Constructing familyness: Pedagogical conversations between professional parents and adolescents

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes conversation between professional 'parents' and of out-of-home placed adolescents in specialized foster care. Videotaped and transcribed interactions of six family treatment homes were analyzed by interactional analysis. The topics of all conversations were initiated by the adolescents and reconstructed by the parents into pedagogical moments.

When parents dominated the conversation, the positive content of their contributions resulted in an active position of the adolescent. In dinner table discussions, parents tried to elicit the adolescents' perspectives, while, by joking and provoking, creating an atmosphere of familyness. The adolescents seemed familiar with talking about their perspectives, views, and future plans.

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1. Introduction

Child welfare policy is intended to provide safety for children who are at risk. A major goal in Dutch child welfare policy is to prevent the out-of-home-placement of children as much as possible and if this is not feasible to place children in a foster family or family home (de Baat and Berg-le Clercq, 2010). This policy has led to a rise in the number of family homes.

Family home care is specialized juvenile care for out-of-home-placed children who are unable to live in a regular foster family due to problematic behavioral issues and complex backgrounds. Its goal is to create conditions of real family life in which children can focus on their future (citizenship). The children live in family-like circumstances on a small scale. The homes consist of professional parents (at least one of whom is paid and trained for the job), their biological children and approximately four placed children. The pedagogical climate in these family homes is hybrid; professional parents combining family life and professional interventions.

In this article we will examine the interactions between professional parents and adolescents in this hybrid context. We are specifically interested in interactions that demonstrate professional parenting 'at work', instances in which professional parents turn daily conversations into pedagogical ones. We will first examine the literature on parent–child (adolescent) communication, and then introduce our results coming from video-observations of daily conversations in family homes.

1.1. Parenting and adolescent's autonomy

On the basis of her groundbreaking study of parenting styles, Baumrind (1991) concluded that authoritative parents raise their children to become socially responsible citizens who are cooperative and capable of regulating themselves. On the basis of her observational studies, she distinguished this parenting style from authoritarian and permissive styles. Authoritative parenthood, based on a mixture of disciplinary and communication strategies, has become a middle-class ideal in Western societies. Parents act supportively and assertively, rather than being restrictive or over-pliant. There certainly are rules and guidelines, but the strategy is more democratic and leaves room for the child to participate. As children grow older, their developmental progress generally permits more room to follow their own compass. Characteristic for parent–adolescent relationships, at least in western societies, is both negotiating freedom and responsibility (De Swaan, 1988; Giddens, 1992; Ashbourne, 2009). Children learn to participate by engaging in and reflecting on personal relationships. Preadolescents' tendency to rise against their parents' opinion is approached as a manner to construct a separate identity of their own (Arcidiacono & Pontecorvo, 2009). In line with the Baumrind studies, analysis of dinner conversations show that parents first try to reason with their children and provide arguments to convince them to do what is advised, but that when that is not effective, the reference to the fact of authority in itself is often sufficient. When parents are open, informal, and calm during conversations, the adolescents are less anxious and less avoidant (Afifi, Joseph, & Aldeis, 2008).

There are however significant differences between children who spent their youth with their parents and out-of-home placed children in achieving social responsible autonomy. Familial disturbances in the

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histories of the latter have made them precocious in some developmental aspects and slowed them down in other ones. There are relevant differences between children who grow up in their family of origin and children who don't. Firstly, out-of-home placed children have negative experiences with parent–child relationships. They often have a troubled family history which has disrupted their development. This may put extra pressure on the relationship between PP's and adolescents. Secondly, a new relationship with a professional PP lacks a shared history. This is crucial as formulations of parental demands depend on the familiarity of the ones involved.

