

*Becoming son and daughter: stepfamilies through the special adoption policy **

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Abstract. *In the last few years Italy assisted at the growth of a new social phenomenon: the creation of those new families defined in legal terms “special case adoptions’ families.” Section 44 of law 184/83” (CAI, 2012) defines them “rejoined families that ask for a legal uphold the role of parenthood achieved via the new situation”. Thanks to the experience gained in the last 12 years (2001-2013) the Adoptions Team of ASL [Local Health Authority] of Padua, had the possibility to observe the genesis and the stabilization of these new familiar nucleus. During a continuous and meticulous observation the Adoptions Team has developed the correct modalities and projected the proper tools thanks to which the children involved as the weakest part of the event can have a correct support. What is important for the Adoptions Team is to explain and give a meaning to those legal changes in which the children get, involuntarily, involved. This aspect is fundamental because it represents a connection with the anguishing past the children lived but also with the desire to “ransom” their story.*

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Theoretical Framework

The involvement of a child in “particular cases” is regulated by Law 4, Section 44 n. 184 of May 1983 “the right of the minor to a family” later replaced by reform n. 149 of 2001.

Before that date, the law did not appear applicable to real situations and it required specific conditions in order to be applied: the couple should have been married for 3 years minimum, the child should have been declared as “abandoned” and between the adopter and the adopted the gap-years should not exceed 40 years. Nowadays, thanks to the 2001 reform, it is possible to resort the special cases adoption even when the 3 conditions listed above do not occur: in this way it is possible to include in this type of adoption those social realities that for any reasons could not find a position in the old Law. In particular, those social phenomena that reflect the current demographic changes: pluralization of social structures and individual lifestyle (Fruggeri, 1997; Di Nicola, 2008; Zanatta, 2008). Families are following new rules; beside understanding how the situation is evolving, there is the need to understand how the new Laws specifically made to defend the children, respond to this change.

The pivotal point of the ex. section 44 of law 184/83 is to guarantee the growth of the children within their own family. The law contains all the indications to decide whether or not the injunction can be processed, notwithstanding the normal adoption, and it points out the typologies of subjects and the particular situations therefore defined “conditions”, in which the recourse can be presented.

Table 1 illustrates the conditions identified by the Law in which the recourse to this appeal can be done; they are indicated by letters A, B, C, D of section 44.

Tab. 1. Conditions by Law 184 to appeal Article 44 “special cases adoption”.

Conditions	Minors can be adopted even when conditions clause 1, Section 7:
A	People related till the Sixth degree of kinship, or from pre-existing relationship solid and enduring; when the child is motherless or fatherless.
B	From the spouse in the case that the minor is adoptive child of the other spouse too.
C	When the Minor is experiencing conditions listed in Section 3, Clause 1, Law February the 5th 1992, n. 104 (Handicap law) and he/she is motherless and fatherless.
D	When there is the proved impossibility of a pre-adoptive fostering.

The effects brought by this specific adoption, even though it requires from the applicant to fulfill duties of children's care and education, are limited if compared to the standard Adoption. The exclusive feature that this procedure requires is the addition of the foster parent's last name to the origin last name of the children; this is an important variable to consider while conducting this analysis.

According to Law 184/83 Section 57, once the Juvenile Court receives the application of adoption, if the points of Section 44 are present and if the adoption is showed to be on the mere behalf of the children rights and interest, it can evaluate and decide all the conditions to proceed. The Court requires some investigations to be conducted by the Local Social Services on the person who is adopting and the family. In particular the assessment focuses on:

- a) their attitude and responsibility in educating the children, the economic situation, the personal situation, health conditions and family environment;
- b) the reasons why the adoptive parents have made this choice;
- c) the children's personality;
- d) the real possibility of a successful cohabitation considering the two parts involved: the adoptive parent and the child.

Each family assessment requires around 2 months of work with usually 3-4 weekly sessions with parents and both the social worker and the psychologist. Once the first information are collected it is possible to settle the house-visit that represents the first contact between the child and the professional. According to the age of the child and the specificity of each situation, the psychologist could decide if further meetings with the child are required or not. Further meetings are usually required if the psychologist feels the need to deeply understand the child's personality; the psychologist could decide whether to use or not tests or having individual session. In the last session, the professionals meet all family member (mother, father and children) to get them the feedback on the assessment and it is in this phase that the professionals verbalize what has been written in their psycho-social report during the entire period of family-study.

Goals and methodology

The Italian procedure results to work very specifically on this topic and led the Adoptions Team of the Local Social Service to reflect over the modalities that the different professionals can adopt in order to collaborate with families in which, differently from the standard adoption, the child is already placed and often is quite "older".

This article has a double goal: on the one hand it wants to present a methodology born to give a voice and sustain those children involved in the adoptive procedure; on the other hand it aims to recall the crucial passages of the normative act that regulates the creation of the new familiar nucleus. This work will hopefully represent a first input to reflect on the methodologies and the strategies that collaborate in the creation and management of those new families, that in our Country are becoming more and more widespread.

The methodology adopted was based on a qualitative approach through the background folders already collected with specific attention to the tales and the experiences lived by the children and the adults during the psychological and social study.

The sample

The analysis here presented focuses on the “special cases” requests presented at the Adoptions Team (AT) in the period between January 2001 and June 2013. It concerns 39 families and 41 children: 2 are relative to letter A, 35 to letter B, 0 to letter C and 2 to letter D.

