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| Fieldnote Note | 14 | Date | 08/06/21 |
| Locations | Bungalow 1Campus | Weather | Hot and cloudy and clamy today. |
| Child interactions | Dennis, Daniel, Brian, Graham, Jonny, Junior, Dom, Eva | Staff Interactions | Thelma, Mary and Sammy |
| Times | 2pm -6.30 | Total Time in field | 4.5 hours |
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Arrived at Bungalow 1 today and found Thelma in the office dealing with all of the logistics and preparations for the children returning from school today – she is ‘senior on duty’ today and so is doing some organisation across the bungalows. Between doing various things, she also gives me a rundown of the current plans for today in Bungalow 1 and I agree to go again with Mary today who is going to pick up Dennis from school and then pick up Brian and take the two of them to a local park and come back for teatime.

Because Brian’s school is about 30 minutes away, we had to pick up Dennis a bit earlier from school (2.20pm) however, when we arrived and he came out with Pepper, he said he wasn’t going with Mary to pick up Brian, that he didn’t want to. Despite encouragement and attempts at persuasion, he was point-blank refusing to go, and this was despite him having had a good day with Brian just yesterday. This creates a logistical problem for staff, who are a bit short today overall. Graham comes out of school along with Jonny who are going to be taken up to the residential campus by one of the education staff. Mary asks Graham if he want to come and pick up Brian, but he does not want to either and asks if we can pick him up from the Bungalows rather than him having to come with us now, but Mary has to head off to make sure that she collects Brian from his (mainstream) school at the right time so that he’s not standing waiting there. She apologises to Pepper, but I guess the argument is that they have staff there, while Brian needs someone to actively go and collect him from his school, which is about 20-25 minutes’ drive away. Mary makes the necessary phone calls and also lets Donald know as he’s arrived to pick up others.

Mary and I discuss the situation on the drive over to collect Brian. I mention that I’m surprised that Dennis didn’t want to come with her given how close he seems to her (see fieldnote from yesterday evening). While she also felt that this ‘came out of nowhere’ she also talked about being Dennis’ keyworker and how he struggles sometimes to ‘share’ her (and another worker) with other children. She also discussed how she thinks sometimes, some of the children get ‘fed up’ being paired up – she clarifies how the pairings often happen around one child who needs quite a lot of adult attention and one who does not and that the child who does not need as much attention (in this case Dennis) may feel like the pairings don’t work for them. It was an interesting insight that the children are well aware of how they are being ‘managed’ in this particular respect. I noted that Graham didn’t want to go either and that he wanted to go back to the bungalow first- maybe just wants to go ‘home’ from school and chill out (something Thelma discussed with me later in a separate and unrelated conversation). However, Mary noted that Graham is hypersensitive to aggressive or angry behaviour, and he is especially wary of Brian – noting that when Brian returns or someone says ‘there’s Brian home’, Graham will ask ‘what does his face look like’ meaning, what mood is he in. He also will pacify Brian in terms of situations that arise. This led on to an interesting discussion about the impact of event during the early years because Graham has been with them since he was very young and this hypersensitivity has been there since.

While waiting in the school car park we discuss various theories and individual children and it’s clear that Mary takes a real interest in all of the children including from the other bungalows. Brian arrives out and evicts me from the front seat. Mary is interested in his day. The conversation is light and playful but also caring in both directions and it’s nice to observe and, at times, be a part of on the journey back to the bungalows.

Back at Bungalow 1, Thelma already has dinner underway – chicken curry with fried rice, spring rolls and prawn crackers tonight. I position myself in the kitchen where staff and children and busily coming and going between there and other parts of the bungalow. I watch as each child, in turn, arrives and tries to get access to the cupboard (a locked cupboard where a range of sweets, crisps and juice are held). Each child, in turn, comes up against a patient Thelma who enforces a rule of ‘healthy snack’ first (fruit or a yoghurt) and, by my assessment, only one child (Brian) successfully negotiates his way through the healthy option to be offered something from the cupboard. Thelma seems so in control – funny, sweet, encouraging with the children, but also unmoveable on her rules as clearly stated. This is not the first or last time today that I will feel like I’m in a big family home – there’s something that feels familiar and familial to me about all of the interactions.

After a short while, Brian comes in and asks if I would like to go for a cycle and after checking it out with Thelma, he takes me out to arrange a bike and a helmet from the bunker for me. While we’re getting that, a boy from Bungalow 3 comes over past us and tells Jason that he’s going to see if he can find a lighter in the rubbish so that he can ‘get his life back to normal’. From the short interaction, in which he says – ‘you know I started that fire in the bungalow last night? Well, I’ve been grounded but I need to hand the lighter back and so now I need to go and find a lighter so I can get my life back to normal’. I’m initially interested in the tone of the interaction, which gave the sense of this being a juicy piece of gossip, despite the matter-of-fact way in which it was stated. I had been aware that ‘we’re staying away from Bungalow 3 this evening’ because Brian had asked for a play date (although he corrected this terminology to ‘hang out’) with Norman after school. This must be the underlying issue (or one of them).

