Participant: T7

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

Date: 15.11.2019

Length: 33.24

Location: School

Interview: CFB (I)

Interviewee: Participant T7 (P)

Age: 25

Sex: Male

Teacher Role and Years: class teacher 4 years

I: Perfect ok, so, we’ll start off with, I just need to gather some demographic information, so to start off with its, age, role and your years of experience in that role and then also with looked after children?

P: Ok, so I am 25 I have been teaching for four years now, I started my career off as supply after doing a three year uni degree, and then moved down here in January so half way through the academic year, so my NQT year is sort of in a bit of a flux so I sort of started half way through so that sort of has dictated...I have been in Year 1 for 3 years now, I’ve got quite a good backlog of stuff there so I feel fairly experienced in the curriculum of year 1 quite well. In terms of this school it is a, my experience with schools has always been in more challenging schools, I’ve always worked in schools with a challenging social demographic, would be the way that I would describe it and I really enjoy that so I’ve got quite a few stories and experiences with children like that, I also volunteer with a kids camp in [location] through a friend of mine, which again, specialises in taking looked after children, children in need and all this sort of stuff and we take them out camping and that sort of thing, so I’ve got a few years of experience of working with children with difficulties. Is there sort of anything else that you need to know?

I: No, I think that’s it, so it your, do you, have you had a child in school in your class that’s been looked after as well?

P: Yes I, so last year I had a child who was taken into long term foster carer I think either before the start of the year or during the very first early couple of stages, I think it was actually before I think it was during the summer, so the last couple of weeks of august before he came into year 1, he was taken into long-term care after an incident that happened. So there was a social incident that happened, and was taken into care so that is the child that I will be basing this discussion upon.

I: Great, perfect. Well in that case, first question, quite broad, but can you just, how you would describe that child?

P: I would describe the child as, he is a lovely individual who is deeply, who has been, I, he’s a lovely child who has shown some very challenging behaviours and who knows that, he is very aware of the situation that’s going on. He’s a very intelligent child, he is not one to have the wool pulled over his eyes, and he understands - to a point - of what is going on. In terms of academics, he’s very, more than capable, but he is very, he is very emotionally unstable because of his experiences and initially if you didn’t know his backstory he comes across as the class clown the attention seeking child, so that’s sort of his background. But he is and once you get to know him you realise that actually he is more than capable of taking on and doing a lot of the higher the higher challenges that are set in school.

I: Ok, so you’ve got that kind of balance between as you said being quite academically able, but then a whole kind of raft of behaviours...

P: ...hugely...

I: ...that as you put it I think, that without context, without background could be seen in one light, but are maybe seen differently.

P: Very much so

I: Ok, well can you just tell me a little bit about some of those behaviours then?

P: ok, so behaviours start with sort of the low-level stuff, he gets, he is very much a shouting out sort of child, wants a lot of attention, so that is, he will come and show you his work all of the time, he wants you to take pride in his work, he wants to show off his, the things that he has done. He wants you to notice him, whether it is positive or negative, so you get the calling out you get the poking and prodding of other children so that he is, he is focused upon by not only myself or by others, you get wandering around the classroom as lot of the time he likes to have a purpose, he’s quite fidgety, moving up, he has been known to have outbursts, so quite emotional outbursts, of both directed towards himself and his work, so that becomes, again scrunching up his work, and it’ll just get chucked, or he’ll take himself off in a temper tantrum, or he’ll he will or he has lashed out in children in rage, and that has got himself into trouble. He’s one to find the places that he doesn’t need to be in, if that makes sense, so in certain spots in the playground that he didn’t need to be in, he will go to those spots to go to and hide away basically, so he has been known to hide away. Yeah, there’s, as we’ll talk probably more of the little behaviours will come out, but yeah he has been known to be quite disruptive from very low level stuff to very high-level

I: So you see the whole spectrum

P: The whole spectrum

I: Yeah ok. What are some of the behaviours that you perceive to be more challenging out of those?

