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EDITORIAL

“The adopted child is a child like any other, with his peculiarities”: a basic principle which sometimes has difficulty being applied 

The specificities of adopted children are still too often the source of unsuitable patterns of behaviour at all levels of society. More awareness raising is still necessary.

An adopted child is a child like any other with his peculiarities, is a phrase that can be repeated ad nauseam by those who participate in adoption matters. It suggests that it is important to take care of an adopted child like any other by recognising his past and being aware of specific needs, which he may put to the test. This basic principle, full of common sense, is sometimes, however, difficult to implement. In a worldwide society, which paradoxically leaves little room for differences, the particularities of the adopted child too often sparks off unsuitable behaviour, generally by a lack of familiarity or information, and all the more so if the particularities of the child are visible.

Over-empathetic behavioural patterns

Beyond racist and discriminatory attitudes that evidently figure in the register of inexcusable conduct, less flagrant ones can be very damaging. Thus, a concern too keenly shown or an empathy supported for an adopted child can be inappropriate, constantly reminding the child of his difference. It is not uncommon to observe the contrasting attitudes of the family circle with regard to the siblings, depending upon whether the child is biological or adopted. For example, there are many who have a tendency to be much more conciliatory with an adopted child, "because the poor thing has already experienced such difficulties" or "because adopted children often have a difficult character". These attitudes of course

start from good intentions, but rarely help the child to integrate into his environment, and to grow up and fully take his place of a child like others. Rather, they tend to imprison him in his differences and keep him in a state of weakness in a difficult position.

Clichés, the hackneyed phrases for stereotyped behaviour

As Mary Josée Lambert the Quebecan authoress, highlights in her book "Adoption and Apprenticeship" introduced on page 5 of this bulletin, for certain people, the adopted child is symbolic of an exotic cultural treasure that fascinates them, thus stigmatising the child with clichés linked to his origin. Thus the little Chinese girl must be disciplined and successful in class; the young Ethiopian must be fast on the running track; the young Brazilian girl must have rhythm in her bones. Here as well, these behavioural patterns are not without consequences for his upbringing and the child's identity, for they implicitly incite sticking to the image that one has of him and makes it difficult for him to construct a realistic image of himself. Such conduct can be all the more damaging than the clichés bandied about and can be very negative.

Finally, one still notes too often that the media also have the tendency to prioritise the "status" of the adopted child, when he is involved in an event in the news (eg: crime), even if there is connection with the child's family filiation to the event.

Peculiarities not assimilated in the system

So that an adopted child can be considered like others and can integrate himself perfectly in society, it is also important that the specificities of adoption be assimilated at all the social and administrative levels of the system. It is particularly essential that the various public and private administrations adapt their procedures and policies so as to integrate this kind of family. As we have underlined several times in this bulletin, it is furthermore desirable that the school includes issues such as adoption as a family tie when

it takes up, amongst other things, questions linked to genealogy (see particularly bulletin 2/2009). Leading health professionals should also be trained in the specificities of adoption so as ensure the provision of care that is appropriate for the children concerned (for example, the family's medical allergies and antecedents).

Better awareness raising within society is still needed

Unfortunately adopted children are still too often confronted with failures of the system or with unsuitable demands of their specificity during administrative or other steps. For example, when a questionnaire asks for a place of birth, to reply with the country of origin of the adopted child is going to lead automatically to a procedure used for foreigners. At each of these obstacles, the child is pushed back to his adopted condition and the deep wounds reappear.

In this context, there appears to be a basic need to raise society's awareness of the reality of adoption and the needs of adoptees, and this must be done at all levels. Professionals and stakeholders can contribute to this by defusing a maximum of information through the media, publications and during the preparation of adoption applicants. Social workers and professionals in the field of health and education should, for their part, receive a minimum training relating to adoption during their courses so as to familiarise themselves with the characteristic principles of this family tie. The authorities and the individuals in charge of various administration also have a role to play in its promotion, and its application at all levels of the ethical and legal principles in force in matters of adoption. It is important that adoptive parents dare to invest more of themselves in awareness raising in their close surroundings so that their child may be integrated in the most natural way. Good co-operation among actors is required so that the child can fully find his place in society.

