Participant: T8

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 T8 (P)

Age: 40

Sex: Female

Teacher Role and Years: SENCo, 20 years

I: Yeah so I don’t know if there is a specific child that you had in mind?

P: There are a few...so, there’s, I don’t really know where to start, so here there is a child who has been adopted but obviously she was taken into care at a quite a young age, maybe about three and her little sister is also here and she was two years younger, so very little. She has an attachment disorder, she’s been with her family for two or three years now I think, and she was permanently excluded from another school and then came here in the end of year 1 so she’s been here just over a year sort of like 18 months, and I taught her in year 2. So in the summer term when she was in year 1 it was very challenging, just lashing out at children all the time that’s why she was excluded from her previous school refusing to do anything, and hurting children for no reason either, not even having a reason, and that slightly improved, but she mainly needed to develop relationships with people and we have kind of found out that she only in her mind she only trusts her teacher if they go up with her to her next class, so she now has that with her 1:1 TA that went up with her and in fact it was a job share in year 2, so the other teacher went up into year 3, with her. But she’s still like pleased to see me when I see her so it’s obviously something good came out of it, but she would be really challenging, just refuse to do any kind of work. There would be no reasoning with her, she would be unkind to the other children, and they didn’t understand why, and it would be really difficult. She has improved but she picks and chooses what she wants to do and when she does it and its on her terms what she does and she’ll dip in and out of lessons and then do her own activities, but has made great progress and is still in a school and will remain in a school because her behaviour is 100 times better than it was.

I: Yeah great.

P: so that’s her, oh and she has an EHCP and then there is another child, very very similar from another school, a little boy and his younger sister, he’s actually almost identical sort of like situations, taken into care around about the same age, he was a lot more challenging he needed to build the relationships but then would test those relationships as well even with his adoptive mum, he had lots and lots of feelings of shame, and would try and push people away when they were trying to help him. Would be quite controlling of other children, could be violent, have outbursts, would be really quite destructive in school and at home. His younger sister, completely the opposite just very very passive, wouldn’t really talk to anybody, very shy, would have obsessions about things, that would be her way of trying to control situations, or try and gain back some control. And she was very dominated by her brother as well. So, that made things a little bit more tricky, but they, that’s what she was like at school but at home she was much more open and yeah, difficult I think for mum and dad.

I: Yes, yeah, not necessarily as passive

P: No, I don’t know if there’s anything specifically you would like to know more about them? Or?

I: Yeah, erm, I guess my first question would be whether you have, if there any children that you have experience with that then haven’t been adopted, or that are still kind of looked after

P: Yes, so, yes, so that then went back to their original parents?

I: Yeah, or who have been with foster carers I don’t know.

P: Yeah so then in another school there was err, I’m just trying to think how old he would have been. In year 2, a little boy and he had a baby brother, yeah a baby brother and his mum really struggled, she was taking drugs and drinking and basically just not looking after them. And they’d had lots and lots of help and in the end social services placed them with foster carers and they were like completely different children, completely different, they had a proper family situation, they were clean, looked after, had presents, started making progress at school, the little baby started talking and actually meeting the milestones and things. And then mum, I think she went to rehab for quite a while, like over 3 months I think, and then came back and she was able to have like visiting and things and that would really really disrupt the children would upset them, they didn’t understand, the behaviour would deteriorate from before the visit and then afterwards it would take them a little while to settle own, and then eventually they did go back to mum, but she was ok in the end. And she managed to maintain it, and then just children who have been in care are just, they don’t quite know what’s going on, like where their place is how they fit in, why they’re not with their parents, I mean it’s difficult isn’t it they’ll say things like, they’ll openly tell the other children that you get taken away if your mum or dad shout, or the police might come and take you or, yeah, it’s difficult

I: because that’s been their experience

P: Yeah, and then for the other children they think well what does that mean, if my mum and dad shout I’ll get taken away but obviously that’s the most simplistic view for them isn’t it?

I: Yeah, yeah, and that’s what they can understand at that developmental stage.

P: Yeah, Yeah

I: Ok, so probably what would be useful is to talk a little bit more about those, the little boy that you said that he was taken into care when mum went into rehab and that, you’re just kind of, yeah experiences around that. So I don’t know if there were particular behaviours that were particularly challenging.

