Meeting with EdT, 16/2/21

ANDREW: I know I sent the leaflet again and there is some information in that leaflet about various aspects of the project. But two things I was going to pull out are just about consent and confidentiality? So, although [org] has agreed to this, it’s up to you guys individually – so as well as these meetings I’m hoping to have one-to-one meetings with people and things like that as well – but it’s really up to you as an *individual* to decide whether you want to take part or not. So, I approach consent with you in much the same way as I would with any of the children. You know, it’s for you, it’s your consent to give or withdraw as you see fit and, just because you agree to this, or because you sign a consent form at some point, doesn’t mean you’re locked in – you can always change your mind, you can always say ‘look, I don’t want to be involved in this’. You never have to explain yourself about why you’re doing that either, so don’t feel any pressure or anything like that. It’s just to try and give participants in research as much power as possible, as much control as possible around their participation, so that you’ve got full choice to decide whether or not you want to be involved… and maybe you’ll be involved in this but you don’t want to do an interview, maybe you’ll be involved in an interview and you don’t want to be involved in something else – you can choose, that’s absolutely fine. So, you might just not be in the mood that particular day that I’m there and you think ‘oh, no, I’d rather not’. Absolutely fine. Not a problem

TANYA: yes, right

ANDREW: and the other thing that’s related to that, is confidentiality. So, when I write up the note from this meeting, I’ll change names immediately as I’m writing the note up. I won’t use your real names or anything like that, I’ll use pseudonyms and, when we create any reports or anything, we won’t even mention that it’s [org], we’ll just be talking about ‘a residential school in Scotland’.

TANYA: ok

ANDREW: So, reports – externally, to conferences, to other agencies, to academics, you’ll be completely anonymous. The only limitation you should consider is within [org] you guys know each other really well. You know the children really well. You might be able to recognise *each other* in the data even if I change the names, even if there are none of those identifying features, because you know each other’s stories really well. So that might be a limitation to consider as well in terms of confidentiality. Are you alright to go on, on that basis?

ALL: Yes, yes

ANDREW: So when I was meeting with the residential staff, the care teams, the other week, one of the things I was doing was getting a sense of what goes on basically. So, although I did some informal visits before the holidays, it was a very limited time, I was just really getting my face know and seeing… I don’t *really* understand how things work at [org] in the care – well, I know a bit more now – but at the school? So, I wondered if we could start the conversation at a kinda, at a, what’s a typical day for your class? How does it begin? How does it progress? How does it end? I wonder if you could tell me a bit about that?

TANYA: em, so the day runs 9 till 2.30. In this class, we’ve got four children who are residential and two children that are day pupils. At the moment, one of the day pupils is remaining at home due to COVID… and to be honest, we run our classroom… quite similar to what you would expect to see in a mainstream classroom [affirmations from others]. Because, what works well for our kids is ‘busy, busy, busy’. So, we just go from one activity to the next all the time – keep them busy. Not really any down time at all and that works really well for our combination. I know it doesn’t work for all combinations at [org] but certainly for the combination we have. They are a bit more able to sit and engage in different types of learning. So, we tend to do a lot of our literacy stuff in the morning. Then we have play time and they have a snack. We do Maths, Health and Wellbeing, A.P.E. kinda stuff in the middle of the day. Then, afternoon is usually topic-based learning… and it’s a similar routine every single day and they *need* that routine every day, they need to know, they can probably tell you what the timetable is but that’s what they need. They need to know ‘Monday we do this, Tuesday we do this’ and their Wednesday they’re out all day doing outdoor learning.

ANDREW: ok, good. So what is it about that routine then, that you think works well for them?

TANYA: It’s the knowing what’s coming next [Lexi and Davina: yeah, what’s coming next] isn’t it? It’ safe for them… they know that we’re gonna do reading and then we might do a bit of writing and then it’s play time… and it’s on the wall for them to see when they come in in the morning – there’s little pictures that show them their day. And they all use it because they need to know what’s coming up next.

LEXI: We have a choosing time in between… just about every activity, isn’t it? [to others] Just for five minutes, a choosing time [Davina: at the table] at the table, but they’re still at the stage where they can’t choose, they still have to include us in that with them. They might want to have a quick game of Uno or something like that, so yeah.