Family homes are 'communities of practice' with common ways of doing, views, ways of talking (Eckert, 2006). Contrary to people who do not know each other well, family members easily produce unmitigated directives (Aronsson & Cekaite, 2011). Yet adolescents who are placed in a family home have not lived there for all their life and accordingly do not share all familial understandings. So, moving into a new family may create communication problems for both adolescents and PP's. These adolescents need to be raised as any other child but simultaneously they need help to come to terms about a troubled history. This requires a child-tailored strategy of parenting in which idiosyncratic and social factors are acknowledged, taking into account the adolescent's specific strengths and weaknesses. The goal is to find the golden mean between autonomy and guidance (Smollar & Youniss, 1989). However, how this golden mean is found and how this translates into daily practices of parenting has not been researched in great detail yet.

1.2. The nature of familyness in a family home

Family is not just a biological, legal, financial or societal construct but also a discursive one (Gubrium & Holstein, 1990). "Family members remember and draw on shared prior interactions of various types to create shared meanings and affirm a shared past, that is, to (re)create a sense of familyness" (Gordon, 2009, 196). For that matter, the situation of out-of-home placed children is radically different from the situation of children who live at home with their biological parents. They are no longer raised by their birthparents but by unknown adults who, as professionals, assume a parental role. A new relationship has to be built between PP's and children, meaning that daily habits appear to belong to the original family and have to be reconstructed in the new professional family situation. New understandings have to be shared to build up a new common idea of family-belonging. In this respect, children who live in a family home are re-socialized within the next context. Age plays a huge role in this, where younger children might slot into in the ways of a family home more easily than adolescent children. Logically, the older children were when they were placed, the more practices of troubled familyness they carry with them. Consequently, they miss the negotiating practices aimed at achieving shared understanding, that is common in untroubled families, and the norms that make it possible to achieve a shared understanding between parents and children about the nature of their common situation and activity (Voutilainen, Peräkylä, & Ruusuvuori, 2010). Moving into a new family with its own sense of familyness and a shared understanding that excludes the child, simply due to the lack of history with the family, therefore involves communication problems.

In the focus groups that preceded this study, PPs reported that they support the adolescents' development of age-appropriate agency by stimulating social responsibility and autonomy but that the adolescents sometimes need a more directive policy because of their developmental disturbances (van de Koot & Schep, 2014). In our study, we analyze how parental pedagogical practices are talked into being (Pontecorvo, Fasulo, & Sterponi, 2001; Sterponi, 2003; Sterponi, 2009). We expected a mixed picture of parental contributions, with PPs sometimes taking the lead in the conversations with adolescents and other times addressing them as 'adults-in-the-making', the adolescents having a substantial contribution in the conversations and taking initiatives to introduce topics. We also looked for signs of shared beliefs and understanding.

We will now dig into the practice of PP-adolescent communication and come to answer the following two questions:

1. What does a discourse analysis of the interaction reveal about the pedagogical function of professional parent talk that follows child-initiated statements/questions?
2. What is the role of familyness in these conversations?

2. Method

This study looks into the professional activity of family homes as a discourse practice (Hall, Juhila, Matarese, & van Nijnatten, 2014). We methodologically and conceptually combine an ethnographically-oriented approach with a discourse analytical approach that relates family homes to broader discourses, in particular to the field of social work, counseling and pedagogy (van der Haar, 2007; Juhila, Mäkitalo, & Noordegraaf, 2014).

In order to answer the research questions we took the following steps:

- We asked two organizations to each select three family homes in which adolescents are raised by well-trained (undergraduate degree) and experienced (in working with adolescents) professional parents.
- In the six homes we installed a camera on a tripod in the dinner rooms that recorded between the hours of 4 to 7 PM over the course of three weeks.
- Together with a group of students we watched all (over 300 h of) tapes and selected conversations in which professional parents and adolescents were having a significant discussion. The term significant was operationalized as: interactions in which conversational work is done to achieve an educational goal (like setting a rule, giving feedback). In total 156 interactions were selected and studies by both authors.
- The interactions were selected in which the topic of discussion was introduced by an adolescent and that consisted of an exchange of at least twenty turns (to be able to analyze the course of the conversation). This resulted in eleven cases of discussions that exist of twenty turns or more and that are initiated by an adolescent. All other interactions are either initiated by parents or are very short. In our analysis we will focus on how the PPs in our collection conversationally and pedagogically succeed in the transformation from the initiation of a topic to a pedagogical conversation.
- From the collection of 11 conversations we distinguished between three strategies that PPs used to get a conversation going:

1. Transforming a topic into a discussion (2/11)
2. Taking a topic as a stepping stone to discuss delicate matters (4/11)
3. Taking a topic as a request for explanation (5/11)

From each category we present one fragment.

