Participant: T5

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

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Location: School

Interview: CFB (I)

Interviewee: Participant T5 (P)

Age: 40

Sex: Female

Teacher Role: NQT

Years Teaching: 1

P: Yeah what sort of, nothing, it’s not going to go anywhere else or anything like that?

I: Gosh, no no no, so what happens is I type up the recording and when I type it up I remove anything that could identify...

P: Ok

I: So school names, everything gets removed.

P: Ok, great, that’s cool.

I: So there’s no way for it to get back at all. Ok, so yeah, if we could start just off with how long you’ve been teaching for and kind of your experience with looked after children, and also your age as well if that’s ok?

P: Oh god, ok. So I’m 39, no I’m not I’m 40, sorry, there you go, I’m 40. This is the end of my NQT year, so I’ll be RQT next year, so I’ve only been teaching for a year. I have a little bit of experience but not much of looked after children, because this is a different school to where I was previously for ten years so, yeah this is kind of my first real experience of it.

I: Ok, cool, so have you got a looked after child in your class then this year.

P: Yep, I’ve got two

I: Oh great. Ok, so I don’t know if it’s easier if there’s one maybe that has slightly more challenging behaviour than the other

P: Mmm, there is.

I: There is, in that case if we maybe like focus on that child more.

P: On him, yeah.

I: So, if you could start just by telling me a bit about the child, generally.

P: So he’s in foster care at the moment, he has contact with his parents, I’m not sure how long that’s gonna go on for, I think they’re looking into long term kinda fostering or adoption, he’s, so he’s four years old, and he’s his behaviour is quite erratic at times, he’s quite, he’s quite erm, like turbulent with his emotions so like one day he’ll be ok, but most days he has kind of like a separation thing with his foster carer where he’ll cry at the door, and want her to come back and she hasn’t given him enough kisses or enough cuddles. He is, very kind of drawn to like the writing area and he’ll try to go to that rather than listening on the carpet. He’s quite, he’s got a 1:1 two days a week now because his behaviours quite demanding. So yeah he goes on time out sometimes for a little bit, just to calm him down really. But yeah he’s, like because he goes to contact like once or twice a week, sometimes if they’ve let him down, if he goes out of routine then he gets really upset.

I: So by let him down do you mean if they’ve not turned up?

P: Yeah, so his behaviours quite erratic I would say, and quite demanding, and although he can be really loveable as well and he does say sorry. I just think he doesn’t really know how to control that behaviour y’know so it’s, yeah, so it’s, he’s quite hard work.

I: Yeah I can imagine.

P: and he started in October, came in October to us, so he’s...

I: ...Not even for a full year...

P: ...not even for the full year, no. But when he first came he was like really unsettled, but I think he’d gone to foster care that night, so and then he came in and he was just really unsettled, he didn’t want to come in. It took him about a week to kinda settle in. He did half days for a little bit, but yeah, he was, he’s ok now. But he does have that little separation bit in the morning from his foster carer.

I: Yeah, so why don’t we talk about that a little bit more then, so what does, what does that look like, what do you see when he comes in in the morning.

P: So he’ll start, he’ll come in ok, and he’ll start off and he’ll give her like a kiss and that, but then as she leaves he’ll be like “I want her back I want her back, I didn’t have a kiss, I didn’t have a cuddle, she didn’t kiss me, one more goodbye” and then he will stand at the window and look for her, and after about five minutes or so then and a little bit of coaxing he will come to the carpet.

I: Ok, so what are your kinda thoughts about why, I guess yeah why he’s showing those behaviours.

P: I think because they’re out of routine as well. And I feel myself he may have been y’know taken out of his parents who he really loves and his siblings and then going to [foster carer], who he then became attached to, and then he’s come to me who then he’s become attached to so it’s kind of, I feel it’s, I just feel he wants some security. And I think that and that behaviour that he’s displaying is probably like a bit of separation anxiety, y’know he’s not sure where he’s secure, and he’s not sure [foster carer]’s coming back and that sort of thing, even though she always does, and maybe that’s because of what he’s had in the past.