TANYA: I mean we tried, like, last Tuesday we tried a… a bit more of a relaxed schedule to the day. Can’t cope with that.

ANDREW: ok, ok

TANYA: Needs to, certainly in the class, needs to be structure: this, then this, then this, then this, then home time.

ANDREW: Yeah… and so that sounds like it’s about predictability – I know what’s going to happen and that makes me feel safe and comfortable… and that, that experiment that you did when you – sorry, you just caught my attention there with saying that – when you tried something, is that something that you work into your planning every now and again, to try different things… or?

TANYA: Yeah, yeah we do that all the time? [to others] Try various different things, see what works and what doesn’t and… erm… well, it was the snowy day last Tuesday, the really bad snow. So, we thought we’d try a bit more of a relaxed take on the day, erm… [Others: no!] No! [laughs] they absolutely *want* their reading and their writing and their maths time. They really don’t like when they’ve got any down time. I think part of that as well – they’re busy, they’re not thinking about their own lives and why they’re here if they’re busy doing their learning, I suppose, distracted?

LEXI: But, I think that kinda comes into the way that you [to Tanya] sort of teach them as well because it’s not like a normal structured sort of, you know, it’s interesting, it’s fun and it’s really quite interactive for the most part isn’t it [to others]? Yeah, so they do enjoy that.

DAVINA: They get lots of support as well because there’s three of us

TANYA: Yeah

DAVINA: so that works… plus, you’re [to Tanya] very good at reminding them of the rules and boundaries – in the nicest possible way – but you must remind them about three or four times a day, but we expect that.

ANDREW: Yip, yip… and that helps with social learning I would guess?

DAVINA: Yes

TANYA: And we’re not frightened in this class to name things with the children that, erm, are difficult for them or are difficult for us or… are…

LEXI: are unacceptable basically [Tanya yeah, yeah] like social situations and things

TANYA: things that they shouldn’t be doing and we’ll just name it and talk about it all the time. In fact, when they know we’re going to talk about it they start to go ‘oh, here we go’ [laughs]. So, there’s a lot of discussion all day about what’s appropriate behaviour, what’s not. Modelling of how we… you know, even things like ‘how to go to another class and knock on the door and ask for something’. Yeah, so that’s going on all the time.

ANDREW: And what about the… you guys obviously have different roles within the classroom as well – is there stuff that you have to do, do you arrive before the class, is there prep that goes on, do you meet as a team, are there processes, are there things that you have to do either side, in addition to the actual class, to make it work?

TANYA: So, we’re all in much before 9 o’clock… and we, we always usually have a chat before the kids come in – ‘oh, what are we doing today’ or maybe something from yesterday that we need to pick up on… and then same again at the end of the day. Have a sort of debrief time then…

DAVINA: An example of that is, tomorrow’s activity day and we’ve got, like, six coming out with us. So we’ve already discussed what would be the best way to sort of, transport them. Who will go in each car. So, that’s already been done – sorted tonight so that, tomorrow morning, we’re good to go basically. So we do do a lot of talking each other around…

TANYA: You, you couldn’t do this job if you didn’t have that time before and after school to debrief and, pre COVID, we used to, as a whole school, meet at half past eight… and we would, if there was anything that needed to be talked about school-wide or class-wide, we would do so in that half an hour. Obviously, we’re not able to do that at the moment because we can’t all be in the same room. But that’s it… and we used to have staff meetings once a week but, again, we can’t all be together at the moment. So, it’s more difficult to do it, I suppose, school-wide at the moment but certainly at a class level we’re doing that all the time.

ANDREW: yeah, there are a lot of different logistics that go into [laughs] planning… outdoor activities, or other things that are going to be coming up and how that’s going to work. So, could you tell me a bit more about your specific roles within the class and how that works, how you work together as a team? Would that be ok?