- The conversations were transcribed in detail according to the Jefferson (2004) conventions, and then translated into English. For all of the data in our corpus informed consent was obtained for scientific use. Names and other identifying details have been changed to preserve individuals' privacy.
- We used conversation analysis (using the notion of sequentiality, Sidnell, 2010) and discourse analysis to analyze the pedagogical interactions.

3. Results

3.1. Transforming a topic into a discussion

In our collection of discussions that start off with a topic initiation of an adolescent we found two examples of provocative responses of

professional parents to a topic introduced by the adolescent. This type of response elicits further discussion in interactions.

We now discuss the example of Lucy (17 year) who discloses about her future educational plans to her professional parents (PM = professional mother, PF = professional father). Mark (17 year) is also in the room.

1. Lucy: Yeah and after this I'm going on to do HAVO,[1] nah just kidding.
2. PM: That's possible.
3. Lucy: Yeah man, no way I could do that (inaudible) come on man! I'm not that smart you know =
4. PM: = You'd quite probably pass, you know, but it will maybe just take you a little bit longer to finish it.
5. PF: I'm sure you could pass it.
6. Lucy: I'm sure I couldn't (2.0).
7. PF: ➔ Then you should put your phone away.
8. Lucy: Jack that's got like nothing to do: with it.
9. PF: No, that's got nothing to [do with it
10. PM: [Of course it does, if you want to get a HAVO diploma you'll seriously need to study a few hours a day.
11. Lucy: Like I'm gonna get smarter just by putting my phone away.
12. PF: I think [so.
13. PM: [You wouldn't get smart just by putting it away but you would have more time to study.
14. PF: °You're not doing anything°.
15. Lucy: Yeah but like do you know how much you need to study for HAVO?
16. PF: ➔ You're not even going to pass your hairdressers' course at this rate.
17. Lucy: If that's what you wanna thi:nk, have fun.
18. PF: Why have fun?
19: Lucy: >Seriously, I'm gonna pass my hairdressers' course<
20. PM: You're twisting it; what we're saying is that you could pass your HAVO as well, but you do have put in the time and effort.
21. PF: Except you think your phone is more important.
22. Lucy: I don't think I can do that much with HAVO as a hairdresser though?
23. Mark: °What a load of crap, like she could ever do HAVO°.
24. PM: Anyone can pass HAVO, except some people will need 10 years to do it.
25. Lucy: I'd like to do level 4 though.
26. Mark: There's a guy in my class though, Sander, and he failed it.
27. PM: Okay, but that doesn't mean he mightn't still pass it in a few years' time. Sometimes you get there too early and you'll have to make a choice and that's often what it's about. If you want to get your HAVO diploma then you really need to study every single day and you can't just go around saying I'll do half an hour today and nothing tomorrow. You need to study every single day.
28. Lucy: What I'd just like to do from February next year, not this February but the next year (.) is I want to do level 3 (.) and then do courses in the evening on how to pick up hair and put in plaits and stuff. And after that I'd actually like to work for a bit and then save up for another course.

