Reunification-processes
from long term foster care to the birth family

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Content

- Some remarks in advance...
- Knowledge about reunification processes
- Aims
- Approach
- Methods
- Results
- Questions

Some remarks in advance...

- **practical issues and benefits:**
  More knowledge about reunfication processes

- **theoretical analysis and benefits:**
  Chance to analyze some very complex, dynamice, unpredictable processes of humans in small familial figurations

  - Process of reunification as a process of turbulences
  - Idea: each person involved has to deal with transformation and adaption processes

- 2.5 to 5% reunification

- Very low rate, but high level of turbulences

- German law is apparently precise
  Reunification is an basic aim if
    a) there is no risk the well-being of the child
    b) the process does not take longer than a <u>proper period of time</u>

- Ideologically influenced discussion

- role identities of carers: more parents than carers

- Family engagement is fundamental

- Accurate, individual assessment and case planning

- Services should be practical and comprehensive – and adressing all aspects of family life

- Family must be included and engaged in planning, selection of services and assessment of progress

- Attention on: family history, dynamic developement, relationships, parents´ health, emotional functioning, community environment

We want to know more about

... the dynamic process and development of reunifications

... how to get more successful reunifications

... how to avoid hopeless reunifications

A sample of 20 cases including planned and unplanned reunification processes as well as cases with a high likeliness of successful reunification and still open outcome.
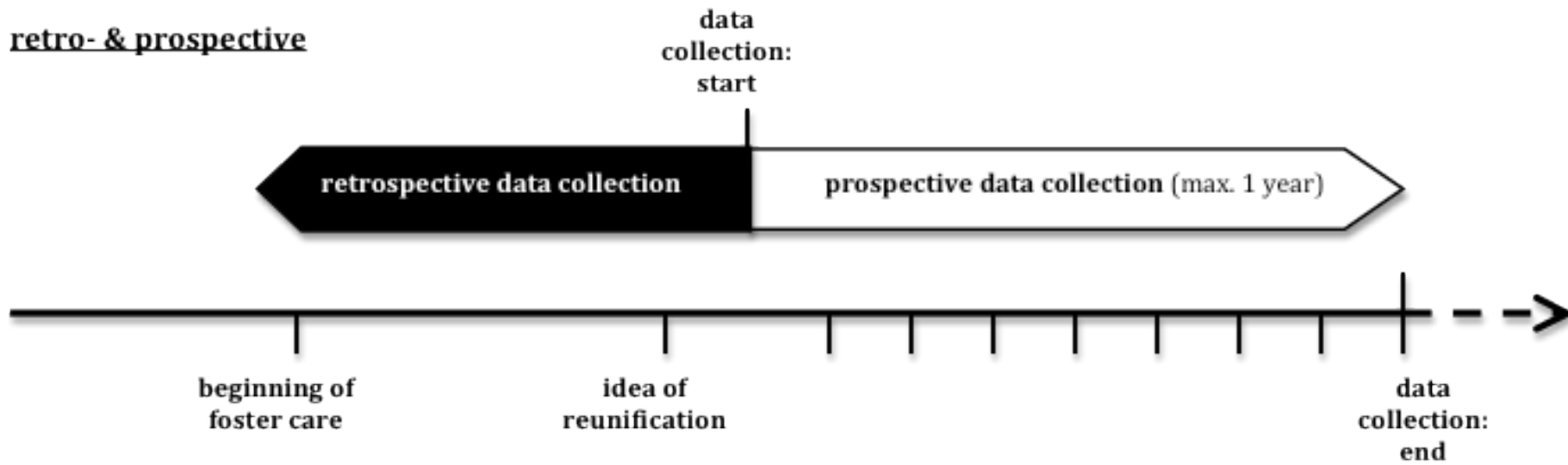
Our research design:
- retrospective & prospective
- multiperspective
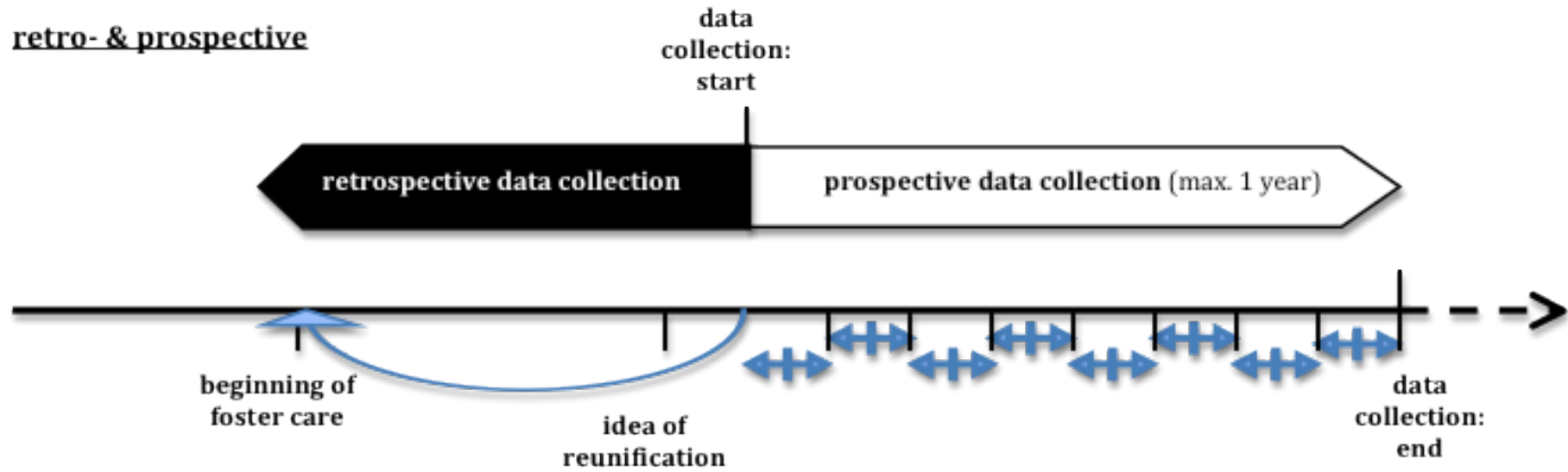
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Why prospective data collection?