TANYA: Yeah. So, I’m the teacher and these ladies are educational support workers. It’s really hard to describe actually, how [others: yeah, it is]… because it works really well in here and it’s really hard to actually… describe… *why* it works so well? [to others] It’s really hard. That’s a wee difficult thing to, because you don’t want ‘it’s just us’ – you can’t quote that! [laughs]

DAVINA: I think it comes down to, erm, I was going to say respecting each other? [to others] And we know each other and what’s expected of each other – without even saying a word, we just know.

TANYA: and I think, Lexi has been here 30 years? And Davina how many [Davina: six]… so, these ladies, I’m fairly new, this is only my third year here. So, what works really well for me is, these ladies have been here a long time. So they know what works and what doesn’t work – so, experience.

ANDREW: Yeah, and that, so I was going to ask then, so that’s – I remember meeting you before Christmas because I remember that lengthy period of service [laughs] – it was quite impressive. So, yeah, so there’s different levels of experience… I wonder then, I could just ask you then, if you’re kinda new to that… how long does it take till you don’t feel new within an environment like that?

TANYA: It was really quite… I suppose difficult might be the word when I arrived because, I taught in mainstream at that point for eight years and I came here and I realise that everything I knew, or thought I knew, suddenly, I felt like I was starting again. Because it’s a totally different environment to work in and it takes, it took me a long time to… sort of, figure out I suppose, the best way to do the job if that makes sense? Because you can’t… you can’t… I don’t know how to describe it… you can’t do what you did in mainstream. In here it doesn’t work… and it took me a wee while to change – not even to change my mindset – what am I trying to say? [to others] You know what I’m trying to describe [laughs]

DAVINA: I do not! [laughs]

LEXI: It’s not even [inaudible]… it’s really difficult

TANYA: I suppose it’s kind of, in mainstream, it’s only you and your class. You don’t have to consider anybody else really? In your day-to-day job, because it’s only ever you and the children…

LEXI: or, I suppose, people like Davina and I, who are Educational Support Workers, in mainstream, we would be seen as like ‘photocopying’ and maybe ‘hanging pictures’ and things like that. Where, that must be really difficult Tanya, when you’ve suddenly got these other two people who are more involved… do you know what I mean? It’s hard to…

TANYA: You’re not, er… see, if you quote any of this, take out all the errs and erms [laughs]. It’s, I can’t even, it’s so hard to describe the…[pause]…

DAVINA: You absorb all of their emotions all day long as well. You don’t get that at mainstream either?

TANYA: Hmph! I don’t know how to describe it… hmmm… I don’t know how to describe it…

ANDREW: It’s actually interesting that, that’s… there’s something going on that’s difficult to describe, that is less tangible, less describable. That’s interesting in and of itself actually.

DAVINA: When I first came… because I worked in mainstream for ten years. I moved here and I’ve learned from you Lexi… and I’ve learned from the best cause Lexi is really good!

LEXI: I don’t say that [laughs]

DAVINA: I thought I knew how to cope in a class until I came here. Suddenly, I was out of my depth and I felt inadequate and I didn’t really know how to manage. I had copy off of other people because it is *nothing* like mainstream. You know, you’ve got all these emotions…

LEXI: Yeah, and there’s almost like nothing could really prepare you for it in a sense?

DAVINA: No

TANYA: No, and nothing could even prepare you for the day you’re coming into

LEXI: yeah

TANYA: it’s not…

DAVINA: there’s a lot of unpredictability

TANYA: yeah and, you know, in a mainstream class, you do the same thing. Day in, day out, day in, day out and I got bored of that and you’re never bored in this job!

ANDREW: [Laughs] That’s a really interesting dynamic – you’re whole mindset is to try and create predictability for these children and, in that process, it’s a really unpredictable environment for you?

[all laughing – yes, yeah, yeah]

TANYA: I do think it, I think it’s, I think for me, when I came – you can read all the books you want, you can do all the research under the sun but, until you’re actually in the classroom working alongside children – you learn nothing until you’re actually in the classroom with them.

ANDREW: So that brings up, there’s a couple of things there… So, Davina was saying about learning from Lexi. So, there’s something in that in terms of, coming into this environment and learning the job from other workers around you… but, then, there’s something about coming in and the children teaching you how to do your job?

LEXI: yeah!