I: Yeah, is that something that he’s articulated to you, like that he’s been able to say like “oh I’m not sure”, or its just your interpretation

P: No, no he hasn’t, it’s just my interpretation, he’s never said that to me. He has said like y’know that he misses [foster carer] all day, which is like his foster carer, so he’s always saying that “I miss [foster carer]”, and he’s got like a little snuggly bear that his mum gave him that he sometimes cuddles. So at the moment he’s having contact I think twice a week, so, yeah. So twice a week, and y’know

I: Yeah, its quite a lot isn’t it.

P: Yeah, so.

I: Yeah, ok. And erm, oh I’ve forgotten what question I was going to ask!

P: He really struggles to sit as well, he really struggles to sit and focus on the carpet, it’s like literally two minutes and then he wants to get up and walk about or go to the writing area or he’ll fidget or he’ll play with things that are next to him, he’s not got that concentration span at all. So the days he’s got a 1:1, I tell him what we’re doing, he does a little bit of carpet time and then he goes and does that. So I think no more than, 3 minutes maximum for him.

I: Oh ok, why do you think that is?

P: Erm, I’m not quite, I know a little bit about like his upbringing so I think that was all very erratic and I don’t think that he’s had to ever sit and do – his foster carer told me that like they never sat at the table and so she’s having to instil all those values to him and so I think that that’s, he’s never had to sit still, so. And also, he’s just got so much on his mind I think, constantly what he’s gonna do, what he’s gonna do next, and, and they have, I think his foster carers did say that he had autism with it as well, so, but that’s not helped, he’s not got y’know that security has he really.

I: yeah, and I guess as you said those kinda early life experiences

P: experiences, yeah, before the age of four and he’s experienced quite a bit. So...

I: Yeah ok, what about some of those, what sorts of, so we’ve talked about separation anxiety in the morning, what other sort of challenging behaviours do you see?

P: So shouting out, he makes noises on the carpet a lot. He’ll sit there and whistle – that’s his latest thing where he’ll just like be going “ffffffff”. His foster carer told me that like he does that at dinner time, they’re had to try and curb that in because they’re saying “you’re blowing on our food, stop doing that”, so he’ll like just make random noises on the carpet or shouting out, y’know it’s just really disturbing the other children and kind of takes me away sometimes because I’m having to sort him out, so our carpet sessions are getting longer for them, so it’s quite distracting.

I: what do you think like, yeah, where are those behaviours coming from do you think?

P: I think maybe his childhood, maybe that he hasn’t had that security, all those kind of behaviour things instilled about y’know listening and respect and things, because he can be quite “I don’t care”, y’know he’s a bit like he’ll kind of stick his tongue out sometimes at you. He’s never physically hurt me, never done anything physical it’s all kind of y’know like, I can’t think of the word, likes he’s displaying negative behaviour really

I: Yeah so he’s being disruptive rather than...being aggressive

P: Yeah, disruptive, negative, and I think that maybe he hasn’t had, I don’t know for sure but I think that he hasn’t had those kind of rules and routines instilled in him so he’s never been told what he has to do. Because he couldn’t dress when he came to me either, so I think that like he hasn’t really had that time given to him, which is why he is the way he is.

I: Yeah, so how does that impact on how you like manage his behaviours and those challenging behaviours.

P: Its really difficult, I mean like I say we have got two other members of staff, we do use praise a lot, so like I’ll say to him “oh look, let’s see how many stickers you can get today” and we’ve got like a little packet of stickers, and they work so I’ll be sticking them on him. He does like stickers he does like praise he does like dojo’s, but he y’know he erm, and like he will go to time out. Also I’ve started a knew thing were, also another thing that I’ve done, I’ve started giving him ticks, because like time out doesn’t really affect him so what I’ve started to do now is giving him ticks instead and saying this is a minute of your busy bee time which is when they go and play, and obviously then they have...