The ISS/IRC team

ACTORS IN MATTERS OF ADOPTION

Source: Permanent Bureau of the Hague Conference: http://hcch.e-vision.nl/index_en.php?act=conventions.authorities&cid=69.

- **Chile:** This country has updated its list of foreign accredited bodies
- **France:** This country has updated the contact details and persons within its Central Authority
- **Greece:** This country has signed and ratified THC-93. The Convention will enter into force on 1 January 2010.

Frontline news from Scandinavian countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden

At a conference in early September held by the Nordic Adoption Council in Iceland, the Central Adoption Authorities from all the Scandinavian countries briefly (and informally) outlined the latest developments in law, policy and practice relating to adoption. Amendments to the Danish Adoption Act will come into force on 1st October 2009 with one of the most significant changes relating to domestic adoptions. Provisions will include the adoption of children without the consent of their biological parents in certain cases. In Finland, as of the 1st September, 2009 registered partners of the same sex will be able to adopt children. Additionally, working groups have been set up in Finland, Norway and Sweden to consider changes to the adoption law although it is expected that any reforms will take at least a few years.

The Brazilian President has introduced a new National Adoption Law No 12.010

Last August, the Brazilian President introduced a new National Adoption Law, which represents a great step forward for guaranteeing the rights of children. As a primary objective, the law introduces important dispositions which modify the statute of children. As part of this objective, a maximum period of 2 years has been established for placing children in institutions, national registries have been created which includes national applicants, applicants who are residents in Brazil and foreign applicants, adoptability conditions for children, obligatory preparation of candidates and use of multidisciplinary teams with assessments. The law limits adoptions to couples who have been in a stable relationship for more than 3 years and for persons over 18 years. For children over 12 years, their opinion is required and it is clear that the separation of siblings will be an exception. Intercountry adoption is permissible only, after national solutions within the country have been sought for a minimum of 30 days, a last result and preference is given to national candidates. Indigenous children or those from communities with descendants that were slaves should be placed permanently within the same ethnic group.

Sources: Noticias Jus Brasil, www.jusbrasil.com.br/politica/3337341/a-nova-lei-da-adocao; Ley N°12.010 del 3 de agosto de 2009, www.jusbrasil.com.br/legislacao/818490/lei-12010-09 y Adoptantis N°72 y 73.

PRACTICE

Diversity in the recognised definitions and forms of foster care: the Latin-American view

ISS/IRC requested Matilde Luna, Project Leader at RELAF, in collaboration with Erica Dantas Brasil, a Psychologist, to draft the following article about the diversity in definitions and forms of *acogimiento familiar* [foster care] in its formal version in Latin America.*

The term 'foster care' in Anglo-Saxon countries include a clear reference to what is known as '*acogimiento familiar*' in Spanish and '*acolhimento familiar*' in Portuguese. In Spain, *acogimiento familiar* is a term that is well known as is the practice it consists of. However, the definition of *acogimiento familiar* in Latin America entails a series of multifaceted examples that are linked to numerous practices protecting the rights of children without parental care. Rather than focusing on having a simple and unequivocal definition, it is necessary to respect the complexity required by this notion. It is

important to take into account the diversity of political settings, cultural practices, social processes, etc. By having regard to the local definitions, this enables '*acogimiento familiar*', to have a greater richness in practice. This is done by recreating a local custom of organising community care for children which then determines the public policy on the protection of rights.

The three dimensions of *acogimiento familiar* in its recognised version

We intend to identify possible components of a definition for *acogimiento familiar* that are part of the recognised versions in Latin

American countries. This is based on a respect for the multiplicity and diversity of meaning as well recognising informal practice, which spreads across the continent. We have identified three dimensions, which must be present in a definition of *acogimiento familiar*: a relationship of attachment, institutionalisation, and public policy.

