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## **Towards a theory of upbringing in foster care in Europe**

### **Abstract**

*Across Europe, foster care is the preferred intervention for children who cannot live with their birth families, yet just what states look for from foster care is rarely articulated. Its use and intended purpose can reflect historical peculiarities but also the nature of the welfare regime existing in a particular country. This article reports on a preliminary exploration of fostering across 11 European countries, reflecting different care and education traditions. Irrespective of variations in history and welfare ideology, and any specialist tasks, we argue that foster care, by its nature, fulfils elements of what might be described as an upbringing role on behalf of society. What is meant by upbringing and how might it be theorised? In this article we draw upon the work of the German social pedagogue, Klaus Mollenhauer, to develop a model of upbringing that might help elucidate what is involved in bringing up children, including those in state care. The idea of passing on a valued cultural heritage is central to Mollenhauer's understanding of upbringing. This happens regardless of social policy intent merely by virtue of shared daily living and the development of pedagogical relationships. We argue that a concept of upbringing might offer an integrating cross-generational theoretical framework for foster care across different welfare regimes.*

### **Keywords**

Foster care, Europe, upbringing, Mollenhauer, state care

## **Introduction**

From different starting points and for different ideological and financial reasons, most of Europe is witnessing a shift away from residential care in institutions, towards family based care, particularly for younger children (Kindler et al. 2010). In almost all European states, foster care with substitute families is the preferred solution for children who cannot live with their birth families (Eurochild, 2010; Everychild, 2011). Kinship care by family members is also increasingly common and may be considered more beneficial than foster care by 'strangers' (Farmer 2010; Vinnerljung and Hjern, 2011; Lopez et al. 2011; Triseliotis, 2002). The family environment and relationships constructed within foster care are argued to provide children with a 'secure base' that promotes their competence and confidence (Beek and Schofield 2004) and their educational outcomes (Jackson and Ajayi 2007). As rates of children in care rise in many European states (Gilbert 2011), the pressure on child welfare services to maximise the quality and supply of foster care increases. Yet, despite the scale of its use across Europe the foster care role remains largely under-theorised.

Building on our work within the auspices of the Centre for Understanding of Social Pedagogy (CUSP) at the Institute of Education, this paper begins a process of comparative research by means of a scoping review of the purpose and place of foster care in 11 European member states. It goes on to suggest that a revitalised understanding of upbringing may provide a helpful conceptual underpinning for foster care services that are of high quality and promote the life chances of children in public care. In proposing a theory of upbringing we draw on the work of the

German social pedagogue Klaus Mollenhauer (1928-1998), who offers a persuasive account worth exploring for its potential relevance in foster care. Upbringing, according to Mollenhauer, is a universal experience, and is first and foremost a matter of passing on a valued cultural heritage to prepare children to face the future (see Smith, 2013). Upbringing happens all around us, 'so general as to be inseparable from basic human realities like language, work and – in the broadest sense—human culture' (Mollenhauer, 1983: 1). Foster carers (and indeed residential care workers) are in essence "upbringers" 'on behalf of society' (Cameron and Moss, 2011: 13). The nature of their task might be thought to position them as 'experts in everyday life'. Such an understanding of the task, we would argue, holds across different welfare regimes.

### **Divergence and convergence across welfare regimes**

In this paper we bring together data on foster care in different welfare state regimes spanning liberal (England, Scotland), social democratic (Denmark, Sweden), corporate conservative familial (Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France) and central and eastern European countries (Croatia, Lithuania and Poland). Acknowledging that there are differences within and across countries, welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen 1991; 1999; Fenger 2006) offer one way of expressing differences in the way states distribute resources for care and education. Esping-Andersen's typology has been critiqued for its failure to include some resources, such as unpaid care work, but is a useful starting point in generating broad characteristics of welfare states. Such a categorisation may also indicate how differentially weighted perspectives around how adults interact with children, such as rights, protection, care or education,

influence child care practices, often failing to locate these within any overarching or integrative understanding of the multiplicity of roles and tasks involved in bringing children up. For example, fostering services in England are inspected using guidance that affords a predominant emphasis to notions of safety and safe caring (DFE 2011), which arguably leads to a restricted conception of the multi-layered nature of bringing children up. Furthermore, an orientation towards a particular dominant theoretical paradigm can also be apparent in different welfare regimes' approaches to foster or residential care. For instance, attachment theory has achieved almost hegemonic status in much of the liberal welfare regime (Anglo-American) child care literature (e.g. Howe 1995; Howe 2005; Daniel et al. , 2011) We make the case here that while attachment may provide important insights it is not itself sufficient to capture the wider cultural elements entailed by upbringing.