Lucy discloses her future educational plans. Right after that is expressed it is dismissed right away as a joke. It seems an effort to create a safe way out in case the discussion about this issue would turn out negatively for her. She safeguards herself against the possible disappointment that such a negative outcome would involve. PM's reaction is a positive response to Lucy's first expressed idea. Lucy again expresses

that she would fail the exam because she is not clever enough. PM does not deny that but suggests that it might take her longer to pass the exam. PF's next utterance is, in spite of its positive content, closed and leads to a similar reaction by Lucy. PF adds that passing the exam needs strict cell phone management. Although this remark again is formulated as a provocative directive, it does not stop Lucy from saying that this has nothing to do with it, a remark which is responded to cynically by PF, who claims to agree with Lucy' although he obviously does not. PM reformulates this by a repeated explanation of study as condition of success at school. The debate goes on until PF says that Lucy will not even pass her exam of the hairdressing school. Here, he again uses a provocative style that gets the conversation going. Lucy reacts angrily and assures PPs that she is determined to get her degree. The arguments are repeated but PPs keep their straight and directive position that a degree needs hard study and that hard study may be frustrated by a frequent use of cell phones. The conversation ends with PM repeating her claims about work and study, and Lucy again formulating her wishes about her future education. In this conversation there are enough ingredients to get an open conflict and in turns 16–19, PF makes a bold assertion which elicits a fierce reaction from Lucy. This free and open discussion about school, which is often a sensitive pedagogical issue, is an indication that the atmosphere in the family home creates the possibility for such a discussion to take place, and that familyness has been achieved. The adolescents speak out and dissent. The sharp exchange of words between PF and adolescent reinforces the findings of Beaumont (1995) and Beaumont and Wagner (2004) that adolescents often copy the fast-paced interruptive style they experience with their friends into the interaction with their parents, and that fathers more often adapt to this style than mothers who more often use a high-considerateness style.

As Arcidiacono and Pontecorvo (2009) point out oppositions between parents and children may be ignored but also reacted to in different ways. In conversational terms, interactional work is needed to change opposition into a 'verbal conflict episode' (2003, 98). Verbal conflicts can end without any resolution or compromise, or by one party submitting to the other one's authority. Another possibility is the negotiation of a compromise, in which both parties make a concession. In the conversation about Lucy's educational plans no direct concession seems to be made. Yet PF's provocative remarks and Lucy's bold formulated reactions show that at a meta-level in this family home it is safe to agree to disagree.

3.2. Taking a topic as a stepping stone to discuss delicate matters

Four other interactions in our collection show how professional parents pick up a topic, initiated by an adolescent to honor different positions in a discussion about a delicate issue. In the example below the professional parents pick up a topic on Nelson Mandela to discuss the issue of how to refer to skin color. In this example the professional parents use different strategies to turn the topic into a pedagogical conversation.

In the interaction we see:

PM, PF, Kenneth (17) Shirley (17), Leroy (16), Pim (14) and Maria (14) eating at the dinner table. Leroy and Kenneth have an Afro-European background. During dinner, they discuss racism in the context of Mandela's recent death.

1. Shirley: [That man really just wrote history].
2. PM: I sure think so (2)
3. Shirley: Yeah
4. PM: What do you, what do you know about him?
5. Shirley: That he took a stand for the, ehm ehm, how do you put that in a way that's not racist, for the black people. [For those people] ((points at Leroy and Kenneth while laughing))
6. Maria: [Darker people]
7. Shirley: I never know how you can say that so it's not racist, it just always sounds racist to me

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8. PM: I don't think it's ever racist if you just say it in a neutral way.

9. Shirley: I'm just always afraid people will take it in a racist way.

10. PM:➔   'There's no opinion in there though, is there. It's just a description of a color, do you mind if we talk about it like that?' ((addressing Leroy and Kenneth))

11. Leroy: Of course not, brown guy.

12. Kenneth: ((nods))

13. Shirley: ((laughs))

14. PF: ➔   But they've got an advantage, them lot are white inside and we are black inside

15. Shirley: They're Bounty, not black but da::rk white.

16. PM: If I'm not mistaken, Nelson Mandela spent <27 years > in prison, for no reason, because he defended dark-skinned people.

