, it was very different to the story that we were getting from the foster carers out of school. I think interesting enough actually the foster carers were not actually particularly local to this area, it wasn’t a huge distance, but, they felt and I think quite rightly so, to kind of help with those transitions they were kept here, so they could continue here so that not everything changed all at once.

I: so, erm, just thinking about that example that you gave of kind of perhaps not always being forthcoming with the truth, so what was your understanding of what might have been driving that behaviour?

P: I think for her particularly it might have been that, kind of an element of fear, not fear of the foster carers but sort of that fear of things that maybe had happened in the past for her and it was it was a way of getting attention that wasn’t necessarily obviously the best way to get attention but perhaps at that time for her with her understanding it was just a maybe a way of maybe being a bit more like things were for her in the past, fi that makes sense?

I: Yeah, so doing certain things to meet her needs in a way that they used to before?

P: Yes Yes

I: and what was some of the challenges – you’ve touched on it a little bit – but that were being seen by the foster carers then?

P: So, the foster carers had some very significant concerns about the way that she was so incredibly open with strangers so to a point where she would, you know if they’d gone to the park, you know obviously the foster carers would be there but she would just go straight up to somebody and start a conversation and have absolutely no sense of that of that wariness of those strangers. I know they, it took a long time for them to establish those routines, things like bedtime routines and those kind of things, I think I understand as well within the foster home, there were instances of items that had gone missing and they were found in her room, kind of thing so was hoarding that, I’ve got these things I don’t want them to be taken away again if that makes sense.

I: Yeah, yeah, what do you think, what’s kind of your understanding of why she might of being doing things like that, like taking stuff or...

P: Again, I think it was that for her its probably that uncertainty because, because she was a bright girl an she understood that mum was still there somewhere and that you know and as far as she was concerned, to begin with it was mummy is ill, so that’s why mummy isn’t there so for her to then have that uncertainty and be with these completely new people – that was sort of how I read it, I mean obviously its impossible to say for certain, because in so many regards she seemed incredibly happy with them and you could see this kind of change in her attitude to her learning and all those kind of things, but you could see that sort of element of uncertainty for her.

I: And do you think it was the uncertainty around, as you said, was that based on pervious experiences that she might have had, or that sort of on-going what if about the future?

P: I think it was probably a combination of both, I mean she also had a baby brother, who she only ever saw a couple of times, he has since been adopted, but not with them, although I understand as part of the arrangements she will get to see him, that’s part of the arrangements that the two sisters will get to see him, but for her, you know knowing that she had this baby brother who she really never got to see I think was really quite quite a blow, because as I say she’s so caring towards her younger sister, she’s got that real sort of protective instinct.

I: Where do you think that protective instinct might have come from?

P: I think that came from the fact that probably she was doing things for the younger sister because mum was not coping with doing them, so I think you know it fell to her to do things that were probably well beyond her years. So then I think to go into an environment where it was that kind of normality – not that anything’s normal – but that normality of a carer and a child was maybe a bit hard for her to comprehend

I: So almost having that a different relationship between child and adult...

P: Yes, mm, very much so, very much so year.

I: What about, we kind of mentioned the behaviour around going up to strangers and that sort of thing, what was, was that something that you saw – I guess in school noones really a stranger necessarily – but did you kind of see similar kind of I guess like lack of safety awareness behaviours...

P: There were, yeah, I mean I would say that certainly if someone who came into the setting was new in the setting shed be one of the first up to them to introduce herself. And, she was, because she was so physically able she certainly had no sort o sense of risk about that so playground equipment, running, all those kind of things she was very much in there doing it, full on, full-throttle, no holds bared, just going for it, yeah very much so. But other than that, yeah we hadn’t really sort of witnessed, I do , I do recall a story about – this was when she was with her birth mother – about being at the local shops and mum turning round and there happened to be a member of staff was there and the two girls had been and helped themselves to ice cream from the freezer and mum’s “oh, oh I’ll have to pay for those now”, so it was a bit, but yeah, so absolutely yeah, no kind of...

I: No kind of barrier...

P: yeah we’ll do that yeah, no problem at all.

I: what’s, how do you make sense of that, those kind of behaviours of the lack of safety awareness of strangers...

P: I think its was probably down to that perhaps lack of adequate supervision for her at that point, and a possible sort of witnessing of those kind of behaviour in mum herself. And then again obviously that total kind of change with the foster carers where it was well no, these are the expectations, this is the way we are, and you know, you’ve got to become part of that, and I know that you know they worked really hard on with the girls on, to establish those routines and things.

I: and, I want to take us back to the, the kind of example of perhaps the not necessarily telling the truth with different things...how do you think your understanding of where that behaviour might have been coming from impacted on how you managed that behaviour, for example, or did it?