I: is that so he can, is that so that he earns that?

P: Yeah yeah, ok, and like the smiley faces, I’ve been giving him smiley faces and saying for each smiley face he gets with his 1:1 he can then get a dojo on the board, so that’s how I’m kind of trying to manage it at the moment, and make his carpet sessions a bit shorter so he’s not sitting, because I think it’s a big expectation for him to sit for 15 minutes, so like 4 minutes is maximum for him. So that’s how I’m trying to manage it at the moment. But the days that I haven’t got the 1:1 its quite tricky

I: Yeah yeah, because you’re still trying to do your upfront teaching.

P: and that’s really impacting on that, y’know, so

I: And do you think, how much of those kind of things that you’ve just said, so giving the smiley faces to count towards kind of busy bee time or whatever, how much of that is different for him because he’s a looked after child and because of his experiences or is that what you would do for any child that was struggling.

P: I think that that’s what I would do with any other child that’s struggling, so he is treated the same as everybody else would be in the class, they all get dojos for good behaviour they all get time out if they’re not behaving or sitting on the carpet nicely, the only thing that I would say he gets extra which also some other children get is the 1:1, y’know. And he’s also, he’s also had a few extra interventions in place as well, so he’s had like the virtual school come in to work with him, a bit of play therapy and I think he’s going over to the centre over there where they do a bit of work as well, so he’s had extra interventions to kind of help him to y’know get those emotions out. Because I think he’s displaying this negative behaviour because he’s not feeling secure, y’know. And, because of his turbulent kind of lifestyle that he’s got.

I: Yeah, because I guess as you said, even now, it’s still kind of, there’s still stuff going on, there’s still contact...

P: Yeah, he’s still not sure what’s happening, and even I’m not sure what’s happening. Yeah, so.

I: Oh yeah, it must be tricky, well for him and for you.

P: Yeah it is, and he’s such a loveable little boy as well, y’know he will come up and give you a cuddle and say “I love you Mrs [name]” and “I’m back Mrs [name]”, so he does kind of he is really affectionate with it and y’know if you’re playing or doing something like that, his behaviour is quite good, but it’s just when your doing a carpet time, that’s when the really tricky, y’know so.

I: Ok. I was wondering if you might be able to think of a specific example, of like a specific incident of challenging behaviour that’s happened, that we might be able to talk through, what it was that happened, what was maybe happening before and how you managed it kind of afterwards, I don’t know...

P: Ok, so I could say this morning, when he went to like spit at another child. And this happened as he came in, and as he sat down. So lots of the behaviours start as soon as he comes in; so he’s just left [foster carer], he’s, she’s gone, he’s crying, he wants her to come back and say goodbye, she doesn’t because she just goes now because otherwise she would be forever coming back, and then he comes to the carpet and we do registration, and that’s when the behaviours started this morning, and he decides that he’s gonna y’know blow raspberries in another little girls face, and then he refuses to go to one of the other LSAs, because I’m like right you need to sit with them now, but he doesn’t want to go to that one, he wants to go to that one, and then he gets up from that one, so then we say I’m afraid you’re going to have to sit for time out, and he takes the timer, and he takes the timer, and he says “I want this timer” and he turns it over so it’s the lead up to coming in sometimes, a lot of the time I think. It’s the change in routine as well, so like the from going from play to sitting on the carpet, because when he’s playing we don’t have many issues with him, but its when he comes to sit down on the carpet that the issues start. It’s almost like changes in the day, transitional times, that’s when the behaviour begins most of the time. And that’s this morning as well, and then he’s, and there’s a lot of transitions in the morning because it’s like funky fingers, group time, maths time, all those three before they go off and play and I think that sometimes affects his behaviour and that’s what happened this morning, so he went to time out after doing that and then he came back but he has to sit with an adult because otherwise he chooses to just get up and walk around, and we’re like – no you’ve gotta sit down.