Acogimiento familiar creates a certain relationship of attachment between the children and the adults. Without there being a filiation tie being created, there are aspects of the latter, as the adult takes responsibility. This equally includes the practical aspects of basic care (food, housing, education, etc) as well as emotional aspects of the relationship (providing a solid basis, affective attachment, control, etc). Secondly, the relationship is arranged by a judicial or administrative institutional authority, a governmental authority or a NGO, which 'sanctions' or 'advances' the relationship. The legal framework is provided by the legal instruments in force on each territory, as well as the institutionalisation, which is unique to the local system of protection of rights. Finally, the practice of *acogimiento familiar* responds to an active public policy, through which the State provides resources via its plans, projects and programmes.

Definition developed by Matilde Luna

'*Acogimiento familiar*' [foster care] is a practice, which enables children and adolescents to benefit from family life, when their biological families are not in a position to assume it. The foster family becomes responsible for the child's care, without resulting in a filiation tie being created. The family carries out all the obligations linked to his or her care. Within the framework of public policies on the protection of the rights of children, the administrative and/or judicial authorities intervene in the foster relationship, by providing support and ensuring that the procedures comply with all the child's rights as well as those of his or her biological family; in particular, the right to be heard, to practice his or her culture and education, to respect his or her background and identity.

Modalities of *acogimiento familiar* and the attachment aspect

There is a close relation between what we generically call the 'modalities' of *acogimiento familiar* and the resulting aspects of attachment: the duration, the relation of prior knowledge, the carers' degree of 'professionalism', among others. In Latin America, as in other regions, this type of alternative care may be implemented on a short, medium or long term basis. Thus, even though the established relationship always involves great emotional intensity, the level of commitment differs depending on whether the living arrangement is based on days, months or several years. It is even recognised that, in some specific cases, the relationship may result in full filiation (adoption). Another

factor, which has an impact on the relation, is whether there has been a previous relationship between the adults and the fostered children. What defines this relationship from the perspective of family dynamics is whether or not the family considerably changes its daily organisation and practices. That is whether or not the family 'is artificially structured' to welcome children.

Legal and political frameworks of *acogimiento familiar* in Latin America

Unlike other regions, there are no laws on *acogimiento familiar* in Latin America with the only exception being the City of Buenos Aires, Argentina, which has a specific law. Programmes of *acogimiento familiar* and their practice are framed within the UNCRC and its complimentary laws such as article 20.

With regards to public policy, *acogimiento familiar* gains relevance insofar as it becomes visible as an alternative practice to institutionalisation. This has been the practice in several Latin American countries. When

reviewing their public policies, programmes of *acogimiento familiar* are considered as a way out of, or a 'new' response to, institutionalisation, jointly with 'family strengthening' programmes.

Despite a history of significant programmes of *acogimiento familiar* (in Brasil, Argentina, Uruguay, etc), we are witnessing a situation of appreciation of this alternative, and of institutionalisation as the main obstacle in complying with the right to a family life.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, one must understand that, *acogimiento familiar* is significantly 'new' in Latin America. There are no 'modalities' as there are in Anglo Saxon countries in relation to the term of 'foster care'. Neither '*acogimiento familiar*' in Spanish, nor '*acolhimento familiar*' in Portuguese are terms, which may be linked to other categories of family relations associated with the practice. For example, in it is fully

incorporated in the English language, through the use of 'foster brother', 'foster mother', 'foster carer', etc. Neither in Spanish, nor in Portuguese, are terms such as 'brothers by *acogimiento*', 'mothers by *acogimiento*' or 'carers *acogedores*', etc, incorporated.

Once more, as mentioned at the beginning, we are not interested, at this point, in generating closed definitions, but rather in calling upon the wealth of experiences as well

as the States' commitments to a necessary public policy of protection of children's rights. We wish to promote active, open, and non-dogmatic definitions, which bring together a possible practice.

* Latin American Foster Care Network [Red Latinoamericana de Acogimiento Familiar], <http://www.relaf.org>.

INTERDISCIPLINARY RESOURCES

The attachment relationship: a stepping stone towards learning

Marie-Josée Lambert, an education support specialist and an adoptive mother, recently published a book aimed at providing parents and other actors with tools in order to support adopted children in the acquisition of knowledge.