P: It’s the attention based thing, so I, he... his wanting of attention is not always appropriate for 30 children and 1 teacher and I think that’s where a lot of frustration came with that he couldn’t spend one, I built up a lovely relationship with the child, with him, but, because I couldn’t spend every time with him and me and him together, then his behaviours then became exacerbated if there were then other things that had happened. So that’s the calling out the showing of work, the up and moving around, he wants the adult interaction, and if you don’t give the adult interaction then there’s the behaviour. So its learning for us to find ways that he would cope with it if that makes sense, so giving him a time to say, ok I will come and see you in 10 minutes

I: So when you say cope with it, cope with the absence..

P: Yeah the absence of someone, it’s all you have got this purpose, I will come and check on you when you’ve done, when you’ve done this. Or, y’know, I’m not coming to see you this lesson, I will have a look at you at the end of the lesson, but making it very clear, because he does understand it, he did understand it, but making it a very clear and firm boundary that he, he could respond and lash out, not lash out to, but he could find the limit of.

I: Yeah, yeah, ok, and so when he’s showing those, I guess as you said that seeking attention, those sorts of behaviours, what’s your thinking about those behaviours?

P: Erm, I, I for me and him, because he’s, his background, his male role models are non-existent and I’m not going to disclose everything because I can’t, but he has a very limited spectrum of male role models. It was my understanding that he, he longed for that sort of father figure in this life, someone to give his boundaries, someone to, because then his response to female members of staff was very different to the way he would respond to myself and the deputy head, so a female member of staff might have told him to do something, he’ll have refused, he’ll get in trouble, shut down meltdown. Whereas with me, he would sit he would talk, he would, we’d get to the bottom of the problem because he, he wanted to, we built that relationship and whether that is a thing or not I don’t know I’m not a psychologist. But it became, he enjoyed and he still does he’ll come and find me above other members of staff because he wants to find me and talk to me rather than somebody else that he’s maybe been with for a couple of years, so he still says to me I miss you Mr [name] I wish you were my teacher still.

I: Oh bless

P: Yeah, so he is quite a heart-breaking

I: I was going to say that’s got to tug at the heartstrings?

P: Oh very much so, he he’s disclosed child protection things to myself, whereas he hasn’t talked to other members of staff about the stuff that he’s experienced, he’s spoken to me about it. Which heart-breaking stuff but he he again, he built a very, his relationship with me was very personal, but of course I had to keep, it had to be a very professional thing of, I can’t do this all the time for you for [child’s name], you are you are a student and that’s the way it has to be, whereas he would have, he longed in my impression of him to have a much more personal relationship with myself.

I: Yeah, ok. And what do you think it was that enabled that relationship to be built between yourself and...

P: I think firmness, I think because he came into my class having known that in reception he didn’t follow the instructions, he didn’t like to follow the instructions, I, I, we always have a list of those children and straight away those boundaries are put in place for new year, new start and I think he responded quite well to knowing exactly where he fitted with myself. You cross the line, that’s the consequence, and it was, and y’know initially we didn’t have the emotional side of things but as he got to know me and he knew exactly where he fitted with myself, and in the classroom, Oh if I do this I’m going to get in trouble with Mr [name], y’know then, and it, he did respond, so I think having that firm, not firm boundary, but a different face, he’s used to female members of staff, a male member of staff comes in, tells him no, ah, ok, I’m going to listen to this person rather than someone else, so that would be my impression.

I: Ok, yeah, interesting. So we talked a little bit about the attention needing behaviours are there, what other behaviours do you see that were on the more challenging side of things.

P: erm, so he would, he would try and manipulate situations for his own personal benefit or he would try and get others into trouble so that he could then be the person to say that so and so had done this, when actually he’d instigated the problem. He would, because we knew he was a very bright child, he would purposefully not do his work to the best of his standards, and then if we pulled it up on him then that would cause the emotional problem, or if he would write in his book, and I’ve seen examples of this still in year 2, that he would write things like “ahh, I don’t want to do this in my book, I know that you’re going to make me rub this all out, but I know...” so he would he would be very much, he’s very able and very switched on to know the triggers that would get him to have to redo things, or he would do his work to a good standard and it would be “oh that’s nice, thank you very much” scrumple up, meltdown, because you hadn’t looked at it in depth, so that would be the challenging side of the work and the manipulation of situations would be the other sort of side of things.

