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Family Transitions
and
Families in Transition

ABSTRACTS



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3. How Group Homes 'do Family' through Interactions: Ethnographic Accounts of Three Italian 'Non-conventional' Families

Saglietti Marzia
University of Rome "La Sapienza" (Italy)

This contribution accounts a conversational-ethnographical in-depth study on three Italian group homes, defined as temporary placements for out-of-home children. The hybrid nature of these settings – public and private, daily-life environment for kids and workplace for professionals – constitutes a fruitful site for investigating how adults and kids creates familial activities and practices.

Through Italian law on the matter, group homes have to show "an organization and interpersonal relationships similar to those of a family" (Law 149/2001). For that reason, our central point is revealing how these familial practices are established, maintained, contested and negotiated through daily social interactions.

Gathered data comes from an ethnographic study on discursive interactions in three Italian group homes (Saglietti, 2010), where the researcher has documented different moments of everyday life (through ethnographic field-notes) and video-taped nine dinners with kids (from 3 to 17) and adults. Video-taped material has been transcribed following conversational analysis's Jefferson's code (Sacks et al., 1974).

Our theoretical aim is to discover what literature calls 'family as a verb' (Morgan, 1996; Perlezz et al., 2006; Finch, 2007) or 'doing family' (Aronsson, 2006) to focus on familial practices and activities rather than on kinship, composition and generations. Moreover, it means being interested in protective and interactive functions of primary groups, as we consider group homes to be.

Results show two main ways of realizing interactive patterns, called 'open' and 'centripetal', depending on ethno-theories of family shown by adults. They differ in: a) organization and functions of talk; b) forms of participation; c) strategies in offering 'thinking spaces' for young people (Perret-Clermont, 2004).

4. Families in Transition during their Everyday Interactions: the Role of the Context in the Reconstruction of Argumentation among Parents and Children

Arcidiacono Francesco
University of Neuchâtel (Switzerland)

This study aims at analyzing how family members resolve differences of opinion through argumentation. To this regard, we intend to show how context is essential for the analytical reconstruction (van Eemeren, Grootendorst, 2004; Arcidiacono, Pontecorvo, Greco Morasso, 2009) of argumentation carried out by family members. We consider the context as a constituent of the communication process (Rigotti, Rucci 2006), co-constructed by means of different communicative moves. We analyze how argumentation shapes the communicative practices of family members and how it can foster a critical attitude in the process of decision-making carried out in this context. The data corpus is constituted by the video-recordings of Italian middle-class families during their interactions during mealtime. These conversations have been fully transcribed and qualitatively analyzed following two approaches. The first one is the model of



the critical discussion, derived from the pragma-dialectical perspective (van Eemeren, Grootendorst, 2004). This model presents an ideal model of argumentation against which real-life interaction can be first analytically reconstructed and then evaluated. The second perspective is the conversational and discursive approach derived from ethnomethodology (Sacks, Schegloff, Jefferson 1974), that allows us to identify the sequential patterns of discourse produced by participants. According to this perspective, we assume that the organization of daily life is supported by a series of assumptions shared and continuously confirmed through social exchanges. The context of family interactions is given by the overarching goal of socialization. Socialization, then, also affects the strategies by which family members, participating in conversation, reconstruct and evaluate argumentation. We finally discuss how argumentation fosters a critical attitude in the process of decision-making and supports the construction of mutual understanding in the everyday interactions carried out in the family context between parents and children.

Discussant:

Kremer-Scdlitk Tamar