17. Maria: ((nods)) yeah, yeah [I saw that on the youth news[2]].

18. Kenneth: [And then he was still saying like… just going around shaking people's hands and stuff]

19. Pim: Instead of getting revenge he just went like this ['Didn't he also, like, walk 10 yards in front of the sign and then walk on?]'

20. Maria: '[We saw one of those videos of when he was in prison and he was looking really happy, like

21. Shirley: Yeah and he was also like

22. PM: The first [president of]

23. Maria: The first black president [of.

24. Shirley: Of Japan [eh America

25. Leroy: [He was a boxer as well yeah.]

26. Maria: Turkey ehm Africa'

After that Shirley introduced the topic of Nelson Mandela's death, there is a table conversation about racism. In turn 4, PM poses an open question, addressed to all children. This leads to Shirley elaborating on this issue. In her next turn, she suggests a topic at meta level (how to address Afro European people). Her disclosure is also a request for explanation (that we will also discuss in the next section) which is picked up by PM (8). Shirley's reaction shows that her mind is not at ease yet. PM repeats her comforting answer and then addresses the two Afro European adolescents and checks her answers with them. PM mediates between Shirley's dilemma and the boys who may be 'hands-on' experts. They join the communication, Leroy by a marked and a comforting response to PM, and Kenneth by nodding affirmatively. This evokes laughter with Shirley, which may be considered as a show of mutual understanding about this delicate issue. PF's uptake with a joke is responded by a witty remark by Shirley. The jokes create a good atmosphere between the conversational participants in which the delicate issue of racism can be discussed freely and openly. The co-operation of PM and PF play an important role in this, the former organizing the discussion, inviting the children to present their opinions, and PF making the discussion 'light' (but not small!) by joking. PM's contributions to the conversation are characterized by modesty markers as 'maybe', formulations in question format, 'if I am not mistaken' and by formulating only two words of a sentence (22). Maria shows that she feels free to correct PM by adding the relevant adjective 'black' (23).

The discussion lasts another 30 turns in which the adolescents contribute extensively to the conversation. The issue of Mandela's passing away appears to be a good opportunity for psycho-education and helping the adolescents to reflect on their ideas and opinions. It is particularly relevant as some of the children are Afro European. The conversation leads to an open discussion, thanks to the mother's translation of the girl's dilemma, the adolescents' active co-operation and the sense of humor, creating an atmosphere of shared understanding in which familyness is being confirmed.

3.3. Taking a topic as a request for explanation

Our last five interactions all show the pattern of an adolescent introducing a topic that is received as an opportunity to get the professional parent going in giving psycho-education. In the following example we see Robin (14) with his professional mother in the kitchen. The professional mother is busy with preparing dinner, Robin is eating an ice-cream. At first, PM is with her back to Robin but during turn 4 she turns around and keeps standing in front of Robin. They start talking about Robin's resemblance to his sister Cynthia.

1. Robin: Cynthia and me, we did discover today that we've got, er, stuff in common. The two of us =

2. PM: = That you resemble each other

3. Robin: Yeah

4. PM: Yeah but

5. ((PM turns down the radio)).

6. PM: ➔   but actually I see that as well, because when she starts talking about all the ehm, what her attitude is to things so to speak and ehm ehm, she – of course she also thought that hey, then I'd like to go to level four.[3] Why did she want to pass level four, well just because that way, she could start something of her own. So obviously you've also got something in your mind the whole time and you're trying to achieve that thing, and that, eh that well there's something along the lines of, well of course loads of kids, and definitely those who've been hurt, they just live their lives like, well as long as my life is cool right now, and whatever happens in the future, I'll deal with that when it happens.

