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| Fieldnote Note | 5 | Date | 10/5/21 |
| Locations | Bungalow 2  Bungalow 1  Campus | Weather | Sunshine and heavy showers at times, 14-15C |
| Child interactions | [one of the children], Junior, Eva, Dom and Daniel | Staff Interactions | Ronnie, Quin, Helen, Blane, Heidi, Mick, Katya, Karly, Carolanne, Stewart and Pru |
| Times | 1pm – 6.30pm | Total Time in field | 5.5 hours |

Arrived on campus and went to Bungalow 2, which was fairly quiet with just Helen and Karly in when I arrived. Helen was asking me about how I enjoyed the outdoors day with the children last week and I was explaining how much I enjoyed it and how it seemed to me that there were differences in the children and in the staff when we were out in that environment, albeit I’m biased as I enjoy being outdoors myself anyway.

I had anticipated joining the wee meeting between the managers again today, but I think I missed the boat sitting talking to Karly at the dining room table. She had her laptop out working on stuff for university and we struck up an interesting conversation where she started talking about the development of her relationship with Eva. I took out my notebook and asked her if she would be ok if I took some notes and maybe asked her some questions about her views of the organisation given her status as a student on placement, which she agreed readily to. She had Eva’s file out as she was planning a piece of work with her for tomorrow. She had caught my attention when she was discussing the developing relationship with Eva she pointed to the file and said she had a ‘leg up because of this’. A minute or so later she made another comment about the benefit of knowing background information, so I asked her how important this was in terms of her day-to-day work with the children. There was a tension in her response in the sense that she felt that background was important, but it was equally important to recognise ‘where the children are *now’* and ‘what they need *now’*. She then went on to discuss how it had been counterproductive for her in the past to know too much background information and this resulted in her feeling sympathy for a child (as opposed to empathy), which then affected her practice (not challenging behaviour etc). I asked her how she had dealt with this and she said supervision and being able to do some preparatory work around what she would be doing with the children really helped her.

I asked her how she had learned this job and settled in during her current placement. She was previously placed in another residential setting, but it was for older children and she is care experienced herself. She said that she observed other staff with children and felt that this was the main route through which she figured out the job and started to build her own confidence. Taking time to get to know children, developing rapport, and ‘being yourself’ were also important to her. I asked her if there were any staff in particular that she took time to observe/emulate and she noted taking ‘wee bits from each one’ but that she particularly liked the relationship that Helen had with [one of the children] – that it was balanced and respectful.

She discussed the intensity of the environment and outlined how she doesn’t always agree with how things are done (by some workers sometimes rather than general practice) and that she had felt able to raise this with her link worker/supervisor in order to challenge the practice and/or understand why things were done the way that they were done. She noted how you have to build trust with staff as well as children when you are a new worker, or a student like her (though she recently got a sessional post with the organisation but can’t start this until after her placement is finished). We discussed the level of intimacy required in the job (especially because the children are younger – helping with bathing, settling at night etc) and how this takes getting used to and checking out – this was in the context of the children’s pasts as well as the general discourse around residential childcare. She said she had noticed how the general atmosphere/environment is changed depending on which staff are on.

We discussed excitement on the back of something that she said about children getting over excited and I had noticed that excitement seems to be an emotion that comes with a sense of dread or danger here – that there seems to be a concerted effort to limit excitement. She agreed but noted it was particular kinds of excitement rather than children not being allowed to be excited about anything. She noted differences in opinion in terms of approaches to dealing with different children and their respective behaviour.

Other workers started to arrive, I met Carolanne for the first time and gave her an information leaflet and brief introduction to the project. Blane was on today as well and Helen was around. My conversation with Karly moved on to small talk/personal interactions about issues each of us had with neighbours etc. As this was happening, I noted down managing behaviour and/or emotions – I think it would be easy to think that the children are managed in terms of behaviour (e.g. it was a great day yesterday, no fighting, no smashing things etc.) but behaviour is often an indication that someone is or is not managing their emotions and, therefore, is this a measure of success (‘good’ behaviour) an indication of an emotional achievement?

Shortly thereafter, [one of the children], Eva, Junior and Dom arrived back from school. Activities were already organised: Junior was scheduled to have a playdate with Serge in Bungalow 3, [one of the children] and Eva were going out clothes shopping with Carolanne, and Dom was scheduled to have a playdate with Daniel in Bungalow 1. Before all of that happened, there was a lot of milling about in and out of the kitchen area and some dancing in the lounge. There seemed to be some very sweet and playful interaction between [one of the children] and Carolanne – a silly face squeezing game. I met Donald face-to-face for the first time when he was in and he asked if I was doing interviews etc. He has an unusual role in that he is not strictly allocated to a particular bungalow. He took Junior over to Bungalow 1 for his play date, Junior taking his digital alarm as a gift for Serge as Junior never uses it and maybe Serge would make better use of it.