Gilbert (2011) notes two predominant orientations to child welfare practice which map onto welfare regimes: i) child protection, common in liberal regimes, which frames child abuse in legalistic and individually pathologising ways and where services are seen as more residual and less accessible; and ii) family support, found in continental European countries, where child abuse is seen as a problem requiring professional help for families on a partnership basis. In these countries, children in public care are more likely to be placed with the voluntary agreement of parents.

Gilbert (2011) notes a convergence in the above orientations to practice over time and the emergence of a third orientation, named 'child development', characterised by the state's investment in children and seeking to shape childhood through early intervention.

While there are differences there are also some similarities across welfare regimes. In all European countries, for instance, the family has changed during the last century (Peuckert 2004, Beck 1997). This change includes a shift of power-balance (Wolf 2007, Gayet, 2004) for example in relation to gender roles, evident in legislative changes such as those concerning female suffrage, divorce and women's rights to education, paid work and economic status more generally. Changes are also apparent in family life in the historically allocated roles between parents (Jurczyk and Schier 2007; Jurczyk et al., 2010). Additionally, there has been an intergenerational shift in power, for example in the wake of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Liebel, 2013). Within families, values about children's roles are increasingly moving away from the obedience of earlier generations towards children being more self-confident and assertive (du Boys-Reymond, 1998; Büchner, 1994; Büchner et al., 1995). Beck (1997) identifies this process as a democratization of the family, where relationships between parents themselves and between parents and children increasingly tend towards an ideal of partnership.

This is not a linear process, but one that is mixed up with other processes: children tend to have more power in families, and upbringing tends to be more democratic, yet at the same time children and young people today strongly rely on their families in many dimensions, modern childhoods are thus family childhoods (Herlth et al. 2000). The reliance is often extended into the third life decade (ibid.) and young

people for instance tend to stay longer in the parental household (Eurostat 2014) with considerable variations in Europe.

Despite these convergences, there is some evidence that families in some European countries tend to be more child-centred focussing on the child's perspective and participation, and emphasising the importance of a democratic family atmosphere, while in some others there remains an emphasis on obedience, respect and discipline (du Boys-Reymond 1998; Büchner 1994; Büchner et al. 1995).

Another distinction is around the question of the private and the public in relation to family life. In Switzerland, Germany and Austria, the family is strongly considered as the private sphere, to be protected from the potentially harmful public sphere (Habermas 1991). From this perspective, educational institutions have had limited space in children's life, especially for younger age groups of children. Alternatively, in other countries, particularly in France, institutions occupy an important place in children's everyday life, even at a very young age, opening the family to the public sphere which is considered enriching rather than harmful. Likewise, there is much diversity within Europe in how alternatives to family life, such as foster care and residential care are understood. Considering these major country and cultural differences, it is not surprising that there are difficulties defining a common understanding of 'upbringing'.

## **Methods**

In May 2012 CUSP hosted a meeting of research experts in foster care in Europe with a view to identifying relevant comparative research questions for social pedagogy and foster care. Representatives from 12 countries attended<sup>1</sup>. These 'country experts' were either members of the CUSP group and had extensive social pedagogic research experience, or were invitees due to their expertise in the field of foster care. Before the meeting, country experts were asked to prepare a short brief outlining the position of foster care in relation to other forms of placement for children, the state of research and what questions remained to be addressed. Subsequently, country experts continued to work together, having identified that the concept of upbringing was one worth exploring in a cross-national context. The convenor (Cameron) asked country experts to prepare a second briefing for the group, outlining definitions of upbringing both in general and for children in public care and particularly in foster care. The information contained in these two briefs, with the consent of the various country contributors, formed the data for this paper.

While each informant was provided with standard questions, there were differences in how they responded, reflecting both the very different approaches and legal and policy frameworks across countries, and the extent to which research evidence was available. Country briefings were consolidated into tables summarising key points and discussed with experts via email correspondence and at a second CUSP meeting in December 2012. Contributors also commented on early drafts of this paper. Our analysis of the information provided sought common and divergent conceptual frames of reference across the different welfare regime types and to capture some

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<sup>1</sup> One country withdrew shortly after the meeting so data on 11 countries is presented.



key features of different national approaches without claiming any more rigorous comparative methodology.

