

Using mixed qualitative methods to capture the interactions and practices of everyday life in a new foster family

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The aim of the study

- The aim of the study was to examine young people's everyday life in their different contexts after entering various types of foster families, and to identify processes that influence their sense of belonging

Theoretical perspectives

- A “sociology of childhood”, in which the young people are seen as active participants and subjects in cooperation with the surrounding world (see e.g. James, Jenks & Prout, 1998).
- A microsociological with focus on emotions – how successful routines and rituals of everyday life increase the emotional energy and solidarity in a group, e.g. a family or the opposite (Collins, 2004). The importance of emotions like guilt, shame, joy etc. for strengthened or weakened social bonds (e.g. Scheff, 1997)

Respondents

- 17 young people, 13-16, 9 girls, 8 boys
- Their foster parents and birth parents
- 6 in kinship, 6 in other network and 5 in traditional foster families
- 11 adolescents have a Swedish background, 6 are born outside Europe (both immigrants and unaccompanied youth)
- 11 were placed voluntarily, 6 by court order

What methods could possibly capture these various aspects

- their lived experiences, that is what they are actually doing in their everyday life?
- what they are doing together with other people – their interactions in their different contexts (e.g. school, foster family)
- not only their *practices* and *interactions* but also the *meaning* connected to them – cognitive level – as well as the *emotions* – emotional level
- the process over time

Methods

- Non-standardized interviews
- Network maps
- 'Beepers'
- Video recordings
- Follow-up interviews combined with network maps and 'beepers'

