Foster care: towards a theory of negotiated upbringing
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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

02. Attachment theory and research | Fostering and Adoption
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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Fostering - Attachment - Social Care Institute for Excellence
www.scie.org.uk/publications/guides/guide07/carers/.../simmonds.asp

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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
References

• Selby, J. and Bradley, B.