How does one support an adopted child in his or her learning efforts and academic success? Many parents feel powerless when faced with this task, often full of obstacles. With her publication and workbook for adoptive parents and professionals, Marie-Josée Lambert – an education support specialist and a mother of four, two of them adopted in Haiti – offers parents concrete tools and a useful guide to support their adopted children on their way to access to knowledge, which is as much academic as it is personal, social and behavioural knowledge.

At first, the author from Quebec examines the preconditions for a child to be able to acquire knowledge. She then explains learning mechanisms: how the brain functions, how it registers information, how it processes it, how it memorises it in order to reuse it and link it to other data to create a thought. Marie-Josée Lambert also provides parents and various actors with many tips and concrete solutions designed to help the child on this path.

Preconditions to learning

In order to be able to properly learn, a certain number of fundamental needs must be fulfilled beforehand. By recalling the famous Maslow pyramid, the author explains that the child must feel physically and emotionally safe, in order for him or her to be able to progress and to allow his or her cognitive needs linked to academic learning to be expressed. Attachment is therefore at the heart of learning processes. A child who

is scared of rejection and abandonment – as is the case for a high number of adopted children with a turbulent past – risks being paralysed when confronted with learning, in particular as he or she will associate failure with rejection at an emotional level.

The adopted child's chaotic past may also have a harmful impact on his or her perception and management of time and space, which are essential concepts in the learning process. Indeed, the integration of the sense of time is the ability to adjust one's choices in accordance with duration, to distinguish the order of events and to know how to use time depending on one's availability. It is also about being able to refer to the past and to imagine oneself in the future. Thus, by restoring relationships in a healthy and solid manner this will promote the child's mental organisation.

Learning mechanisms

Among the learning mechanisms listed in detail by the author, the notion of inherent motivation has an important position. Indeed, she encourages the pupil to make efforts directed at the encouraging the child's pride to overcome challenges and, thereby, learning to give rise to self-confidence and to a feeling of ability. The wish to learn is influenced by a multitude of factors, which determine the interest, confidence and dynamism, which the child creates to become involved and persevere in the tasks he or she is offered: the child's perception of the value of the task, of his or her ability to fulfil it, of the degree of control he or she has over the task. Here again, the attachment relationship

strongly influences the inherent motivation and, therefore, the ability to learn. The child must have had the opportunity to build a realistic and positive image of him or herself, which will act as emotional fuel on the road to knowledge.

The stages in the process of support

In order to support the child on the path to academic success, Marie-Josée Lambert identifies four stages of support; for each of these stages, exercises and games are suggested in the workbook (see attached example). In the first place, adoptive families should try to establish good cooperation with the educational environment and raise the awareness of the actors with regards to the reality of adoption. Adoptive parents must also acknowledge the unfulfilled needs of their child and to strengthen his or her emotional frame by focusing on the attachment relationship.

As the third stage, the author recommends parents resort to concrete means of action to strengthen their child's initially acquired knowledge and consolidate his or her cognitive baggage, in order to offer him or her better access to learning. It is not a matter of giving him or her additional homework, but to use daily situations to overcome his or her difficulties and to create a pleasant environment to address these. For example, the parent may ask the child to help him or her write the shopping list. Thereby, he or she helps the child to manage a sequence of events, which he or she must establish as existent in his mind, in order to achieve it without forgetting anything. In order to help the child in organising and adapting him or herself to a rhythm, the use of a calendar is suggested, as the child can plan forthcoming activities and divide them into stages. He or

she will thereby learn to visualise the time scale and to imagine him or herself in the future.