TANYA: Yeah.

ANDREW: Is that a fair assessment?

TANYA: Cause the kids are, well, we’ve got six children in here and six different personalities… and each child has about eight personalities within that

DAVINA: and [inaudible] [all laugh]

TANYA: and you do, you learn a lot from… you learn a lot about *life* from the kids.

LEXI: and they’re very needy as well. They need constantly, you by their side. We’ve got one boy in here who constantly just cuddles – doesn’t he [to others] at the moment and it’s… you know

DAVINA: some of them are needing that.

LEXI: that’s what they need at that time, and it’s…

ANDREW: uh huh…and, do you find then that you have to… Lexi, that you have to give a lot of yourself then, when you’re faced with that kind of need? What’s that like for you as an individual to provide for that level of need on a day-to-day basis?

LEXI: I think I’ve just grown used to it. You know? It doesn’t feel like I’m having to give myself to them. It just comes, like naturally, it’s just like it’s your own kids.. ‘Oh my goodness, give me a cuddle’ and that’s kind of it… and, it’s trying to sort of teach them that they don’t need to be hanging around your neck all the time either? That kind of thing. Yeah, I don’t feel, ever feel that I’m drained with it.

TANYA: and I think that’s what makes somebody the right fit for [org] as a member of staff? That it’s a natural, it feels natural to be in here with these children. Yeah – that you’re not feeling like you’re *having* to come to work, or *having*… you never feel like that.

LEXI: and I think, as time goes on, I don’t know about you ladies, but now – and it sounds, and I don’t mean it to sound crass or anything – but I can actually leave my work at the door, you know, when I go home? I mean, there is occasionally when I go ‘oh my goodness’ or I wake up at 3 o’clock in the morning and think ‘oh, we need to try this’ or ‘we need to try that’ but pretty now much, that’s it, I can walk out and it doesn’t burden me and, I think if you got to a stage when you were worrying constantly it would be really difficult to do this job… I don’t know what you think [to others]?

DAVINA: It’s not like you go home and forget about the children.

LEXI: No, I don’t mean it in a crass way but I think if you constantly had that burden on your shoulder, you couldn’t, that would make it really, really difficult to work in a situation like this.

TANYA: Yeah. A good piece of advice I was given about that, when I first started I think it was really easy to feel responsible for the children’s life and, it’s, you have to remind yourself all the time that A) you’re not responsible for the situation that they are in but B) that my, well, *our* role is only a really small part of their lives. So, our role is to try and educate them and that’s what our responsibility is and not to lose sight of that as our responsibility and try to fix everything else around about it. So, we need to think about what our role is on a day-to-day basis. That’s really hard because you want to, your instinct as a human is to try to

LEXI: fix everything for them

TANYA: fix it… and we can’t fix their experience… but we can take a really good go at trying to give them some form of education…

ANDREW: yeah, yeah, and some *new* experiences, some positive experiences within that as well.

DAVINA: especially when you get that attachment and trust from them… but that isn’t easy

TANYA: no

DAVINA: attachment and trust – it takes a while to get that.

TANYA: that’s hard when you first come in as well. In a mainstream school, you can take any class at any time and the children are at a place where they’re able to just accept the adult in front of them. It was, I don’t know, a good year[?] before I felt that even the children I was with on a day-to-day basis start to think ‘oh, actually, you’re alright’ [laughs]

LEXI: even, cause, like, Davina just joined us, Davina joined us in August?

DAVINA: August

LEXI: August last year… and Davina has been around for a lot of the time

DAVINA: Yeah, I’ve been around the school for a long time

LEXI: but it still has taken the children that length of time to actually accept her?

DAVINA: Oh, definitely because they’ll go to you and Tanya first before they’ll come to me. That’s ok because I understand that it take a long time

LEXI: so just knowing, you know, knowing where we are with, sort of gaining the trust of these children does take a long time. So, Davina is here all the time and, erm, you know…

DAVINA: Likes of, Simone won’t let me do her hair but she’s quite happy to let you [Lexi] do her hair, that kind of thing

ANDREW: Yeah, so that’s interesting, you know, that, how the children’s experiences, how their start in life, that stuff that’s happened to them is affecting them in the here and now in terms of how they create relationships, or how they develop trust or, sort of stuff like that. So, that’s part of day-to-day practice for you? Having to respond to that? [yeah] and provide nurture that, I suppose, you might expect to give to a much younger child…

TANYA: Yeah!