P: Do you know what interestingly enough I would say it probably, you want to try and make sure that it didn’t impact and that you would deal with it in the same way that you would with anybody, and actually for her to know that actually we would speak to her in the same way that we would speak to any other child about ensuring that you were telling the truth and how it could you know, all those things would have actually ben exactly the same for that exact reason for, it wouldn’t be a case of “oh we’ll tread a bit carefully here” because actually, you know to kind of keep things level for her and kind of maintain that consistency, I think especially as she, she did think about things a lot, I think she’d probably think, well I know that if so and so did that then you’d say that to them and you’ve not said that, so actually being as consistent and you know keeping those same expectations and high expectations and routine and things in the setting were important.

I: So almost, having that additional understanding and context doesn’t necessarily lead you to do things in a different way, but more kind of be more considered that you...

P: considered and fair, yes absolutely. I know that we, because although as a looked after child she wasn’t necessarily getting the pupil premium grant we did identify her as one of those children sort of you know we then, especially when she went into foundation stage 2 she become part of our nurture group so she was then given those kind of small group situations where and the focus was very much on the PSE side of things, very much on the opportunity to talk. From what I understand she was very open about about her carers and things and understood and she was incredibly open about “and then I’m going to find my forever family my forever mummy and my forever daddy” and she was incredibly just kind of just excited about it. And as she went into foundation stage we did find that there was some difficulties just just in friendships and things, nothing out of the ordinary, but, she liked to be the one in control of it and again I think that probably links back to those feelings of instability and its much better for her to be in control of it than for somebody else to be in control of it for her. But there was nothing you know there was never anything she was certainly not sort of problematic in terms of behaviour, it was just kind of being aware.

I: Yeah, so , it sounds like as you said the behaviours were not necessarily out of line with what you might expect as kind of typical age-related type behaviours. But that and then similarly perhaps they were managed in the same way as they were for everyone but there was perhaps a different understanding behind what was driving those behaviours.

P: To give her that chance yes, absolutely, and to give her that space to talk, very much yeah.

I: Ok, can you think of any, are there any other times or example that you can think of where, it sounds like there may not have been, but where there were kind of more instances of potentially more challenging behaviour or something else that might have come up or out of the blue or anything like that – its totally ok if not, just...

P: not significantly as I say for us, I know that again, this was less the experience we had within our setting and more just some of the experiences that we shared with the carers which was great that we had that relationship with the carers, with the foster carers, was just that there were times I know that where the younger sister was very very clingy and really very quickly made that bond, that there were times that she would maybe you know deliberately not want to do what she had been asked to do, I think especially around bedtimes routines I think that really was a struggle I think because she possibly, she really had a very disordered routine beforehand, but no, within class as I say I think I think that that consistency and that familiar place and faimiliar people really really helped her, really helped her, so yeah.

I: Ok, thank you. Can you just, we’ll probably wrap up with this last question, but are you able to describe or talk about whether you have a particularly positive memory or just something that, yeah, whether it’s a particular event or particularly theme or..

P: I remember, as part of the being in the foster care, the foster carers were given some money so that they could go to ballet lessons, and I remember the first time she’d been to a ballet lesson, because I do a bit of ballet – I never did ballet as a child, but I do a bit of ballet as an adult – and we came in and the two of us together and she was showing me her ballet positions and things and she was so excited, just that whole experience and that was such such as positive thing, and then every lesson I’d say “oh what have you done this week” and we’d do it together and she’d be yeah sharing that experience which she really really...

I: are those the types of experiences that they perhaps hadn’t had before then?

P: Most certainly, most certainly...yeah. so yeah.

I: That’s lovely

P: I know I know, and funnily enough, this week, just in the children centre the foster carers came in because that was now they’ve gone through that final transition and now they’re with the adoptive parents.

I: Gosh, gone kind of full, you’ve seen it all the way through.

P: Yeah, we have, yeah. Been amazing, it has been amazing.

: Yeah, and quite, potentially quite unusual, because there’s often lots of kind of as you said geographical or school moves, so for a school to see that.

P: Yeah, no its been amazing, they came back and came to tell us everything, so that was lovely, really nice.

I: Ok, is there anything else in particular that you wanted to share or any other thoughts that you’d had that you thought might be relevant or...

P: just I thin kits, obviously for me as I say I have bizarrely I’ve not had huge numbers of children come through, which seems absolutely crazy, but just on this on this occasion I would say that the foster carers that they found, it was an absolutely life saver for those girls, and absolute life saver it was the first time that they’d been foster carers, so they’ve got grown up children of their own, and actually just the positive impact of that, that has had on those girls, has been incredible, so yeah.

I: Oh that’s really lovely

P: and I am more than aware that that is not always the case...but it makes you wonder doesn’t it whether because it was that early on in their development, especially for the younger sister, whether that you know obviously has a significance in terms of being able to cope with it.

I: And maybe why, I mean obviously they had some push back at home, but maybe why they were less challenging behaviourally and things because actually there was less to have process and to have dealt with and to grapple with and those sorts of things.

P: so yeah.

I: Ok, thank you.