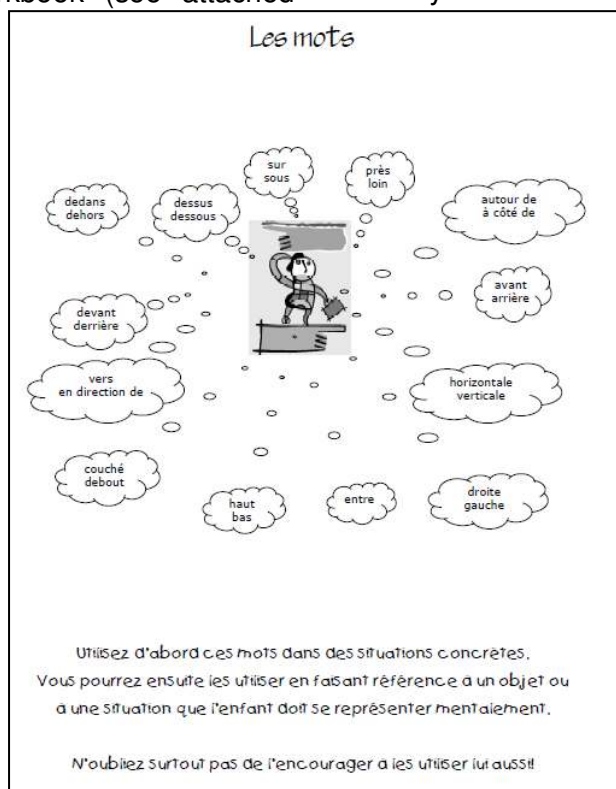
Lastly, the author encourages parents to establish strategies and to become an important resource for their child by taking on a supportive role. Thus, numerous exercises and games are made available to adoptive parents and professionals in a workbook attached to the publication, and of which an example is presented in the attached box.

The ISS/IRC considers that this book is a very useful tool for any person who supports an adopted child in his search for knowledge. Too many parents and actors are still powerless when faced with their child's academic difficulties, whether in relation to his or her learning process, or to his or her behaviour and motivation. These difficulties are unfortunately common among adoptees, given that, according to Johanne Lemieux, they are the third general cause of post-adoption consultation.

Source: *L'adoption et l'apprentissage : quatre étapes à franchir vers la réussite scolaire* [Adoption and learning : Four steps to

overcome on the path to academic success], Marie-Josée Lambert, Editions SAJE, 2008. Available with the workbook via the author's website: www.adomisco.com. See also: *Resources for adapting the education system to include adopted children* and *Demystifying the dream in order to live through reality better: a toolbox for adoptive families*, Johanne Lemieux, presented in Monthly Review 02/2009.

Diagram translated clockwise from sur nous: about us, close, far, around, next to, before, behind, horizontal, vertical, right, left, in between, high, low, lay down, stand up, towards, in the direction of, in front, behind, inside, outside, above below. Text at the bottom: Use these words in concrete situations. You could then use these words with reference to an object or situation where the child needs to be mentally present. Don't forget to include the child in this exercise.



Interview with Marie-Josée Lambert, author of the Adoption and learning: four steps to overcome on the path to academic success*

In addition to her publication presented on page 5, Ms Lambert shares, in this interview, her thoughts on the needs of adopted children and their parents in the field of learning in its broadest sense.

Name, surname : Marie-Josée Lambert.

Place of residence and work: Québec.

Professional position / responsibilities :

Education support specialist, author, lecturer and adoptive mother.

the case in many environments, although one cannot generalise. However, this cooperation requires true efforts from both sides, as well as support in order to prevent misunderstandings, conflicts, fatigue...

1. What led you to publish this book?

Even though this may seem a little cliché, I wrote the book I wish I would have had when my children went to school and when I found myself with many questions and very few answers.

2. As an adoptive mother and education support specialist, which needs of parents and children have you tried to address through this publication?

On the one hand, I intended to fulfil the parents' need to understand their child's difficulties, in order for them to feel able to become involved and to support his or her development. By providing them with a tool, I also intended to fulfil the children's need for emotional safety as it is by targeting the attachment relationship that we can better prepare the path to their academic success.

3. Your book addresses learning in its broadest sense, what do you mean by that exactly?

We all have an idea of the fact that learning is often summarised as the acquisition of knowledge and the development of skills. I wanted to extend the meaning given to learning, by exploring the emotional aspect and, in particular, the impact of unfulfilled needs on the expression of the wish to learn in the child. By widening our view of learning, this enables us to better understand and therefore to become better involved.

4. You put the cooperation between parents and teacher at the heart of the child's support in his or her learning. Do you believe this cooperation is well established?