In this excerpt, Robin introduces the topic by telling PM that he discovered to have much in common with Cynthia. PM's reaction mirrors the remark but Robin does not express any explorative remarks. PM's reaction (2) may also be seen as an interruption (no pause between turns 1 and 2) which leaves Robin no room to further explore the issue of family resemblances. PM takes over Robin's initiative, reframing the issue of family resemblances into the common ambitions of sister and brother. PM gives an indirect compliment (comparing him with his well performing sister) by inserting it in the context of family resemblance. By using 'obviously' (6), PM presents her assessment of Robin in an assured attitude and establishes epistemic authority on adolescent psychology (compare Koole, 2012). After 'and you are trying to achieve that thing', the use of hesitation markers shows PM's indecision to categorize Robin as member of a population of children who can get seriously disturbed. Her mode of speaking has changed, formulating her ideas in general terms. After a few turns, the discussion returns to the topic of Cynthia's perseverance while being in a difficult life situation.

47. Robin: I mean, Cynthia is gonna be okay

48. PM   Yeah I think so too. Of course she's really honest about how it's not always easy=

49. Robin: =no at the start she wanted=

50. PM: =but then you don't pretend it is either.

51. Robin: (inaudible) she didn't want me getting in with the wrong crowd she said.

52. PM   Yes

53. Robin: (inaudible)

54. PM: And she just got really lucky with her foster parents. And she just really gets on very well with her foster parents and actually you, well (.) you do as well.

55. Robin: Yes

56. PM   That's important, of course. That you're somewhere where you do get on well with people

57. Robin: Yeah

58. PM: [yeah

59. Robin: 'cos if you haven't got that, well ehm]=

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[2] Maria mentions the Jeugdjournaal ('youth news'), a daily public TV show which presents local and world news aimed at a young audience.

[3] Level four is the most specialized of four levels within Dutch third-level vocational education.

60. PM: = you don't really accept much from them. If you really, well like sort of hate someone's guts, like for example, you know your foster parent or whoever

61. Robin: Yeah no that doesn't help =

62. PM: = You'd just take. Yeah just think pfft

PM is coming to a conclusion on how and why Cynthia is doing okay en then gets on about the importance of getting along with your (foster of professional) parents. Robin is listening. Yet his continuers are alternated with short questions and remarks, showing that he is listening actively. He also makes some efforts to initiate topics (47, 51 and 59). In turn 51, Robin changes the topic, which is disregarded by PM who introduces a new topic herself. PM's style is general, giving Robin an explanation about the relevance of a good relationship between children and PPs. In turn 59, Robin wants to respond more extensively to this narrative, but when he hesitates, PM interrupts and finishes his sentence. Although, PM is steering this conversation into her own direction, not allowing Robin conversational space to interrupt, her quick uptakes may also be considered as displays of affiliation and as 'relevant responses' (Ruusuvuori, 2000, 191), whereas longer pauses by PM to encourage Robin to talk might have caused a painful situation in which Robin might feel obliged to reveal how lucky he is with the professional parents. At the end of this fragment (57–62) there seems to be shared understanding (both agreeing by saying 'Yeah' in 57 and 58, and in 61 and 62).

After some talk about age differences, Robin initiates a topic about his mother's wish to have all her children with her at Christmas (85):

85. Robin: Yeah. Mum's biggest dream is still↑ that there's seven candles around the Christmas tree, one for each of us

86. PM: Yeah

87. Robin: Yeah and well no candle for dad now obviously↓ but (laughs)

88. PM: Yeah

89. Robin: Yeah, but for all of us to be together for Christmas, that at night, that's just

90. PM: Yeah. Well of course that isn't easy you know. I think that's just like with Arun's mum, who'd come here, and ehm I just think that isn't easy you know and obviously everyone wants to have their children close.

91. Robin: Yeah.

92. PM: Yeah.

93. Robin: But mum also told me you know, you really got lucky with your foster family.

94. PM: But do you realize, do you realize how good it is that she says that.

95. Robin: Yeah

96. PM   I mean, really that is SO great it is, seriously↓. To just be able to say you know, wow you really did get lucky with the people you're living with. To be able to say that to your own child. Of course there's loads of mothers around who just, well, really try to kind of say bad things about the foster parents because deep down they just, you know, it's just so↑ hard for them to deal with.