I: Ok, so let’s take each of those sort of, so if we go with the manipulation kind of behaviours, what’s your, when those situations were occurring, like what were you thinking, what was your thoughts about what was going on?

P: erm, I think with the experience that I’ve had working with children, you know when something isn’t as it seems, and so we’d be very used to the situation of him coming in and it would be like oh no here we go again, we’ve got, y’know we’d get to the bottom of it quite quickly that it wasn’t such and such that had happened, it was, it was because he had done something. So it wasn’t a shock it wasn’t anything new. I’m used to children saying one thing to get something else, to get situations out. It was more the frequency of things that would happen so it just became “oh here we go” right. And so it almost became a bit of a boy that cried wolf really in sort of certain situations that we’d be, right so do we actually trust you to say that this has happened, because in the past, you’ve done this.

I: Ok, and what was your thinking about why, he might as you said, those, if we take the example of, I guess instigating something that gets another child into trouble and then he’s the one who brings it to the adults attention, what’s your understanding of where that behaviours comes from, why?

P: Erm, my understanding. I would think that it is again that attention seeking side of things he knows that there is a justice side of things he wants to do the right thing but he’s not quite sure how to do the right thing, so he knows that doing the right thing is telling the truth, but if he can’t tell the truth all the time then I’m going to make something happen that means that I can be the hero in this situation.

I: Ok, yeah. Ok, and how does that understanding of the situation influence, or does it influence then how you would manage that situation. You talked a little bit about how it became the boy who cried wolf, I’m just curious...

P: Yeah it, it does influence you in certain ways but it is very important that each situation is dealt with as its own separate situation, because of the children that I’ve worked with before I know that situations, certain things turn children around, they have better days, they have poorer choices, so you have to take each situation, even if it is, even if you are exacerbated by it constantly and you know there is a potential for something else to be going on, it has to be dealt with fairly because otherwise then the consistency of behaviour management goes and he doesn’t feel that y’know he can be trusted to come and talk with an adult, it has to be dealt with “right, ok, let’s get to the bottom of it”, each and every time and that’s what I aim to try and do, whether I can do it or not is a different matter, but that’s what goes through the back of my head of, right ok, lets sort this out let’s find the bottom of the situation. Let’s sort it out, even though I know that you’ve probably done something there, does that make sense?

I: Yeah, it does it does, you mentioned that it’s kind of based on experience with other children, is that children with similar types of needs? So would you make the same approach for any child in the class that kind of showing those types of behaviours or is it tailored because of his needs.

P: each child is different, you do have to tailor it for and the way that you speak to certain children, you know, I know that if I spoke to certain children in my class “have you done this?” it would be floods of tears and they’d know they’ve made the wrong choice, you’d know they’ve made the wrong choice by the instant reaction, I’ve done this, I’ve made a mistake, here are my emotions. Whereas getting to the bottom of some of the challenging behaviours is I know I’ve done this, I don’t want them to know I’ve done this, I’m going to shut down I’m going to try something else, I’m going to explain I’m going to blame, I’m going do anything else around. And so it’s working out which children are going to respond to which certain techniques of trying to get it out of them.

I: Yeah ok, and is that, would you say that kind of working out of which children respond to which techniques, is that kind of, I guess not irrelevant, but not necessarily dependent on kind of their looked after child status or not, that’s just due to individuality of children

P: Yeah, absolutely individuality off children I know that if I spoke or if I say certain names, or you say a name and they’ll respond very differently, whereas I might need to say “oh do I need to check the cameras, do I need to, y’know, do I need to speak to Mr [deputy headteacher], do I need to get the phone out?” it’s those sort of little phrases that they’ll respond to, but “did you do this?” and that’s enough for some, so it’s very much to do with individual children.

I: Yeah ok, that’s interesting, and the the other example that you gave was I think about the work and not necessarily working to the level that you perceive that he was capable of, so talk to me a little bit about what your understanding was of those kind of behaviours.