It is certain that efforts are being promoted to encourage parent-teacher cooperation; this is

5. How can this cooperation be promoted without overloading the teacher?

The establishment of good cooperation should never rely solely on each person's willingness. On the contrary, it requires some support, which should be planned beforehand. Designated meetings and resource persons (as much for the parent and for the teacher) – who will closely monitor the file in order to intervene in the event of problems – must be chosen. The opportunity must also be given to each person to express his or her limits, in order to ensure that they are respected. The teacher and the parent must not be the only persons responsible for this cooperation. The sharing of this responsibility with other actors is also important for the well-being of all, and in particular, that of the child.

6. It appears essential that the parents acknowledge and understand the unfulfilled needs of their child in order to help him or her adequately. However, is it not unusual for adopted children to not clearly express their needs and fears? How can these be identified?

The unfulfilled needs, which I talk about in my book, are foremost needs for emotional safety. It is true that these may be expressed in different ways, but by focusing on the attachment relationship in order to provide the child with a solid basis of safety, from which his or her feeling of trust can be created, we may allow him or her to fulfil these needs on a daily basis.

7. What help can families resort to or which strategies can they develop?

They require help in understanding their child's needs and the difficulties he or she may experience in relation to his or her past.

By offering suitable help as a result of having taken the time to properly identify the child's needs, one will intervene efficiently and will truly help him or her. Parents must therefore be supported and the parent-child relationship must be focused upon as the basic strategy in this support. Teachers, on the other hand, must take into account the pupil's unfulfilled needs and must become a solid basis of safety for him or her, from which he or she will be able to discover his or her internal resources, to learn to take advantage of them, to experience successes and to fully find fulfilment.

8. Are post-adoption services in Quebec sufficient to support families in their process linked to these issues? If not, what are the needs in this field?

An increasing number of post-adoption services are established in Quebec to support families, but few of them directly address the child's schooling difficulties. It is important to direct our efforts in this direction.

9. Based on your personal and professional experience, what is society's current view on adoptees and adoptive families?

Given that adoption, as known to us, is a quite recent reality, we still too often see the adopted child through our personal lenses, either as a treasure come from abroad, a different family that one finds attractive... All this proves a genuine openness and a wish for acceptance, which are indeed commendable, but which prevent the child from developing a realistic image of him or herself, as it is influenced by what others see in him or her, rather than being built on congruent attitudes towards him or her, which simply reflect what he or she is.

10. What can we do to develop this perception?

I believe that, with time and by talking, these views will slowly disappear, as it is by living different experiences that one manages the difference. This results in offering even greater openness to the other, more genuine, as it is based on respect towards the other as a person, and not on what one may reflect on the other or on what he or she represents in our view.

** Original Title of Book- L'adoption et l'apprentissage: quatre étapes à franchir vers la réussite scolaire*

FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES, SEMINARS, SYMPOSIA AND COURSES 

- **Austria:** *Development of Quality Standards through Storytelling*, SOS Kinderdorf, Innsbruck, 16-18 November, For more information <http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=20716&flag=event>
- **Cyprus:** Eurochild will host it's 6th Annual Conference: Monitoring Child, Well-being: Better Policy and Practice in Cyprus, 11-13 November 2009. For more information, http://www.eurochild.org/fileadmin/user_upload/files/events/2009/11_AC/flyer_final.pdf
- **France:** *La question de la référence en institution* (The question of a 'reference person' in institutions), COPEs, Paris, 2 to 4 December. More information: www.lecopes.org;
- **United Kingdom:** **a)** Teamwork, teamwork, teamwork: Improving education for children in care, London, 19 November, For information: www.baaf.org.uk, **b)** *Family Futures: Empathy, Attachment and Making Trauma Safe Therapy*, Adoption and Attachment 2 year course, London, 14 October. For more information: joanne@familyfutures.co.uk
- **United States:** *Practical Considerations: The Nexus of Social Work and Law in International Child Welfare* International Social Service Baltimore, MD, October 30–31, www.iss-usa.org/site.asp?PageId=5&SubId=36

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www.iss-ssi.org/Resource_Centre/Resource_Center_EN/About_ISS-IRC/about_iss-irc.html. See Activities.

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