

What school means to young people in foster care in Sweden

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Some previous research - background

- The educational attainment of foster children is significantly lower than that of the general population (see e.g. Berridge, 2007)
- The poorest outcomes are among young people who experienced intervention during adolescence (see e.g. Vinnerljung *et al.*, 2005)
- This may result in educational deficits after leaving care, leading to limited employment (see e.g. Jackson & Cameron, 2012)



The aim of the study

To explore young people's experiences of and attitudes towards school, and whether these change after placement in a foster family

Methods

- Non-standardized, low-structured, focussed interviews with 17 young people
- Network maps
- 'Beepers' – text responses via mobile phone, around six times a day, for six days



Previous school experiences

10 adolescents had serious difficulties at school:

Long periods of truancy
Having to retake a year
Serious troubles with peers
Etc.

School experiences after 3-18 months placement

An obvious change of school situation:

Attending school regularly

Improvement of school performance

A change of attitude towards school:

Increased interest in learning

A stronger confidence in their future possibilities

Appreciation of school

After placement – a quotation

- “I sort of started to feel better. I began to feel okay and then, well, to want to go to school and have a good future and all that. They really helped me a lot with this” (Lisa, 14)



School as an arena for learning

Good performance make the young people happy and proud

Basic conditions:

Being present at school

Listening during lessons

Doing homework

Learning – a quotation

“Yeah, I used to be absent from school a lot, you know, and I didn’t do well in school, didn’t do homework and stuff. Now, living like this, it feels almost fun to go to school all day. Yeah, so lately I haven’t been absent much, though once in a while I’ve been absent without a valid reason; and also I’ve started doing homework and I’ve passed almost all my subjects.

Interviewer: Didn’t you do that before?

No, I failed several subjects.” (Robert, 15)



School as an arena for socialization

- *The young people find their peers at school
- *Being involved in organized activities like sports and concerts gives access to peers
- *Support from teachers, peers, and school social workers is important
- * They can also be exposed for bullying from peers

Basic conditions in the everyday life of the foster family

- * Routines and rules give a feeling of safety and security and normalise daily life
- * Interactions like mutual talk and laughing together create good emotions
- * Support like assistance with homework - facilitate studying
- * Participation in discussions – gaining influence and self-confidence



Finally - school matters...

- Succeeding in school gives hope for the future and a feeling of pride
- The young people's agency is illuminated in their capacity to make educational improvements but also their vulnerability as foster children
- Routines, rules, and support in the foster family gives a foundation for scholastic achievement
- Assessing foster parents' attitudes to school and how they organize everyday routines related to school is important
- Breakdowns in foster care tend to effect the school situation in a negative way



Based on the articles

- 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*, 16 (1), 43-51.
- 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



Thank you for your attention!