The first question we address in drawing together this data is the purpose, and the place, of foster care in each country's services (Table 1). Arising from this, and the varying country contexts, we develop one aspect of the foster care role, which applies across national contexts and differing welfare regimes that of 'upbringing' (Table 2). We analyse both upbringing in general, and in relation to children in public care (Table 3). In doing so we identify the work of Klaus Mollenhauer and his exploration of the culture dimensions of upbringing as helpful in articulating an upbringing function which underpins what foster carers do, just by virtue of being with children, irrespective of differing national policy orientations. Upbringing is discussed in relation to the role of early childhood education and care services in Denmark and Sweden (Boström, 2006; Kaga et al., 2010) but is largely unarticulated within an English language foster care context. Mollenhauer (1983) is one of the few social theorists to discuss upbringing whose work is available in English translation (Freisen, 2014). In German, Giesecke has extended Mollenhauer's work to take into account growing societal diversity and pluralism. However, for the purposes of its application to foster care Mollenhauer offers a helpful starting point. His conceptualisation of upbringing takes us beyond psychological perspectives, such as attachment theory, but also beyond prescriptive task focussed guidance, to include the dimension of cross generational relations and in so doing, gives depth and status to the role of foster carers.

## **The purpose and place of foster care**

A policy preference for foster care in different countries can reflect historical trends in its use that do not necessarily correlate with welfare regimes. Sweden, for instance, demonstrates a high usage while fellow social democratic country Denmark has one of the lowest proportions of children in foster care, and these are nearly all younger children: 'the general tendency is that younger children are placed in foster families and older children are placed in state or private residential care centres' (Bryderup, 2012:1).

As documented in Table 1, in some countries, the purpose and place of foster care appears to be framed by an ideological preference for private family environments over institutional care. A strong commitment to a family type placement was given as a rationale for foster care in Scotland, England, Austria and Sweden. In England, for instance, this reference might be traced back to the Curtis Committee (1946), which argued that children in public care ought to be brought up in a way that was as close as possible to an ordinary family (Jackson 2006). Milligan (2012) points out that in Scotland, another liberal welfare regime, the lower costs attached to foster care also contribute to a preference for its use. In Poland, which has a relatively high proportion of foster care placements, fostering 'dates back to the use of wet nurses for infants in residential homes for abandoned children, and a custom of bringing up (children) outside the family of origin which existed in knightly, noble and burghers families' (Kolanckiewicz, 2012:1).

For others, foster care is located within a more explicit developmental and learning orientation towards child welfare on behalf of society. In France, Denmark, Poland and Lithuania, the emphasis was on facilitating children's development within foster care, while in Germany, the purpose is expressed in a more neutral way, as an alternative to residential care, and in Switzerland from the perspective of providing 'stability' and 'normality'. The place of foster care within a range of options for children in public care varies from around 40% of placements in Denmark and Austria to 75% in Sweden and England. In two countries, Austria and Switzerland, there are no regularly collated national statistics on this question; foster care is not the responsibility of a single national ministry with the result that accurate and up-to-date information is often partial or absent.

Table 1 about here

Another factor to consider is the views of young people. These purposes of foster care largely correlate with evidence from the UK and Germany about what children seek within foster care placements. Sinclair's (2005) review of UK studies found that children generally want to feel that they are not singled out or are different because they are in foster care, that they belong in their foster home and that carers have respect for their original families with no conflict of loyalty. Young people want to have control over their own lives and to know that attention is paid to their views, to have opportunities in education and that, while in foster care, the carers act as 'a springboard for getting their lives in order' (Sinclair 2005). Similar trends are apparent in Germany. Reimer's (2008, 2011) biographical narrative study of 100

children who grew up in foster care found that they have a strong desire for normality: they like to know that they are accepted as part of the foster family, and, as one said '(I want to be) just like their own child'. They like to receive attention and appreciation from their foster families. At the same time it is crucial for them to be in mutual, respectful contact with their birth parents and especially with their siblings. These accounts have in common an emphasis on constructive and respectful relationships that allow opportunities for self-expression and give direction to their present and future lives. Arguably, these dimensions of foster care signify a concern with the moral and educative concept of 'upbringing'.