ANDREW: … actually, yeah? Certainly I’ve seen a fair bit of that in, in other areas of practice and in the literature as well. I wonder then, if you could tell me, cause the DDP model has obviously been rolled out across the organisation. So, have you guys, do you get that training as well then? That’s my understanding?

ALL: Yeah, yeah

ANDREW: So, I wonder if anyone can talk me through their training, whether they think it makes a difference, whether it interacts with their previous experience, anything along those lines would be really helpful actually?

DAVINA: I like it because there are strategies that you can use before they get into that traumatic state… we’re like ‘oh, you’ve got big feelings, let’s talk about it’ and all that. That’s where the training comes in handy. For somebody walking in, might go into a crisis mode straight away, whereas we know there are strategies to use before it.

ANDREW: so there’s practical benefits then in terms of how you deal with situations that you are faced with?

DAVINA: Yeah

TANYA: there’s a lot of roleplay in the DDP training – and we all love a bit of roleplay

DAVINA: they do because they’re drama queens! [all laugh]

TANYA: you like roleplay Davina! We do a lot of roleplay of different situations at DDP training and you are given the opportunity to roleplay things that might be happening within your own classroom, which is quite helpful. I find it useful, the DDP, after something has happened. Once the child has calmed down

DAVINA: regulated

TANYA: that’s the word… once they’re regulated again and they come back to the classroom, it’s quite useful then to start picking up on… why they’ve reacted that way and what could we try next time. So, I find it really useful *after* something has happened…. Cause, a lot of the time, they’re zero to 100 in five seconds and you’ve not got any time at all to get in. Whereas, with some of the kids, you can go in before they hit the 100 point, but we’ve got a couple in this class that are zero to 100 and it’s afterwards that it works well for them. I think it’s… it’s not something that we *do*, it’s something that we *are*.

ANDREW: yip

TANYA: we don’t do DDP, we, it’s just who we are as…

LEXI: Yeah… we’re accepting of these children and we’re always curious about them, which is part of it as well… and I think we are quite playful with them?

DAVINA: we are, yeah

LEXI: so that is, you’re right, we’re not

TANYA: Yeah, so we don’t say ‘right, we’re going to do DDP just now’ we just do that all the time…

DAVINA: the likes of roleplay, we do bounce off each other and, eh, we talk things through that they get without actually talking to them… you know what I mean? Like doing roleplay with each other…

TANYA: It is quite… the training, I’ve done DDP1 and DDP2, have you [to others]? [yeah, yeah]… and I found the training quite useful because you get to mix with… adults from other schools similar to ours… because we’re quite unique in what we do… and there’s not really very many schools that you can link up with that are doing exactly what we are doing. So, it’s quite nice to meet other people from other residential schools and, sort of, see what they’re doing and then… you almost feel kind of better in a way because they’re working to the same things that you are.

LEXI: there are other people who have a day like you know

DAVINA: nurture based though

ANDREW: yeah, almost like a peer supervision type thing [yeah] where you don’t feel quite so.. alone [laughs]

TANYA: we would never use the word DDP because we just do it all the time. We would never say ‘oh, that was a good bit of DDP there’… or… You know, cause it’s just what [org] is about.

ANDREW: So, that sounds like it’s embedded in the culture and I wondered then, because it sounded like, that was an interesting point that ‘we *are* that’ rather than ‘we *do* that’… so about being something rather than doing something. So, do you think that training is interacting with… the type of person you are? the previous experience you’ve had? The way that you think about children anyway? Or is there…

TANYA: I don’t think you can *teach* someone to…….

DAVINA: you can’t

TANYA: ……. You, I don’t, I just, I always think that to work at [org] you need to have a special formula and you can’t teach this special formula to anybody. You either… you just have it and everybody here has it.