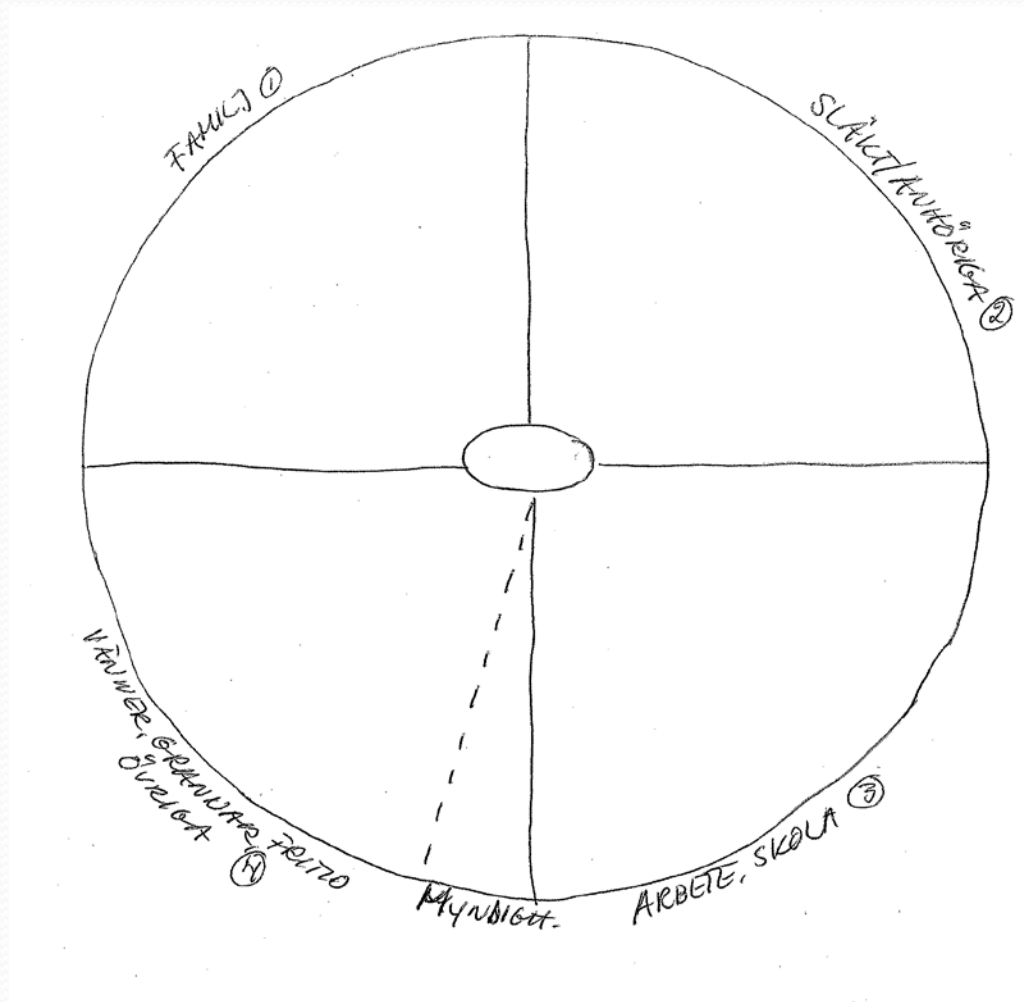
Interviews

- Non-standardised, low-structured interviews, focused on specific themes
- Interviews lasted from 30 minutes to 1 hour 45 minutes
- Tape recorder was used
- Interviews took place in the foster home, except from one interview in a library.

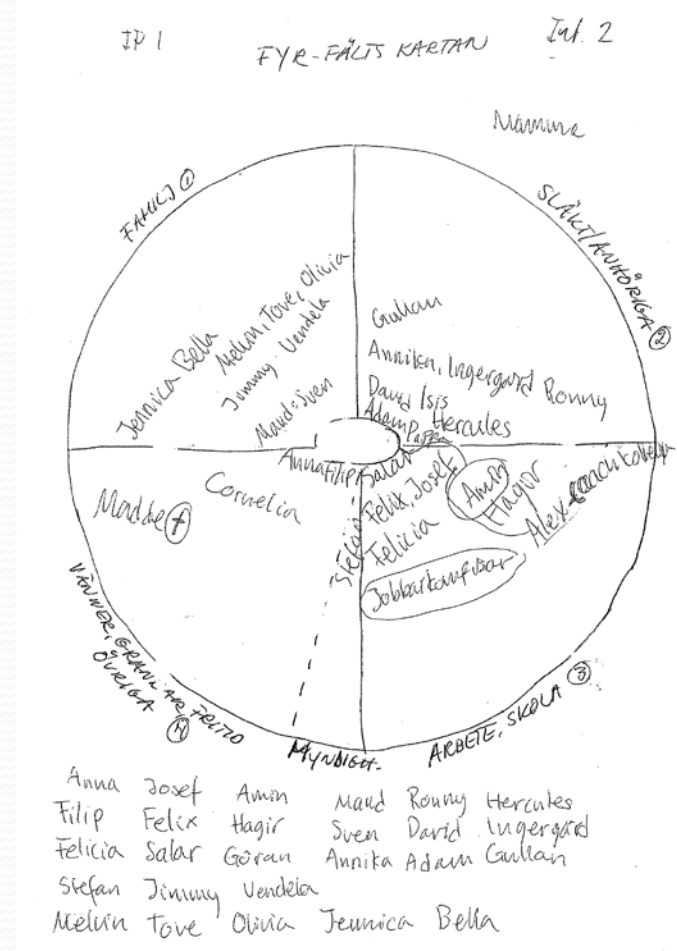
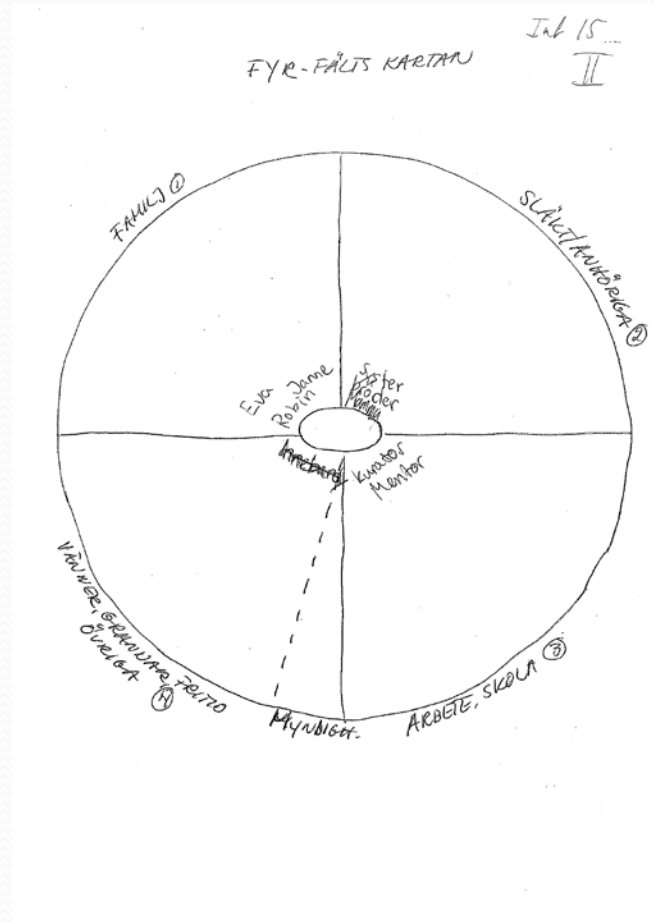
What information did I get from interviews?