### **Characteristics of upbringing**

Country experts were asked to provide a definition of upbringing in relation to children, and in relation to foster care/state care, drawing on policy and research evidence. The data presented in Table 2 largely indicates that the family service orientation-familial corporative conservative countries are also more explicitly educational in the focus of their definition of upbringing, while the two social democratic countries, along with Scotland and Switzerland, refer to both care and education. What is also notable is the investment in childhood orientation in Sweden and Croatia. England stands out for having a care oriented concept where the role of the state is defined by children's welfare in primarily parental contexts. The English government's 'charter for foster carers' focuses on foster care as a place for stability, helping repair earlier emotional damage and providing a 'decent second chance at a safe and fulfilling childhood' (DfE 2011, foreword).

Table 2 about here

Table 3 summarises understandings of upbringing for children in public care and foster care in each country. The main message to emerge is that the concept of upbringing is underdeveloped in both research and policy in relation to foster care. Fostered children are included within broad conceptions of the state's role in children's upbringing in Scotland and Croatia, but in most of the countries, the private family model of upbringing dominates and the term is largely undefined and does not apparently warrant further exploration. In England, where placements are often short term or for a specific purpose, the role of upbringing appears less relevant. It may be more prominent in contexts where there are longer lasting placements. Overall, upbringing is largely seen as part of the role of parents in their task of raising children. As such, it might be understood as a non-directive educational task that can be undertaken by parents but also by others, to complement, support or replace parents. The 'everydayness' of parenting and substitute parenting may have inhibited wider theorising of upbringing. A further possible explanation for this may be that foster care research has been closely aligned with parenting, itself closely aligned with developmental psychology, and which may have obscured thinking about the educational and wider cultural aspects of upbringing.

Table 3 about here

### **Mollenhauer's concept of upbringing**

Examination of the preliminary data presented here suggests that while reference to upbringing underpins different national understandings of the role of foster care, and foster carers across all countries are unquestionably tasked with promoting children's upbringing, there is little by way of consensus in the literature or policy and legislation across these 11 European countries to indicate what upbringing might mean or how it might frame fostering practice. A central question in this paper is whether a revitalised understanding of upbringing might provide a conceptual foundation for the role. Potentially, a better articulated understanding of the task, taking into account different national contexts might bring about improvements in areas of common concern around, for example, measures such as placement stability. Our approach is exploratory and conceptual; subsequent empirical work would be required to elaborate Mollenhauer's ideas for the particular circumstances of children in foster care.

In the rest of this paper we discuss how foster care might relate to Mollenhauer's concept of upbringing. First, we give three concrete examples of ways in which the fostering role might relate to Mollenhauer's thinking: foster carers as i) experts in everyday life; ii) reflective practitioners and iii) skilled in 'being with' or accompanying children and recognising the opportunities that this can bring.

### **Experts in everyday life**

Foster carers specialise in knowing about, and educating young people into, everyday life at home, and in negotiating spaces between home and all other

spheres young people come into contact with. This emphasis on social context and on everyday experience might be likened to the idea of a 'lifeworld orientation' (Schütz 1973), which is a central feature of German social pedagogy (Grunwald and Thiersch, 2009).

Foster carers are experts in everyday life and this idea might be afforded some conceptual purchase through the German terms *Erziehung* and *Bildung*, with which Mollenhauer was familiar. *Erziehung* can be translated loosely, as 'education', or 'upbringing', blurring the boundary between school and home, personal and professional. *Bildung* is a contested concept and its meanings include both passive transmission of facts and a much more active and open ended process of learning through meaning making and 'implies an increase in the individual's possibilities for freedom' (Dahlberg, 2013: 83). In this latter interpretation the upbringing's role is as co-traveller on the learning journey and a coach that supports and challenges the learner. *Bildung* is close in meaning to 'socialization' in that it describes the process of formation by self and others, and through multiple contexts: familial, scholastic and recreational but has a much more active sense of personal agency and mutual co-construction of knowledge than socialization implies. This broad role as upbringing contrasts with a one-dimensional concern with, for example, safety, or the psychological reductionism of currently dominant interpretations of attachment theory.