97. Robin: Yeah.

98. PM: That their child is living somewhere else. So actually that's just REALLY REALLY great for your mum to be able to say that.

99. Robin: Yeah and mum also said ehm

100. PM   Seriously, really great

101. Robin: And I told her yeah, I'm actually yeah, the first thing I said was yeah I really like it here and then she eh

102. PM   yes

103. Robin: I really like it here and mum said like yeah she said to me, is that what you think as well, ehm, and then she said, yeah, of course I'd yeah prefer to have you living here but I do think that you ehm, that it's going okay for you over there and I think you got lucky yeah↓. Because eh

104. PM: Yeah and that is real love you know. That you want someone, that you want your kid to have that.

PM reacts with continuers (86 and 88) to the topic introduction of Robin, which leads to more elaborations. Robin's use of 'but' (89) is remarkable after PM's acknowledgment. Robin formulates his mother's wish to have a joint celebration of Christmas as not realistic; by using 'but' he repairs his loyalty to his mother; his laughter (87) indicates embarrassment with her naiveté to have included his father. PM shows her admiration for Robin's mother's performance, reframing the issue as a general parental emotion. Robin's loyalty for both his mother and his professional mother may be a sensitive issue. In turn 93, he formulates his loyalty position as reported speech, using his mother's authority to underline how lucky he is to have such nice professional parents. Although PM does not invite the boy to tell more about his own position, finally Robin discloses something about his feelings (101 and 103) verbalizing the double loyalty. The delicacy of this issue becomes obvious by Robin's hesitation to verbalize his emotions. In 103 the disclosure of his emotion is directly followed by a report of his mother's reaction, which decreases the chance that PM reacts to his emotions.

In the following (not in the excerpt) PM keeps her positive moralizing tone about how Robin's mother and how different things would turn out when such permissions would not be given.

120. PM   And if and if your mum were to say. You know, there are also lots of mums who just start to say all these comments about the foster parents, that they're doing this wrong or doing that wrong

121. Robin: that's not nice for you guys either

122. PM   no, but yeah you know you shouldn't start doing this job because

123. Robin: no but if you

124. PM   because you want biological parents to be really ehm, you know really happy with you or something, that's not why you should start doing this job

125. Robin: no but it's (inaudible) respect…

126. PM   This is nicer of course. This really is nicer. This really is nicer for us. Definitely. So the way your mum is dealing with it is really, really nice for us. You're … but that's, of course that's not what I should be talking about now obviously. The most important thing is that you're like, that you then think oh, my mum thinks it's good that I live there.

127. Robin: yeah

128. PM   And then you can, then you're also just allowed to have a nice time here.

129. Robin: yeah

130/PM   Of course there are other kids who think, mum doesn't want me living there and they just want to yeah, they they just shut themselves off to, ehm to that. That's what we've seen very clearly with Colette. Her mum just didn't want her to be living here.

131. Robin: Yeah and then

In the prolonged discussion about Robin's mother's attitude, PM presents a hypothetical situation in which she would not have been so cooperative. In the middle of her sentence, she switches from a personal to a general style. Robin does not follow this switch and tries to return to the consequences such an attitude would entail for his professional parents. In 122, PM remains on a distant level, using 'you' to refer to family home parents as 'professionals' and 'this job' relating the interactions between herself and the adolescent and his birth-mother to work. By the use of this style, PM addresses Robin as member of a professional audience, interested in the qualified dimensions of the job. Yet Robin persists in returning to the personal consequences for professional parents (123 and 125). In reaction to this (126), PM specifies her discourse to an interpersonal level and contextualizes it to the concrete situation of Robin

and his (professional) parents. In other words, Robin helps his professional mother to decenter her professional discourse (Avdi, 2005) and return to the concrete level of Robin's situation.