I: So what do you do on the days when you don’t have the kind of additional adults,

P: well there’s me and there’s two LSAs but they’ve got other children that they have to sit with as well, so he sits with them, and we all work together to kind of y’know help him, so it might be that one of them will take him to time out and then that leaves me teaching, or I myself will have to take him to time out.

I: Ok, and what does time out look like for him in school?

P: It’s just literally round the corner from where I am on a little red carpet spot, so I can see him and hear him and he does come back when the timers run out and says I’m sorry, and then we say “oh come and sit down”, and we have tried it’s not just about time out, he does get like time in when he’s really good, so his rewards, his stickers, his dojos, y’know I’ll tell [foster carer] at the end of the day, “oh he’s been a really good boy today” so he does hear that praise as well, it’s not just all negative y’know and I’ll say to him “oh look, lets see if we can sit for, if you can sit for 5 minutes you can have another dojo” and he will y’know respond to that sometimes, but other times he’s like “I don’t care, I don’t wanna dojo, I don’t want a sticker” I’m just going to be on my own agenda.

I: Why do you think that is sometimes, why is he like that sometimes?

P: Yeah, I just don’t think he’s, he’s not in that zone to accept that.

I: Yeah, I guess it’s, to accept the instructions that are given to you by the adult and kind of follow through with them?

P: ... Follow them, it depends what mood he’s in, sometimes his moods are quite erratic, like, erm, not as in moods as in sulky, but like emotional, can be really emotional y’know “I want [foster carer], I want [foster carer]” y’know and what he wants to do, he doesn’t want to follow the rules. Quite tricky...

I: ...Yeah ok, oh bless him, oh and I keep thinking he’s four as well...

P: ... Quite tricky, it is tricky

I: He is little.

P: It is tricky when you’ve got 29 other children as well. Y’know I feel that he really needs like, I think he might need a special school later on just because of his behaviour and his learning, his maths is quite good to be honest, y’know he loves maths and he’ll focus for that for a bit of a longer period.

I: Oh ok, that’s positive

P: Yeah

I: Yeah you have one lesson!

P: Yeah he does love maths, and he’s quite like creative as well so he does like that sort of thing. Y’know, he just struggles like with the sitting and listening and the expectations. The behaviour expectations is what he struggles with more than anything and he does, he will go to Miss [name (headteacher)] sometimes as well, we’ll send him to her, and again, she said he just kinda looks at her [laughs], so it’s that understanding of why its wrong.

I: So he doesn’t understand, and again, what do you kinda put that down to that lack of understanding?

P: Yeah just lack of understanding, I’m not sure if he’s been taught respect, because I know that if I was going to my headteacher I’d be quite, y’know I think he’s got a lack of understanding about respect and rules and values, y’know all those kind of things, I don’t think he’s been taught. I mean his foster carer does really good, y’know she’s really on it with him, she makes him sit at the table, she tells him what he’s not allowed to do what he is allowed to do, he’s started getting dressed now, and yeah so that’s really helped having those values instilled

I: So things are kind of moving in the right direction.

P: I think its like his upbringing to be honest, I think that’s where it all comes from and the fact that he has got traits of autism as well, and it could be due, I think someone mentioned like the alcoholism during pregnancy, there’s a chance that that might be there, so that could also be impacting on his behaviour.

I: yeah yeah, ok, so potentially lots of things going on for him

P: Lots of things yeah

I: Bless him. Ok, if we could kind of I guess begin to wrap up, do you have like a particular kind of happy memory, a kind of one off incident or if there’s something more positive that’s kind of come out of the year and your experience working with him.

