

7 th International Foster Care Network Meeting
Padova, 9-11 September 2013
Foster Care in Europe: what do we know about
outcomes and evidence?

Experiment on a bilingual cross
cultural approach in a foster care
situation: an access to
childhood's memories (segregated
systems) of maternal
grandfather's foster care family.

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Intro:

The present research began in a little foster care association (Asbl) placed in Bruxelles “La famille d’accueil” where I worked as a visiting foster care psychologist.

We, the resident psychologist Mrs Th. Hynderick and me, were very interested about the Anthony’s grandfather experience as a little child, particularly on how he lived his childhood in his family settled in Belgium after the great immigration’s flux from Italy on 1950.

1. Aim

It was considered that this experiment could have been a first pilot study to evaluate the opportunity to realize a transformative offer in favour of the foster care family (Mr. Genovese) to empower his caregiving competence involved with a better modulated educational role.

Our *hypothesis* was that if it had been possible to reach a past memory experience as a child, Mr. Genovese would have been able to be a better foster carer with his nephew Anthony, 5 years old, because of the possibility to elaborate, and integrate in his internal world, his relationship with his own father and the related feelings.

2. Method:

To overcome some psychological reef, based on a linguistic gap, and promote an integrative processing of old experience's memories, it was necessary to create a bilingual and cross cultural device formed by two psychologists that could interact with Mr. Genovese simultaneously in two languages: French as integration and actual language and Italian as mother tongue, the language his father talked with, a more “emotional” language.

3. Tools:

It was work out a semi-structured interview that could allow to reach informations in both languages, french and italian:

- we planned two meetings of 1,30 hour length each one for submit the bilingual interview at T0,
- we established to be free in word taking turn to facilitate with an easier and more natural context for Mr. Genovese to express himself.

That's why also we decided to not directly record the interview but, as soon as it was possible, once in our bureau we wrote down contents and trying to integrate our impression, emotional responses and acknowledges with the literally interview's transcription.

4. The interview was structured in 2 areas:

1) Experience as foster care family, educational role

- Competence to stay in tune with children needs
- Competence to offer limits and authority
- Competence of holding and reassurance

2) Experience as little child, son of an italian immigrant

- Memories of feelings about being loved and held from his father
- Memories of feelings about father authority's exercise
- Memories of feelings about being understood in his needs

The interview was composed of 2 open questions on any of 6 sections considered above.

So 12 was questions to be proposed in two different sessions in two consecutive days.

Questions were proposed using french as priority language, but Mr. Genovese was encouraged to use italian language too, e.g. for express himself when he shifted on italian to use some dialectal expressions or to address himself to me as italian speaker, in this case i answered using italian too. We noted that just knowing to have an italian speaker was a stimulation to use italian language as a mother tongue and that it was an easy associative way to narrate about his childhood experience.

5. Follow up interview

After one month two interviews was performed to have a T1 expected modification's measure in managing educational behaviour of the foster care family. Mr. Genovese was asked to share with us his observations about how and how much our intervention was useful in helping him to take a better way to be a foster caregiver.

The follow up interview was focused on a survey of improved competence on self-reflection and taking awareness about relational exchange between the foster care family and little Anthony.

We was able to observe and share with Mr. Genovese that his way to address himself to Anthony had become more emphatic and at the same time more authoritative, i.e., Mr. Genovese referred that when he had to recall Anthony to a prohibition he didn't use a strong tone and an imperative form but he tried to smoothly ask Anthony to come out from the kitchen, and to be listen he repeated more firmly phisically approaching to invite Anthony in giving up his activity while proposing another one (little Anthony was playing a football in the kitchen).

6. Results and outcomes:

Improved educational competence of Anthony's grandfather, Mr. Genovese, was verified with 2 follow up interviews where it was stated to reach operational indexes evidence based to measure transformations about parental abilities in represent caregiver role.

This device has had a big quality impact on Mr. Genovese psyche so that was, for him, possible to talk about deeply emotional episodes he lived with his father, particularly referable to his father's strong manner to represent authority.

6.1 Results and outcomes:

The supposition is that reflecting on our own experience with our caregivers:

- give us a new mental state,
- producing better integration of positive and negative feelings,
- which is a good base to begin a transformation path for benevolence oriented internal objects.

7. Conclusion:

The present study based on an experiment with a complex technique, realised on a bilingual and cross cultural approach, that allowed us to intercept deep contents deposited in episodic memory demonstrate that there is a strong linguistic influence in possibility to detect very old experiences, take them on surface and promote their elaboration in view of a better awareness of own internal working models.

It seems that to overcome psychological defences we can take benefices in using mother tongue with immigrant population.

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