P: so we, it was very interesting that, before, so when he joined my class a week, so at the start of September, we then did some children with trauma training and recognising the signs of that and it was very interesting to see and to think of him whilst we were having these examples, because he fit that classic bill of children with trauma and when he came into school he just was not ready to work, and it, and his reaction is that occasionally he’s just not ready to work he’s not in a mental space that he can do the work. So as he got more and more used to the routine, it was less about him putting pencil to paper, because that was what it was initially, he just didn’t want to do it, because he just couldn’t he just couldn’t physically process what was going on around him, so we get him to do other things, we get him to go and do some jobs, we get him to go and make sure the book corner was sorted or pencil pots or things like that just to keep him busy keep him moving, but as he sort of came back, that’s when we started to notice the work issue side of things we thought ahh he can do a lot more than we thought we could and as we start to challenge him I think that’s when the behaviours started to come of, where I’ve got control of this, I want to control how I present my work, because I don’t have a lot of control in other situations in my life, I’m going to control how I present this, and I know that it’s going to get a reaction out of someone, would be my understanding of it. And so unless, it became less about saying “you’ve done the wrong thing” of “right ok, crack on”, quick rub out, crack on, no reaction to it, because that’s what I perceived as him wanting, he wanted me to react to it saying “that’s not good enough”, so just “ok, we’ll just keep going until you decide that that’s there”, and putting the onus on him to decide that today I’m going to try something else, I’m going to get this done so that I could do something else.

I: Ok, yeah that’s really helpful, so I guess, you kind picked out almost two things in terms of what was driving the behaviour in terms of that kind of being able to elicit some level of control because that’s not something that he gets elsewhere in life, but then it has kind of the dual purpose of maybe getting some of that adult attention as well.

P: yeah

I: Yeah ok, that’s really helpful. Is there kind of one incident in particular that stands out, I don’t know if it’s one of those bigger meltdowns or incidents or, like a one specific memory that we could kind of talk through rather than a general pattern?

P: Erm, it was ...

I: Its tricky...

P: it is tricky, erm. I can’t pick out a specific big event that came, one of the more interesting things that I noticed with him, was the way that he reacted to certain individuals in the class. And so at that time in the class we have a child in the class who was ASD diagnosed ADD, the works, to the point where he was in and out of exclusion, PRU, so we had this going on as well as my looked after child, and they butted heads consistently, but it was sort of became a love hate relationship because he, my perception was that because I’d have to deal with a very challenging child in terms of behaviour and making sure that things were safe in the classroom, there’s all this chaos going on around this child, and then he would become, he would then become more difficult because of the focus based on him [other child] and he would then try and build a relationship with the child, and they’d fall out they’d fight, they’d make up, they’d fall out, they’d fight, so this became a lovely little triangle of these two boys and myself. And when child, the child with all the diagnosis 1:1s was off sick, the behaviour switched, he was almost like a different child, very much so like a very different person because he didn’t have this chaos going on with the other child having to be taken out taken in talking to 1:1 and support. The behaviour changed drastically to the point where other individuals in the class then their behaviour became more challenging, and so he was, he was like oh, I can, yeah it was very much so, if you came and observed him when this, the other child wasn’t in, you wouldn’t necessarily know that he had a lot of other behaviours going on and other stuff going on with him.

I: So what were you seeing on those days.

P: He was listening, attentive, I didn’t have to speak to him as much about attention, coming over, wandering, he wanted to get on with his work, he, almost a complete flip of what we’d have

I: Ahh interesting.

P: so that would be probably one of the more memorable moments, the other stuff will have been more low-level constant stuff, having to say his name all the time, doing things. Another more memorable was when he disclosed a child protection thing, that was traumatic for myself because I’ve never had to go through that whole process of giving the full disclosure to him and having to find a private space, and he just reeled off everything, and yeah, that’s one thing ‘ll never forget about him. But no there wasn’t an explosive moment that I can remember straight away.

I: Ok, ok, thank you. Erm, when, were there any things that you would do with the, I guess potentially less so, but with all the kind of different behaviours that you were seeing, the kind of seeking attention seeing the work, not performing on the work that side of things. Would you, would there be, you talked about how you might manage that in the situation, was there kind of, I guess, later kind of debriefs or chats with him about what you were seeing and what you thought that might have been about? How did you work through that with him, or did you work through that in an explicit way or not really?