P: before, so during the process he would, he had no confidence at all, he didn’t really have like confidence in his own abilities so he wouldn’t really do any work or try any work, or the first bit of work he would do if he found it challenging he would give up or screw it up or hide it or not do it. He also didn’t really have any confidence in himself like socially or in different kinds of situations, so he would never put his hand up, never want to take part in like Christmas play or class assemblies and things, and then the change was completely the opposite when he went to the foster family, really came out of his shell, was happier, more confident, started growing...

I: what physically?

P: Yeah

I: Oh wow

P: Yeah and had more confidence because he knew that he was wanted I presume and was able to do reading and homework at home and they did things with him so he was more like the other children and then he could have play dates and parties and things because he was with the foster family for quite a while actually I think, maybe about a year

I: Oh ok yeah that is quite a while isn’t it

P: I think, and the little baby the same like really started thriving

I: Yeah, and what do you put that down to that kind of change between,

P: I think the nurture that they had the security the stability, the physical nurturing as well as the emotional, as well sort of actually being their basic needs being met, completely without any question about having to worry about whether they would be having the next meal or not and never having to be hungry or anything like that, but also going to places, having different experiences, being part of the wider kind of network of family and friends

I: Yeah that’s true, all those other things that goa round the outside

P: Yeah and then having making better relationships with other children at school then with playdates and parties and things so I think definitely the nurturing that the family gave them, the love and attention that mum wasn’t able to at that time, so

I: Yeah ok, that’s interesting. And were there times even when they were with the foster carers that behaviour was more challenging in school

P: Only when they started to see mum again after she’d finished with the rehab because obviously they would have the supervised visits and things and then they had to build it up and so then he would be more anxious because he didn’t know where he was supposed to be, he didn’t know whether he was able to talk to his mum and about the foster carers or say y’know nice things about them because he didn’t want to upset her, he felt guilty then because he was happy with the foster family, and then he would just be angry or easily angered or frustrated.

I: so what would that look like in school then?

P: Like withdrawing again, not maybe being so keen to do his work doubting himself again and just not participating as much.

I: Oh, yeah, that’s tough. What were you kind of, when you were seeing those kinds of behaviours, what was your kind of thinking at the time about where those behaviours were coming from?

P: I’d kind of guessed it was because he wasn’t, he just didn’t understand the situation or what he was supposed to be feeling, so we would just reassure him that it was fine to feel the way that he was feeling and that he could obviously love his foster family and that was absolutely fine, and that his mum wouldn’t mind and that it was fine that he could love his mum as well, and that she needed some help with things and getting things sorted out and that was the only reason they weren’t with her, it wasn’t because she didn’t love them or anything. So we did try to support him sort of emotionally and with the academic kind of side just getting him to do what he could do at the time without pushing him or making too much of a big deal about it.

I: Yeah, so how much do you think your understanding of what was driving some of the behaviours impacted on then how you would like manage things in the classroom then for him?

P: erm, we would kind of pre-empt some situations, so we would know when he would be having the visits and things, so we would maybe do more small group or 1:1 work with him so he would feel more secure, or getting him to do specific jobs with people so he could have that relationship with the adults, and then maybe just plan the activities that we knew that he would enjoy and have a go at rather than giving him something we knew he wasn’t particularly too keen on, on a day where he really wouldn’t want to be doing it. So kind of just easing it for him.

I: Ok, yeah and what about those kind of, I guess in the moment things, where, I don’t know if he started doing any, when you talked about the behaviours before he’d been taken into care about like screwing up work or, did those sorts of behaviours kind of resurface.

P: Sometimes, yeah

I: And how did you manage those types of things?

P: We would just give him the time to almost like come round again, so not make too much of a big deal and say I understand that you’re unhappy today or you’re feeling a bit sad today or you’re a bit confused and giving him the time and then maybe getting him to go off and do things with teachers just to sort of take him out of the situation, change the situation give him something else to think about and then just saying its ok, y’know we’re here as and when if you want to come and have a go in a minute that’s fine, if you want to come and help me. He actually liked helping other children as well, so sometimes we would say why don’t you go and, “ohh so and so is not quite sure about something, why don’t you go and see how he’s doing” and that was sometimes kind of a like almost distracting but just getting him doing it in a different kind of way without him realising.