DAVINA: You’ve got to experience it here…

TANYA: and I think, personally, you could go on the DDP training but, unless you’re, unless that’s the type of person that you are, I think it would be very difficult to do it. Because you can’t, you can’t, I don’t know, you can’t pretend to do this job!

ANDREW: Just that blazing reality of it as well… and do you, so do you think then that DDP has just augmented who you are, or strengthened, or gave a framework to think about things differently, or is it just, ‘well, actually, that’s telling me something that I already know, I already feel, I already am’?

LEXI: I think that’s what I took out of it. Do you know what, after all, we must be doing an ok job?

TANYA: Yeah.

LEXI: and, yeah, there were bits you could take and go ‘alright, ok, we could work with that’ but, you know, it was more, you know, realising that you’re actually doing ok.

ANDREW: that’s interesting. So, you were thinking Lexi, ‘oh, that’s the way I approach my work anyway’? So, it’s actually quite nice to have this person, this clinical psychologist, comes and tells me that I’m… [laughs]

LEXI: yeah, I’m ok and I’ve done it ok [laughs]. We do get it wrong at times but it is really nice to know that, yeah, actually… so that’s what I took out of it

DAVINA: I like it that we’ve all got the same practice after the training as well and we all know where each other is coming from?

TANYA: Yeah, cause part of the DDP training number two, level two, number two, is, in a group of three, you share *your* personal story with two colleagues… to sort of think, or I suppose to help you understand where your colleagues come from when they react to a situation… and it’s quite scary doing that. I think it helps you to understand just how difficult it is for the children to face their past when you’re asked to do it as an adult. You know, a fairly stable adult… and we’re asking these kids to do this all the time. I think it does, it helps. Not only where the kids are coming from but also understanding that adults will react to things based on their experience and their upbringings… and it doesn’t necessarily mean it’s wrong because you did it in a different way.

ANDREW: Yeah, cause you’re a different person?

TANYA: So, everybody is doing their best based on the experiences that they have

ANDREW: Yeah interesting… It’s interesting that as well, because you often hear about it in terms of practice, that you need to be person-centred, you need to treat every child as an individual but, actually, within that, so is every worker? With their own experience and stuff like that… so load of diversity of experience and ways of going about achieving the same kinda outcomes?

TANYA: And you get, what’s quite good in here is that everybody has got things that annoy them more that others and we’re quite good at, you know, if I’ve been told to reign it in or [laughs] you know if someone’s pushed a button of mine, that’s quite good. People are really good here at assessing a situation, realising that maybe the adult needs to have five minutes away and just saying ‘look, I’ll swap in with you, you go and get a cup of tea’ – that’s really good here. I think sometimes you can’t recognise your own dysregulation and someone saying ‘go and get five minutes’ that’s really useful.

ANDREW: Oh, God, I could really use somebody to tell me when I’ve to [laughs] reign it in – I can totally empathise with that when I start going off on one! [all laughing] I need to get somebody that says ‘Andrew, you know, somebody’s pushed your buttons Andrew, gonna reign yourself in and go and get a cup of tea’! Listen, I’m really aware, I don’t want to take up too much of your time. I know how precious it is and how busy you are so I really appreciate you giving me some of your time today. Just before we finish up, it’s just to check if there are any questions or any points of clarification or anything that you wanted to ask me at all?

LEXI: no..

TANYA: It’s just a shame you can’t come in and do it in person

ANDREW: It, Stirling Uni has kind of got a three-line whip because it’s lockdown. I see the schools are going to actually open and, I don’t know how the risk assessment is going to go, but I would be much more comfortable with that. That’s the kind of research that I do, where I’m actually there, and chatting this stuff over in more casual, day-to-day, while I’m able to see how things work in day-to-day practice, that’s what, I love that.

TANYA: It’s easier for you to see it than it is for us to describe it.

ANDREW: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, I would agree with that. So hopefully, if I an get out, I’ll be out… I suppose, one of the benefits of doing this, obviously I met you guys just before Christmas, just briefly, when that dog ate the beetroot em and..

TANYA: Oh yeah, that’s right

ANDREW: weird things that stick in my mind, I don’t know why. I’ll stop that recording…