### **The need for reflective capacities among foster carers**

According to Mollenhauer, adult understandings of upbringing involve inevitably personal and subjective dimensions; we measure a sense of what might be thought of as a good upbringing against our own experiences of being brought up. While we may be grateful to our parents for aspects of the upbringing they gave us, we can generally also find fault with it; each individual's upbringing involves processes of broadening and enrichment as well as narrowing and impoverishment. This might suggest the need for foster carers to develop a reflexive understanding of their own upbringing and how this might impact on how the attitudes and practices they bring to bringing up other people's children. Since reflective thinking is an important dimension in professional learning, such capacities may arguably be more important to achieving good care than practice guidelines.

### **'Being with' children**

Merely being with children involves foster carers in upbringing. Mollenhauer (1983: 14) suggests that 'it is simply unimaginable for an adult to undertake any educational or child-rearing measure without conveying some aspect of him or herself or the way he or she lives, whether it is deliberate or not'. Foster carers thus have to pay attention to what messages they might convey to children in the course of their everyday lives and to what extent these contribute positively to their upbringing. Mollenhauer suggests that adults contribute to children's upbringing both implicitly and more consciously through processes of what he calls presentation and representation.



## **Presentation and Representation**

Mollenhauer argues that in pre-modern societies where adults and children lived their lives in largely undifferentiated ways, adults simply 'presented' a grown-up 'way of life to children in the course of sharing daily life. This process happened in a largely intuitive way, within which glances, tone of voice and gestures could assume a particular cultural meaning. Mercantalism created greater social distance and differentiation between adults and children, requiring that decisions began to be taken around which features of adult life ought to be presented to children or indeed interpreted as valuable and 'represented' and which were to be filtered out. This led to an increasing emphasis on instructional techniques and methods through which to most efficiently pass on that which was considered culturally valuable, which in turn led to the growth of specialised institutions - schools, orphanages youth clubs and, of course, foster care, all of which might play a part in children's upbringing.

Formal education thus became separated off from wider processes of upbringing; adult culture was no longer 'presented' to the child naturalistically in the course of everyday life. Friesen and Saevi (2010: 132) identify the distinction between presentation and representation thus, 'whereas processes of presentation are implicit, habitual, and in this sense natural, those of representation are artificial, relying on forethought, planning, testing, refinement, and technical expertise'. This

poses questions for carers as to the way of life that ought to be systematically represented to children and how best this might be done (Mollenhauer, 1983). The other side of the coin of what is to be represented to children is that of what needs to be filtered out? Carers need to strike the balance between ensuring an age-appropriate 'shielding' of children from harmful aspects of the adult world and helping them to push themselves and respond confidently to the challenges that everyday experience might bring. The need to protect children from some aspects of the adult world or to stage their initiation into it requires judgments to be made around children's rights and adult responsibilities. In foster care settings this tension might be played out in everyday life over questions, for instance of appropriate language, appropriate dress, attitudes towards alcohol consumption and so on.

In everyday living, there is an inevitable interplay between implicit presentation and more systematic presentation. In fact, messages that a carer might seek to transmit by explicit means are often of more limited importance than those that unwittingly seep into a child's consciousness without either the carer or child knowing anything about it (Friesen and Saevi, 2010). The pedagogical relation in this sense precedes educational methods and theories.

### **Pedagogical relationships and foster care**

We now consider some features of pedagogical relationships as they might relate to foster care. The pedagogical encounter, according to Mollenhauer, constitutes a special kind of personal relationship between adult and child marked by a number of characteristics, which we summarise below.

### *Upbringing requires a pedagogical relationship*

According to Mollenhauer, the transmission of cultural values, the development of the child, presentation and representation can only take place in the frame of a secure relationship, within which adults take the role of the upbringer and are also acknowledged in this capacity by the wider society. The pedagogical relationship is at the heart of concepts of Erziehung and Bildung.

### *Upbringing includes (altruistic) care*

Part of being an upbringer is selfless and generous care for the one that is brought up. This experience of altruistic care is not linked to future rewards but is for the sake of the child and his wellbeing. This changes according to the age and developmental state of the child.

### *Upbringing includes commitment and solidarity*

A precondition of upbringing is commitment to the one s/he brings up. Upbringing takes place in a relationship that is marked by solidarity and a long-term perspective. The upbringer has aims and a purpose for the upbringing.

Upbringing takes place in what might be identified as a common life space but also involves private space. The arena of the pedagogical relationship is everyday life activities: the development of daily routines, but also special activities, adventures, common activities such as sports, cooking, crafts, eating together, getting up together and going-to-sleep rituals, spending leisure time and working together.