- The narrative is an insight into the adolescent's emotions, experiences and relations and way of creating meaning about these at a specific time.
Example:
- *“I was so careful about showing emotions then. Now I have become much better. (...) It's probably because I feel safe here. And we've talked about how it's simply normal. It has to be okay to get angry and sad and all that” (Kristoffer, 16)*
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Network map



Examples of network maps



What information did I get from network maps?

- Information about important relations, both of positive and negative significance
- How close they feel these people are to themselves
- An overview of respondents' network in different areas and possibility to achieve support
- Also the lack of important relations becomes obvious

The Experience Sampling Method (ESM) – “Beepers”

- The same questions were sent via mobile phone, around six times a day, for six days a few weeks after the interview
- Where are you, with whom, what are you doing, how does it feel
- Rather short, concise text answers, if possible directly after they got the message
- A few days after I called them to see if there were any questions or thoughts about it.

What information did I get from 'beepers'?

- About their situation here and now over a period of time (weekdays and weekends)
- With whom they spend their time in their various contexts (school, foster family, leisure time, birth family)
- What emotions they connect to different practices, interactions, and to different people
- A complement to interviews and the other sources of information
- Besides, the young people appreciated this method

Examples 'beepers'

- Text response 13.45: Home alone. Sitting at the computer. Bored. (John, 17)
- Text response 17.00: In town with the adult school's rock group. Together with several in the group. It feels very good. (Erik, 17)
- Text response 21.20: Hi. At home. With mum. Watching TV. Just fine (Emma, 15).

Video recordings

- Of the foster family and youth in everyday situations, e.g. dinner, card-playing, afternoon coffee. About 20 minutes
- They chose the situation and made the video recording
- Video recordings were made in six families, the other declined
- In four recordings one or more people participated, eg, a birth parent, a girlfriend etc.

What information did I get from video recordings?

- The atmosphere and social interplay like who speaks to whom, about what, people's placement, responses, and body language
- A possibility to study interactions in more detail while there is possible to return to the situation
- How joking, laughing, and smiling influenced family interactions in a positive way became obvious
- That these interactions in a way worked as inclusion practices

Examples of video recordings

- A funny story from a holiday trip last year, in which they all participated, promoted a good atmosphere (keeping in mind that a holiday trip with the foster family seemed to be a strong inclusion practice)
- Joking and teasing each other about how to ride a horse with everyone laughing and smiling
- Foster mother and foster youth are laughing at the foster father's way of dipping buns in his coffee
- Foster youth spend most time using her mobile phone and less interest in card-playing with her foster parents

Some reflections

- To use different methods gives a possibility to bring out the complexity in everyday life
- The focus on time (six days, one year's follow-up) and space (foster home, school, birth family's home) exhibit the assumption of a changing reality

Articles based upon these data

- Hedin, L., Höjer, I. & Brunnberg, E. (2011). Why one goes to school: what school means to young people entering foster care. *Child and Family Social Work*, 2011, 16, 1, 43-51.
- Hedin, L., Höjer, I. & Brunnberg, E. (2011) Jokes and routines make everyday life a good life – On ‘doing family’ for young people in foster care in Sweden. *European Journal of Social Work*. Doi:10.1080/13691457.2011.579558.
- Hedin, L., Höjer, I. & Brunnberg, E. (2011) Settling into a new home as a teenager: About establishing social bonds in different types of foster families in Sweden. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33, 2282-2289. Doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2011.07.016.
- Hedin, L. (2012) A sense of belonging in a changeable everyday life – a follow-up study of young people in kinship, network, and traditional foster families. *Child and Family Social Work*. Doi:10.1111/j.1365-2206.2012.00887.x



Finally...

- Thank you so much for your attention!