P: I made it very clear of what I expected of him and y’know I gave, I showed him the examples of the stuff that he’s done before and compared to the stuff that he’s done to say look you can do this, this is amazing, y’know I want you to try and make sure that you’ve got lovely beautiful sentences, or you’re going to try and be very specific with what I wanted him to put into his writing, or giving him a target line or things like that to make it very clear what I expected of him with his work, rather than y’know letting him go, oh I don’t want to do this today, I’m just gonna, I’m just gonna crack on with whatever. And as he settled into that routine, that became easier to manage, we’d have less of the moments, but if he wasn’t ready to work you’d obviously get the other side, the emotional side of scrunching up things. Yeah we did it was day by day, but as he did settle he’d have, we found ways of making it clear what we wanted him to do, and then he would be even more, I guess proud, of the things he had done because it would be “oh I have done this”. And another thing was he did love to write, he loved reading he loved writing, and so I said to him look, he didn’t have, he went home to his foster carers and came back and said I don’t want to play with the toys I want to go back to school I want to be in school, I want to do things. I was like great [child’s name] what sort of things would you like, right stories, “but she just makes me play, she just makes me play”, ok well, go home and write me a story then [child’s name], and he did, so almost every week he’d come in with a new written story of stuff or something that he’d done, a couple of pages and I’d read it and I’d write it as if it was a normal thing, because that’s what he wanted he wanted that routine of school. Because he enjoyed it he liked that structure so yeah he definitely progressed in terms of, or sorry, we found more and more ways to manage his work needs.

I: Ok, oh bless him. That’s lovely. I just have one kind of final question which is do you have like a favourite memory or like a positive experience that you have of your work with him?

P: I have quite a few, I will always remember him with absolute fondness because we had such as personal relationship and there was negativity towards his, he did make negative choices with his behaviour and the like, but I will always remember him with absolute fondness because he was just he was a nice boy. I always remember school trips, he always wanted to sit with me, and I couldn’t always, but school trips, we went to Warrick castle and he loved it, he y’know smiling all the way around he was happy, he was by my side all the time, but I’ve never seen him so happy and excited about everything that he was witnessing, because he was loving it, and y’know it could, he just, very sweet, very sweet. No sort of specific wow moments with him, he was over the moon when we gave him start of the week. Sort of skipped up to the front really with a big beaming smile on his face so, and the next week he went into full meltdown, but that’s...

I: ... because he didn’t get it?

P: well no no, because I think the expectation oh I’m star of the week, ohhh, and then we had the negative...

I: The pressure?

P: The pressure, the behaviours started to come out a bit, but when we did praise him he was very happy, I do remember him with a lot of fondness, he was never one of those children that I’ll remember as being a bit more infamous in my teaching experience, definitely a positive experience for me.

I: Oh good, ok, thank you. Is there anything else that you would particularly like to share that we haven’t kind of talked about or?

P: Erm, I will say that he, we did notice the last half term the summer half term his anxiety went through the roof in the anticipation of the summer holidays, and he was almost back to square one by the last day of the summer holidays because he knew that he wasn’t going into school, so we found that very tricky with him, very sad really, because he knew that he was going back to he was going back his parent at that time, but he didn’t know when or why, the trauma of all that, definitely shifted it. So I thought that was very interesting in terms of him processing stuff. But erm,

I: How do you manage something like that?

P: day by day. It was a very, again, just personal, we built a relationship with myself and my LSA and he just became our shadow really because he just needed the consistent body in his life. That was sad, because we knew what was going on, he didn’t fully understand or couldn’t talk about it, he didn’t have the language to talk about why he felt angry or why he felt sad about things and so it became erm, and then that’s when you get the blame side of things, he couldn’t communicate things and it’d become a, I feel angry why because I can’t tie my shoe laces, well that’s not something that’s happened before, there’s clearly something else that’s bothering you but you just don’t know why yet, and so that was very interesting. And, hard for us because we couldn’t explain it to him it wasn’t our place to explain anything was to him, we knew that that was going on, but we couldn’t say to him, the stuff that, yeah, it wasn’t. that was one of the more challenging side of things to deal with.

I: Yeah, I can imagine

P: Just having to be personal and him wanting that interaction. but yeah, but I thought that would be.

I: Yeah, thank you. Great

P: Pleasure.