*The pedagogical relation comes to an end.*

The child grows up and the asymmetry of the relation (if it is still maintained) disappears. The process of upbringing comes to an end when the child can take appropriate decisions and actions independent of adult help. They may still maintain a relationship with an adult who has acted pedagogically in the past, but this should no longer be asymmetrical. It is instead mutual and reciprocal, meaning that the pedagogical relation has dissolved and been replaced by one of friendship or mutual attachment. This, of course, is what happens in families (natural and foster), where there is a gradual relinquishing of adult authority and a corresponding assumption of responsibility on the part of a child, with a resultant shift in the nature of the relationship that exists between them.

### **The challenges of upbringing in foster care**

While pedagogical relationships between children and adults, as described by Mollenhauer, undoubtedly exist across the European countries studied, the nature and task of upbringing takes on particular complexities and raises challenges that go beyond more normative understandings. Upbringing in public care is characterized by contradictions; family life presumes a private arena, but the foster family is also a public family and may involve intensive contacts with the birth family and professionals such as social workers.

Making use of a classic social pedagogical view as a wider frame on the topic of upbringing in foster families, those affected by foster care may be considered as

human beings in difficult settings and conditions, who actively shape their biographies. Four groups of people who are especially concerned may be considered: foster carers; foster children; biological children of the foster carers and the birth family. All of them construct their biographies in a difficult setting and under complex conditions (Reimer 2011; Faltermeier 2004; Wilde 2014; Marmann 2006). Examples of the challenges faced by these groups might be that: they have no common history with one another; behaviour appears challenging and incomprehensible - from both the foster carer's and the child's perspective; open-ended rather than permanency-oriented planning in care placements; and very few cultural ideas of how foster families constitute 'normality' in their everyday lives and relationships as well as how birth parents may constitute normality as parents without a child. Not only is the way all those concerned shape their biographies particularly challenging, but the upbringing is also highly specific to the individual setting. For the foster carers, upbringing is rendered complex by the responsibilities that come from their situation as a foster family, and the children's specific backgrounds, usually characterised by abuse and/or neglect. The experience of upbringing is also more complicated for the foster child being brought up by people who are not their biological parents and having a different position in their family (such as different names). Moreover, they are also supposed to keep contact with their birth parents, and wider kin, who might also claim the role of the upbringer or be uncertain about the own role towards the child.

Moreover, the biological children of foster carers are involved in many tasks concerning the upbringing of the foster child and feel very responsible for what

happens, while, simultaneously, they are also being brought up (Marmann, 2006; Höjer, 2007). While holding responsibilities for siblings might be very common, there are strong indicators that this is quite specific and distinctive for biological-foster siblings.

A further contradictory dimension to a foster care upbringing arises when we consider the influence of the care system. As noted above, upbringing is characterized by the pedagogical relationship, which is not only acknowledged by the upbringer and the one being brought up, but also by the surrounding society. So upbringing in foster care is influenced by two systems of upbringers, the foster family and the biological family, whose values and customs may differ. And somewhere in between are professional social workers who have also their system of values. We have noted that upbringing is characterized by altruistic care, but in some jurisdictions foster parents receive payments. To what extent is it then altruistic? While upbringing is characterized by commitment and solidarity, solidarity in foster care is established by contract and may be time limited. Considering all these challenges, upbringing in foster care appears very complicated, since the frame which constitutes it is very particular.

## **Conclusions**

The central role of foster care is apparent and growing across most of Europe. Yet, such an important resource draws on no consistent underpinning theoretical rationale. In this paper we have considered the purposes of foster care expressed in

the perspectives of researchers in 11 EU states, have examined the potential of the concept of upbringing and have proposed that this may be a constructive way to conceptualise the role of foster care. Mollenhauer's work is foundational in this regard and we have used it to articulate and contextualise an understanding of how a concept of upbringing might enhance understandings of foster care and the status of foster carers. It has the potential to bridge different national contexts and welfare regimes and to take understandings of foster care beyond psychological reductionism or the prescriptivism of practice manuals to incorporate a concern for the cultural and intergenerational dimensions that are at the heart of bringing children up. Such a perspective, if taken seriously, could, we might infer, have an important impact on placement decisions and has the potential to improve outcomes in key areas of children's lives, most notably those of placement stability and by extension of educational continuity.

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