



Foster care: towards a theory of negotiated upbringing

Claire Cameron, Centre for the Understanding of Social Pedagogy

Today

- Limitations of reliance on attachment theory
- The basis for foster care in Europe: data from 11 countries
- Mollenhauer's 'upbringing'
- An intergenerational and rights perspective
- Towards 'negotiated upbringing'

Attachment theory dominates

- 1946: foster care preferred
- 1951 'warm intimate continuous relationship' essential to avoid irreversible mental health consequences
- Now: Programmes and therapies abound
- Brain research
- Empirical evidence does not support reliance on attachment
- Babies' multiple attachments
- Does not reflect complexity of children's lives
- Not necessarily helpful for older young people

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Scholarly articles for foster care theory

Foster Care: Theory & Practice (ILS 130) - [George](#) - Cited by 157

... and inclusive practice in **foster care**: An empirical study - [Palmer](#) - Cited by 141

... **theory** of mind among maltreated children in **foster care** ... - [Pears](#) - Cited by 140

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They are dependent on the physical and emotional availability of the key adults who take care of them. Their relationships with adults are crucial to their trust of ...

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Foster care in 11 European countries

- Preference for private family over institutional care - Scotland, England, Austria and Sweden.
- Developmental and learning orientation towards child welfare on behalf of society - France, Denmark, Poland and Lithuania.
- An alternative to residential care – Germany, Croatia
- Providing ‘stability’ and ‘normality’ - Switzerland.

Young people's perspectives

- Not singled out or different
- Belong – ‘just like their own child’
- Carers have respect for birth families
- Contact with siblings
- Can develop and ‘get lives in order’

**Congruence with moral and educative
concept of ‘upbringing’**

Upbringing: England and Germany

- The Children Act 1989 and subsequent amendments refer to the role of the court in making the **child's welfare the paramount consideration** where any question of upbringing is being determined. The Children Act 1989 also specifies that local authorities must **promote the upbringing of children in need by their parents in their area by providing an appropriate range and level of services**. In research and official documents, long term placements are referred to as for '**care and upbringing**'.
- Upbringing refers to the major German concepts of Erziehung and Bildung. Erziehung refers to interactive and co-productive **adult child relations** that shape upbringing in both families and in formal care settings; Bildung refers to a **process of self-education** in both formal and informal settings – training a person with special attention to intellectual abilities. Families have the major responsibility for upbringing and the state has a responsibility when families fail. But upbringing is more than just Erziehung and Bildung, as it includes also **care, solidarity, commitment, living together and shared privacy**.

Foster care and upbringing

- Included within broad conceptions of state's role –Scotland, Croatia
- Private family model dominates – meaning of upbringing assumed and not explored
- Less relevant in countries with shorter placements (England)

No consensus

Mollenhauer on upbringing

- A universal experience
- Passing on valued cultural heritage to prepare children to face the future
- Inseparable from language, work, culture

Foster carers are ‘upbringers’ on behalf of society

Foster care as

- Experts in everyday life: know and educate young people, negotiate spaces between home and other spheres
- Reflective practitioners: evaluate a 'good upbringing' against own experiences
- 'Being with' young people: conveying self within relationship; what positively contributes?
- Making judgements: what to (re-)present about adult life, what not to

The 'upbringing relationship'

- Altruistic – selfless care for the sake of the child
- Commitment – long term, solidarity, purposeful
- Everyday life activities – routines, adventures
- Ends – when child no longer benefits from asymmetry of relationship, becomes mutual, reciprocal

Challenges for foster care

- Highly complex dynamics in which to sustain upbringing relationship
- Often few shared values, cultural ideas about 'normality'
- Children's backgrounds (abuse/neglect)
- Demands of the 'system'
- Positioning young people as rights holders

Rights and participation

- UNCRC 1989 listen to children's views and involve them in decision-making (art 12)
- Young people's contribution to family life as carers, doing chores, bringing fun, affection, creativity and learning to bear
- Agency – active participants in families

Towards a 'negotiated upbringing'

- Meaningful relationships
- Avoid reliance on the single primary carer
- Connect foster care with the wider educational, social and cultural framework for bringing up children
- Recognition and reframing of the young person's prior experiences of family life

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