- Social figurations in process
  (from static to dynamic model)

- multi-phase-model

- includes the interdependency between
  involved parties

Approach

retro- & prospective

data
collection:
start

retrospective data collection | prospective data collection (max. 1 year)

beginning of
foster care

idea of
reunification

data
collection:
end

Approach

retro- & prospective

data collection: start

retrospective data collection

prospective data collection (max. 1 year)

beginning of foster care

idea of reunification

data collection: end

Why multiperspective data collection?

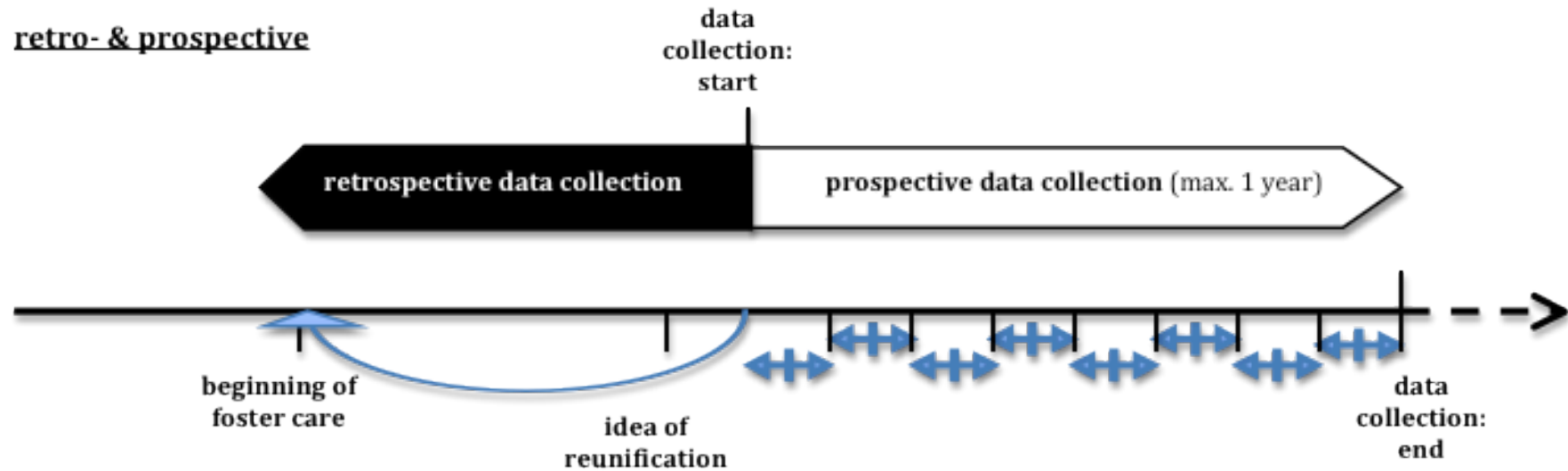To get different and controversial opinions

We want to know what is necessary:

…to get an idea of different needs

…for mutual understanding
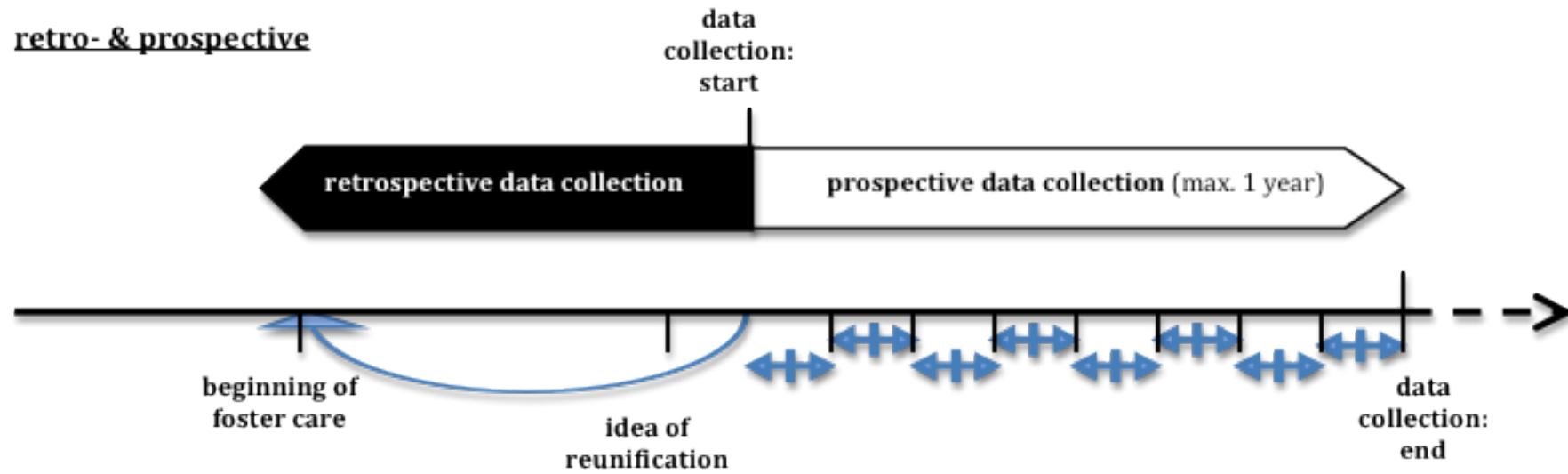
…to lose reservation

…to support cooperation
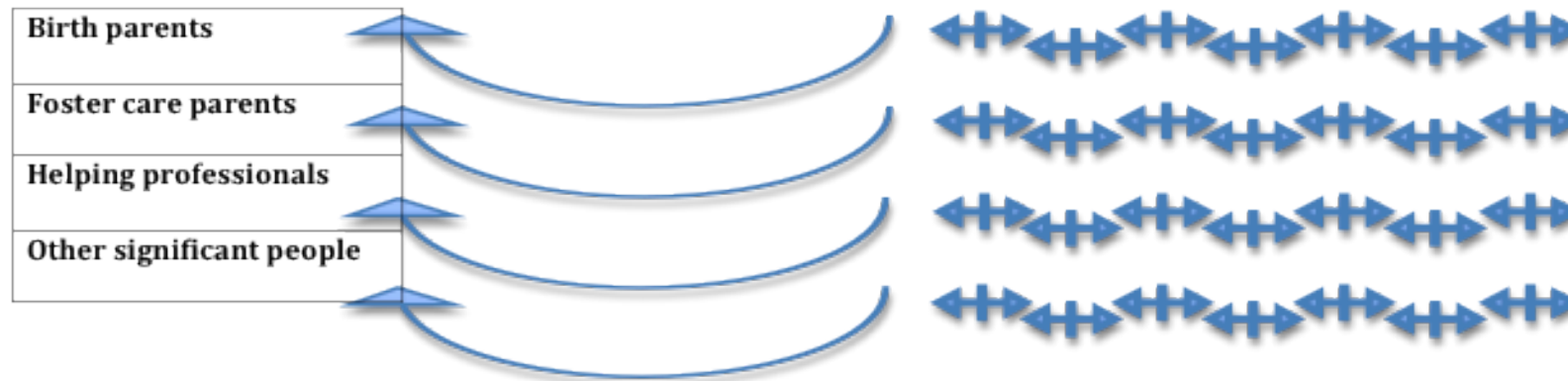
Approach

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data
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multiperspective

| Birth parents |
| Foster care parents |
| Helping professionals |
| Other significant people |

Approach

Methods

- focused interviews (face-to-face)
- consecutive interviews (phone)
- analysis of local authorities child service records
- participant observations

Different perspectives <u>at the beginning</u> of foster care:

<u>Birth-parents</u>: It is hard, but we accept the support of foster care to keep custody of our child. If our family-situation is stable and solid again, we will take our child back.

<u>Foster-parents</u>: We will give this child a warm and secure home. He has to deal with negative experiences – we will help him. His birth-parents have a lot of trouble, so nobody is believing that they will get him back.

<u>Helping-professionals:</u> The child is save now. We have to support the foster-family with their new child and organize the visiting days with the birth-family. Situation has calmed down.

<u>Child:</u> These family is nice but really different. I am missing my mum. I would like to know how my sister feels. I really do not know what is happening next.

birth-parents:

1.) Kind of support is not understandable

2.) Who is my contact person?

3.) What do I have to do?

4.) How to participate in making decisions?

consequence: extensive intensification to work
with birth-parents and birth-family

First results

foster-parents:

1.) Reunification? Nobody told us...

2.) show great solicitudes about the child

3.) lonesome and exploited

consequence: recruitment, preparation and
    assistance have to be adapted

children:

1.) I am fond of both of you…

2.) Who is hearing me?

consequence: concerned children need people who pay attention to their signals. And sometimes they have special and concrete ideas…

First results - general

- high level of transparency during the whole process

- meaning of agreements

- contact person and responsibility for parents, child, foster carers

- regularity and complexity of case management is not adequate

- huge differences between diverse agencies (system-level) and caseworkers (individual-level)

- How do you call it, when it is not a reunification?

- How long or permanent is long term foster care?

References

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