Suddenly, the bungalow had almost emptied, so I grabbed my stuff and headed over to Bungalow 1 where I joined Dom, Daniel, Blane and Thelma in the lounge. Dom and Daniel were playing a game on the X-box. Blane, Thelma and I were sitting behind them facing them, all of us on bean bags. While we had some chat with each other and there was some interaction with the two boys (‘ok Dom, don’t stand in front of Daniel as he can’t see the screen’ and Daniel giving us regular updates on the relative scores on the games) the boys were largely involved with their game and with each other and it was time for the staff to take a back seat and just supervise. Thelma managed to get on and clean out the playroom, which is adjacent to the lounge (she refused the help offered by me and by Blane). I was somewhat engrossed in the interaction between Dom and Daniel during the playing of their game. I was surprised at this match up, having met Daniel before on my informal visits and having spent some time with Dom, I would have assumed that they would have clashed more. I commented on this and both Thelma and Blane noted that ‘on paper’ it shouldn’t work, but they discovered by accident that they actually get on reasonably well. This kept going for just over an hour. It was a largely chilled atmosphere although there were little points of tension when Dom would playfully shove Daniel or they would swear. I found myself feeling little points of anxiety about whether it would escalate into something more difficult and started to wonder if this is how staff are feeling – monitor, monitor, monitor, something – do I need to react, no – monitor, etc. It seemed to me that motivation (to play) and supervision created an environment that both boys seemed to enjoy. It became a bit more fractious after Dom decided he wanted to go outside for a bit. Daniel was not up for this although decided he was when he saw Dom on the trampoline out the front. However, he was not allowed to go outside to play as he had refused to go to school today. He spent a good bit of time trying to debate the issue with Thelma, who was very calm and clear about the types of privileges that are afforded to boys who attend school and those who don’t. She used me as a sort of talking stick, whereby, through explaining to me some of the issues he had been having, she was talking to him and trying to encourage him in changing his behaviour. When Dom came back in about 10 minutes later, the two boys decided to play Minecraft, but the atmosphere was altogether different with them using each other’s controls to stymie the other’s attempts at starting a game. Thelma indicated that Tea would be getting organised in Bungalow 1 soon and gave them a 10-minute and 5-minute warning (preparing them for change) and then Dom, Blane and I headed back over to Bungalow 2. In the kitchen before I left, Daniel quizzed me about why I hadn’t been up for so long and what I would be doing.

Blane was making the tea in Bungalow 2 while Dom and I danced to some videos in the Lounge. Ronnie noticed my improvement when he popped his head round the door. [data removed as consent could not be established] I rested on a beanbag after the dancing and watched as Carolanne rather skilfully moved between different children who were requesting/needing her attention – some medication to [one of the children], play fighting with Eva, joined in the dancing with Dom. Katya had come on shift as well and had been helping out with the Tea, which we were all called through for. Junior was having his tea at Bungalow 3 with Serge.

Once we were all seated, Carolanne asked what the highlight of everyone’s day was. [data removed as consent could not be established] For Dom it was playing with Daniel, for Katya it was coming on shift, for me it was meeting Carolanne for the first time and Dom and Daniel playing together, for Blane it was hanging out with Mark in Bungalow 1, for Carolanne it was taking [one of the children] and Eva shopping. At this point Eva became excited and talked rapidly about how her and [one of the children] ‘hadn’t squabbled’ and talking about all the places she had gone to try and find shoes that fit her. Blane urged her to calm and that she seemed like she ‘wasn’t managing’. [Data removed as consent could not be established] Eva’s was getting her flowery jammies. [Data removed as consent could not be established].

Dom had been remarkably quiet during dinner, something that was noted by the staff. He asked if he could go and watch dancing videos in the lounge but was asked not to do this while [one of the children] was in there (he was given an option of activities in his room). ‘Not while [their] in there pal’, Mark rolled his eyes in a way that suggested his activity was yet again being curtailed by someone else. However, he quickly agreed to the room activity and disappeared down the corridor.

This left me, Eva and Katya at the table with Eva talking up how she was absolutely full to the brim even though she had hardly eaten anything – this seems to be a pattern for her and an area of concern for the staff who all encourage her to eat more whenever she says she is finished. Katya managed to bargain with her a proportion more, which she acquiesced to but then attempted to change the terms – eating 4 bits of pasta but none of the tuna. Katya managed to encourage her to eat some of the tuna as well with a drink of juice without any great drama in the end.

After tea, I was sitting on a bean bag next to Katya with [one of the children] watching Youtube videos on the couch. Katya engaged me in a conversation about swearing and we exchanged our views on it discussing how some people are completely opposed, what we were like as children, the prevalence of swearing in our respective families etc. I felt a bit awkward at times in this conversation because [one of the children] was on the couch and I worried that maybe hearing adults talk about swearing in this way would encourage them to swear but Carolanne got them organised to go for their bath.

After [one of the children] was out of the room, Katya continued to engage me in conversation and outlined how [one of the children] had targeted her for aggressive behaviour or by saying things to upset her (Nobody loves you, everybody hates you, I hope your dog dies, I hope your dad dies) and how she (Katya) had responded by saying that she had lots of pets that had died, and that her dad was old and would die, and that a [child] saying this to her didn’t upset her. I felt quite a bit uncomfortable at this point because, while she wasn’t saying anything that seriously concerned me, the tone sounded a bit combative to me. I made the point that it sounded like classic projection in that [one of the children] may feel like nobody loves them, that everybody hates them and was projecting this on to Katya. She agreed with this categorisation but then went on to detail some issues with another boy in Bungalow 3 that I’ve not yet met. I had stood up by this point and moved in the room, but it was proving a wee bit difficult to extricate myself from this conversation. Carolanne came in through the lounge and, to me, she looked a little bit flushed. I wasn’t sure if this was from her dealing with [one of the children] up the corridor or if she had overheard this conversation and was maybe feeling a bit anxious about what Katya was saying to me. I have to admit, I was surprised she was so forthright in these opinions given my position/perceived position as a researcher. Maybe Carolanne was thinking this would reflect badly on the organisation or other staff. However, maybe these children could use someone who pushes back firmly against the aggression and hurtful comments – maybe it’s me that needs a reality check here. This woman has worked here for some time and has experience working with these and other children. Maybe I would work differently – all the workers do – but maybe her approach is clear and understandable to the children?

After this, I had a brief chat/reflection with Blane about Dom and Daniel’s interaction today, which I had felt was largely positive but that he caveated in terms of its time-limited nature and the other situations where things have escalated.