Once appropriately kitted out, we head off for Brian to show me the ‘gang hut’ that the children built along with Millerton. During this whole trip, which takes about an hour and 20 minutes all in, I really feel like Brian is looking after me. He swaps bikes with me when I can’t figure out how the gears work on mine, advises me on tricky cycling bits (steep hills, bumpy tree roots etc). En route to the gang hut he tells me about how it was built and by whom. Brian is 14 and I found myself surprised when he said he was glad I came as he wouldn’t be allowed to come up on his own. At 14 and, in fact, much younger than this, I would have been allowed away out to play – especially in a rural area like this, which is similar to the environment in which I was brought up. I was able to tell him a bit more about why I am here (another benefit of a bit of one-to-one time) and told him about my idea about Minecraft having spent some time with Jonny the night before – Brian said he’d be up for that as well.

After about 25 minutes, we arrive at a forested area and park up our bikes and helmets before Brian said (to my delight) ‘let’s go an explore’. Just inside the wooded area, there was the gang hut – a multi-levelled wood structure with walkways and chute (see below) [pictures saved in a separate file].

We were only on this for a very short time as it seemed like some of the wood bits had rotted and were not so secure. We then went through the woods a little to find the tree swing, but Brian was annoyed that someone had tangled/tied it up and it seemed unusable. I agreed to try and undo the fankle while he looked for a suitable replacement stick to act as a seat. It took a while to untangle and a while to find a suitably strong stick, but we eventually managed to do it and both of us had a swing on it from the (quite high) branch of a tree.

I was a wee bit worried about doing this, or something happening and either one of us getting injured and then I remembered how I used to do this all the time when I was Brian’s age and younger; so, decided just to let myself play for a while and I really enjoyed it and I think Brian did too.

After this, we headed back the long way. This time, Brian went behind me but kept me right with directions and I had the feeling that he was assuming the position that the staff/adults would normally take – behind so he could see me but keeping clear and consistent directions, so I knew exactly where I was going. We went past a deer farm and commented on them and then had a bit of a race back to campus once we reached the road.

Back in the bungalow, Brian sorted me out with some water and diluting juice and then I chilled for a bit in the lounge with him, Sammy, Mary and Dennis. We were joined for a bit by Daniel and Graham periodically emerged from the playroom. Brian went along to practice guitar as his instructor is coming for a lesson tonight – he’s seriously impressive. When Thelma called that dinner was ready, everyone made their way to the kitchen. This was the next big familiar and familial event of the day. Thelma was serving up dinner to everyone around the table: Mary, Daniel, Graham, Sammy, Dennis, Jonny, Me, and Brian (clockwise from the head – Mary). There were conversations and side conversations, children to children, adults to adults, children to adults. There were appreciative comments about the food, requests for different combinations of things, different sizes of helpings, ‘I don’t want to hear what people don’t want, tell me what you *do* want’ (said with love and good humour). There were jokes and wind ups, recriminations and reparations, plans and counter plans. It seemed for some minutes that the whole of life was happening around that table and I was loving it. Jonny liked my idea of building the bungalow/campus in Minecraft and started taking orders from others about what kind of bed they would like in their room.

As the beginning of the end of the meal passed, baths were run and the group splintered off to different activities. The kitchen was put back in order and I remained there, watching as individual children came and went to ask things of Thelma and Sammy who were putting the kitchen back in order after the meal. Mary was through in the lounge with some other children. After a short while, things became a little more tense through in the lounge. Brian seemed a bit restless and impatient with the others. Sammy couldn’t go out to play football with him as they were a little light staff-wise as Thelma was ‘senior on duty’ so was spread across campus and there were issues ongoing in Bungalow 3 that meant those children were being grounded and I got the sense that had the potential to be difficult to manage. Therefore, when Brian asked me, I agreed to go out and play football with him.

We have a kick about initially out the front but, in order to avoid hitting any cars, we move to the back between Bungalow 1 and Bungalow 2. Norman was out with Peter and they went over to the kitchen door of Bungalow 1 where Thelma fed Peter some curry and they talked about something. After some football, Junior challenged me and Brian to a game of ‘cops and robbers’, which turned out to be a version of tig played on bikes. Helmets on, we ended up chasing each other around campus on bikes for about 30-40 minutes. It really was good fun, despite me falling and my chain coming off! Lots of squealing and laughing and wind ups as we chased each other about. After I washed the oil off my hands, I said my goodbyes until next week.