The directive style of PP does not lead to a passive conversational position of Robin (121, 123 and 125). He does not show any signs of restraint, but, on the contrary, tries to initiate topics, extensively reports his mother's speech and shows his interest by looking at PM and standing straight in an active position. In our view this is thanks to PM's very positive narrative about the boy's mother. PM's contributions may be seen as psycho-education, integrating her moral understandings of good motherhood into Robin's personal situation (Ochs & Capps, 1996). References to Robin's mother's positive attitude, his resemblance to his sister and their successful way of dealing with problems in their lives, may be seen as efforts to transform the way Robin understands his troubled history. PM tries to create or confirm a new understanding of his life situation. The excerpt is a long exposé about how Robin, his sister and his mother are giving new meaning to their lives and recreating a positive perspective out of the previous difficulties. In spite of PM's dominance, Robin is actively involved in this re-relating process. PM's narrative may be considered as an effort to put Robin at ease with his stay in the family home and by integrating his family history into the discourse of the family home.

4. Discussion

In this study we analyzed pedagogical conversations between PPs and adolescents in family homes. These conversations were the outcome of parental reconstructions of adolescents' topic initiations, parents taking up the issues the adolescents bring forward and changing them into 'teachable moments' (Slembrouck & Hall, in review). Rather than problematizing or judging the adolescents' input (Ochs & Taylor, 1995), parents turned the adolescents' input into pedagogically relevant elements (compare Leudar et al., 2008).

As expected, the parental contribution in the conversation is different in the three cases of this study. In the first two excerpts the adolescents were addressed as equals in the discussion. By parental invitations, the adolescents were stimulated to take an active position in the conversations. In the last excerpt, the PP took strong lead, providing the adolescent with explanations. It became obvious that the PP tried to comfort the adolescent in his difficult loyalty position between his mother and PP. The parental strategy is one of conviction, bringing a message that should be heard. By presenting a positive narrative about the mother, PM integrates the boy's history into the history of the family home, and constructs familyness. Maybe that is what professional parenthood is about: bringing together the different historic lines of the adolescents so that they are able to construct an autonomous identity rather than be wedded to their troubled past.

The pedagogical conversations in the three cases were all different. The conversation about family resemblance was most exemplary for parental dominance, the parent taking a psycho-educational approach. PM's explanatory conversational attitude shows PM's effort to construct familyness, addressing the adolescent's position of potential loyalty conflicts and bringing together the adolescent's birth-family history into the discourse (and history) of the family-home he actually is living in.

The conversation about educational perspectives and the one about Mandela also showed parental strategies but the PP's contributions were mainly directed at eliciting the adolescents' views and answers. In the discussion about the educational future of one of the adolescents, the parental contributions were even provocative, meaning that these were directive but aimed at stimulating the adolescent's conversational contribution and based on mutual trust (familyness that allows members to make fun of each other; compare Aronsson & Cekaite, 2011). The PP's remarks showed a positive attitude towards the adolescent, underlining their belief in the adolescent's intellectual skills but providing her with pedagogical advices. The issue of racism was even more

sensitive and here the father was joking rather than provoking, demonstrating the family's openness to different ways of approaching such an issue. The conversational undertone is positive, as the family members share their great admiration for Mandela and reject racism. The joke about people's color is a confirmation of this familyness.

The adolescents in our study spoke out freely in their conversations with PPs. Even during moments when their contribution to the conversation was significantly less than those of the PP, the adolescents still demonstrated an active position. They sat or stood straight and followed the conversation actively. The adolescents seemed familiar with talking about their perspectives, views, and future plans. This was not only the case in debates about political issues but also about delicate issues as educational plans and family of origin.

Adolescents who grow up in a family home often have a developmental history of disturbances. This may burden the relationship with PPs. Moreover, PPs and adolescents cannot fall back on a common history and still have to get *familiar* with each other. This study shows that PP's tried to build or confirm familyness in various ways: by showing confidence in the adolescents, by approaching them as adults-in-the-making, or by making jokes.

All interactions in this study were initiated by the adolescent and taken up by the PPs. PP-initiated interactions may be quite different as these often contain critical comments on the adolescents' behavior and request for accountability in the adolescent.

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