P: I think it’s just, it’s given me a lot of patience, and also understanding for what he is. I know we say we put him on time out, we do this we do that we do the other, but we do have a lot of time of understanding for him. Very empathetic to what’s happened to him, and it does have a bit impact having him in my class and some of the things that obviously I know are quite, y’know they do play on your mind when you go home. So he’s erm, yeah I think he’s had quite a big impact on me, as a person, and knowing the sorts of things that he’s gone though as a child and the fact that’s he’s been, that he’s not had that stability in life that I think every child should have, and he hasn’t had that, and he’s had to go from y’know parents to foster carer, be whipped away from his siblings, everything that he knows y’know, although we might think of that as a bad thing, it’s a good thing that he’s been taken, but at the end of the day they’re still people that he loves. That’s his family isn’t it no matter what, y’know so I think it’s kind of, it has taught me a lot about what these children go through and to be empathetic to his needs as well so we’re understanding why we’ve got like a grounding of why he’s behaving like this, it’s not like some children where they are just refusing to listen or refusing to y’know comply with the rules, whereas with him, there is a reason there, and I’m not saying that he should be treated any differently to any other child because he’s not, he’s given, because at the end of the day through life he’s going to have to stick to rules, and not everyone’s going to say, oh because of his upbringing he can get away with that, so I’ve kind of tried to treat him the same as everybody else but have empathy for the fact that he’s going through different things. Yeah y’know. And I’ve still got quite a good relationship, well I have got a good relationship with him and his foster carer, and we work together really well, so I will say, like she’s told me that he likes his iPad at home, so we’ve kind of said, “well if you’re good today, I’m going to tell [foster carer] and she’s said that you can have five minutes more on your iPad” so we work together as well. So that’s worked really well this year, and she’ll communicate really well with me and I’ll communicate with her so I think that like working with people that look after foster children has really like helped me to understand where he’s coming from where they’re coming from.

I: Yeah, no that does sound good.

P: Yeah, I might be a foster carer one day...

I: Yeah yeah, no, that does sound really positive.

P: It has like, it’s had a huge impact on me, and y’know you have sympathy for them, because they’ve been through some really tough things, like four years old it’s not, it’s not great.

I: Yeah, no its young isn’t it to have gone through that already.

P: Yeah, yeah, I can’t imagine going through that in my lifetime and I’m 40 so there we go

I: Yeah exactly, let alone at that age

P: Yeah ok, so I hope that’s been some help.

I: Yeah, no, absolutely, was there, is there anything else that you particularly wanted to share or anything before I turn this off.

P: erm, I think we’ve covered most of it. Erm, yeah like I say it’s mainly his behaviour and his attachments. He does get, he also does, which I haven’t said he gets very attached to me, he always wants me to go with him in the line, me to sit with him at lunch time, y’know if I’m not there its “where’s miss [name]” or “where’s miss [name]” or “where’s miss [name]”, if one of us is away he really notices that, so that’s again, those, I know I’m jumping a bit, sorry I’m going back

I: No no that’s fine.

P: But that’s again that those attachments again, he’s made quite secure attachments with me, miss [name] and miss [name], so I’m hoping that his 1:1 that he’s got will go up with him to Year 1...

I: ... yeah to provide that ...

P: ... to provide that continuity because he’s, yeah, he loves y’know like us three, and it is that constant “will you sit with me, will you sit with me” in assembly “will you sit with me will you sit with me”, and in assembly I have got to constantly like “sit nicely”, sometimes I’ve had to nearly been on the verge of taking him out, but we have managed to keep him.

I: Yeah, because assemblies quite a long time isn’t it really

P: Yeah yeah, so yeah, so he’s quite attached.

I: Yeah, oh bless. That’s nice though that he’s able to kind of feel that he can, like he obviously feels secure enough in school that he’s got that attachment.

P: yeah, it is that secure attachment that he’s got there but it’s a bit insecure as well, because he’s, because I don’t think he ever really knows, “its ok we are going to lunch, but we are going to be back” and I think maybe that comes from y’know the insecure attachments that he’s had throughout his life. So poor boy.

I: Yeah bless him. Well thank you, thank you very much.

P: Hope that’s helped.

I: Yeah absolutely.