I: Yeah, makes it feel more purposeful for him

P: yeah and a lot of the time he would just say “no”, so you would say “oh ok, oh can you do this?” and then you would get him to do it when he didn’t even realise he was doing it

I: I like it, yeah ok, and were there any other things that were kind of particularly challenging in that time that he was looked after at all?

P: Erm, I think, other parents found the situation difficult, because they were very supportive when they were placed with foster carers because they could see and they were glad, but then when it started, when mum came out of rehab and things that was like a hot topic of conversation, will the kids go back with her or not and nobody wanted that, even members of staff were not supportive of that situation and people would say “oh I’ve seen her here, and I’ve seen her there” and would try and, y’know maybe say things that weren’t true to just do some damage really and then it was difficult with people when they actually went back to her full time because lots of people didn’t have a lot of hope for the future because the children had made such good progress, like socially, academically, in every respect, they were worried about the damage it would maybe do. But in the end it worked out fine.

I: Ok, how did their behaviours kind of go with the transition then back to mum?

P: They were really really happy about going back, he was really really happy. And then sometimes he would worry if like they’d run out of milk or something, he would worry that that would then mean...

I: ...that was like the start of...

P: ...does that mean we would be taken away again, does that mean we’re going to go and live with so and so and I can’t even remember their names now again. But it would be no, she’s just run out of milk, I run out of milk all the time, and we’d obviously have to check that they were, that they’d come to school and they had had breakfast and clean clothes and things, and subtly talk to the children. But he was really excited, but then was always half waiting for something to change

I: yeah yeah, and was that something that you saw within like how he was in the classroom?

P: Yeah he was, yeah, he wasn’t as confident, initially, but after a little while he got his confidence back again so it was maintained with like a slight dip with the initial transition

I: Oh ok, oh that’s good. Ok. Great. Are there, were there any other elements of his behaviour that were challenging at all?

P: Not really, because he was quite passive really, it would just be refusal to do work and not want to do things if he thought he couldn’t do it.

I: Yeah ok, how would you manage those sorts of situations?

P: Just give him the support, maybe pre-teaching during assemblies so you would talk with him and a group of children – so it wasn’t just him - about what we would be doing and get their ideas and maybe play games based on what you might be doing in maths, so that when you started the maths he wasn’t like “oh I can’t do this” ...

I: ...brand new yeah...

P: ...because he already knew that he’d just played a game on it, and sometimes he’d be like, oh we’ve just done this haven’t we?

I: Yes

P: But it gave him the confidence to be able to be a bit more confident and willing to have a go.

I: Oh lovely, that’s really nice. Ok, thank you. The kind of final kind of question that we have to kind of wrap up is just to share a positive memory or kind of experience that you had with him

P: in terms of his behaviour or his work?

I: Just generally, it could be anything,

P: Well I have seen now on Facebook that he’s training to be a chef

I: Oh wow

P: So that’s good, so he’s, I don’t know like 17 or 18 now, so he managed to get through school, without any issues, I think his mum has had another baby, and he’s doing ok, so that’s good. That they managed to stay together and she was able to cope and I think she maybe even got married and had another baby so he has actually got a family with a mum and a dad and

I: ahh that’s lovely isn’t it, because you don’t always get that same level of kind of happy ending in that way, so that is, that’s nice

P: No no, and when you see that things are a certain way you then kind of carry on doing that don’t you in a cycle, so

I: Yeah yeah, absolutely, ok lovely. Thank you. One thing that I did forget to ask at the start, was just for those kind of questions about, if I could get kind of your age, role and years of experience with looked after children as well

P: Yes, so, I’m 40, I’ve been a teacher for 19 years, SENCo for 10 years, I’m deputy, have been a deputy for 10 years as well. I think that’s probably. I’ve only taught in primary, reception to year 5, to year 6.

I: And in terms of looked after children, how much experience or how many years would you say. It’s a tricky one I know when you’ve been teaching that long.

P: ooh. Probably, 7, 6 or 7 years of children in that situation, because they’ve always been in my class, so I’m just trying to work out, because I’ve taught brothers and sisters year after year if you know what I mean as well.

I: Yeah, ok great. Thank you. Was there anything else in particular that you wanted to kind of share or talk about in terms of your experiences or?

P: erm, no. I think that’s pretty much everything yeah

I: Ok, perfect, that’s everything then, thank you.

P: Thank you.