Among the children 19 (46%) have not been recognized by the natural fathers or there has been a decay of the parental authority. 14 (34%) come from divorces or separations or relationship’s suspension and 8 are fatherless. The foreign children are 17 (41%) and out of these, 15 are currently living in mixed families.

The average age of the children in the first phase of the study is 10, with a range that goes from 0 to 17; this allows us to split the group in the following age bands:

- 0-3 years old: 2 (5%)
- 4-7 years old: 14 (34%)
- 8-11 years old: 14 (34%)
- 12-15 years old: 7 (17%)
- 16-17 years old: 4 (10%)

An additional interesting data concerns the presence of other children of the new couple: 19 children are only children (49%) while 17 children have at least one sibling (43%) and 3 children (8%) are experiencing their mother’s pregnancy while the study is conducted.

The cultural background of the parents resulted medium-high: 23 % of the parents hold a degree and 48% a High School Diploma. All the fathers have an occupation whilst only 43 % of the mothers results to be employed. The remaining 57% is divided between housewives (44%) and unemployed (13%).

From the study there is an evidence of couple, both Italian and foreigner:

- Italian couples are 22 on the whole
- Mixed couples are 15 and they usually include an Italian husband and a wife from either European or Not-European countries, more precisely: Eastern Countries (10), South America (2), Africa (2) and Asia (1)
- 2 foreigner couples (both parents are not Italian).

Results: Strategies and tools to give children a voice

In order to work in such complex situations during their years of work the Adoptions Team has created proper psychosocial tools; those tools have been created firstly to give a better welcome to the families who need their support and secondly to obtain an overall, wide but detailed view about the offered services and the best use of it. The instruments we are going to report in this article are those used to collect the past stories of the children and their thoughts about the new experience where they are living, those instruments have been shown able to give back the children their main actors' role.

Specifically, we will describe the: "Psychological and Social assessment of the family", the "letter to the Judge" and The Test of family borders and belongings named "double moon", test that the operators use with children older than 7.

The assessment of the family

According to the standard procedure, the first session involves the couple, the social worker and the psychologist. The first meeting mainly focuses on understanding the economic status of the family, the general family situation, the health conditions of the family. In this session it is also important to understand the reasons that drove the decision to adopt and the parental attitude and responsibilities of both mother and father.

For what concerns the child, some phases of the process have been identified to be pivotal for his/her active participation in the procedure. One of these is the first "home-visit". It is fundamental that the child arrives at this stage with some information about the professionals who are coming, in particular the parents should tell the child about the reason why the operators are visiting the family. This moment is particularly tactful

because it represents the very first contact between the parents and the professionals. According to the age of the child, the professionals and the couple will identify the best solution to settle up this moment. It has been seen that if the child gets enough information before the arrival of the AT professionals, he/she lives this visit very spontaneously, even the word “adoption” is used without any particular problem. Usually in this phase the professionals ask the oldest child to think about or write the letter for the judge that later could be enclosed in the folder for the Court. From the various experiences we saw that generally the child benefits from a direct involvement in the process since the beginning and he/she strongly desires to be present during the session with the Judge.

The final moment of the investigation is called “restitution phase” and it involves the entire family. This is the moment in which, if the child has written a “letter for the Judge”, it is given to the operator which will assure the child that it will be given to the Judge.

Given the fact that the “special case adoption” is based on the protection of the child, we therefore think important to understand how the child’s past history in relation to the loss (abandon or death) of the biological father or mother is being lived by the child. During the second session the families are asked to systematize the knowledge of the children about their past history to lead to an improvement of their state. This phase is important both to present to the Tribunal an updated and trustworthy picture of the family, and to observe how, while the work of the operators is mainly focused on the current situation lived by the child, it also helps the parents to understand that the child’s past will come over again as weaknesses in their child’s history. It is interesting to see how in the majority of the cases the children know about their origins: they have been informed by the parents before their request of adoption or during the assessment sessions. In detail, the children who know about their origins are 29 out of 41 (70%). The remaining 12 children (30%) have not been told about their origin perhaps as a form of protection towards them. The latter situation represents the most delicate one and it usually requires a longer procedure in order to give to the family appropriate tools to front it.

It is interesting to see how the children informed about their origin, nevertheless of their age, have a positive attitude towards these information while those children which have been omitted keep on doubting of their origin and have the deep need to understand a reality that appears to them even more unclear.

The background of the family of origin through the words of the children

Often in “special cases” adoptions, it is the age of the children that permits them to hold lots of memories related to the past. It is therefore important for the professionals to recover and explore those memories who belong to these “older” children. Attributing a meaning to these memories give a sort of respect to the past events and the memories related to them. An issue arisen thanks to the confrontation of different stories is related to the role of communications transmitted to the children according to their story.

The period of the “family assessment” in fact often represents an opportunity to front the origin of the children or to re-construct and negotiate the information already given in past. It is throughout the adoption procedure that the empty gaps of the children in relation to their doubts and insecurities on their origin must be filled. Mostly, the parent assessment concerns a sense of belonging to a coherent story and the construction of the child’s identity. The possibility to front and explain it reasonably, always considering their developmental phases, helps the creation of a sense of attachment, of belonging with the new nucleus and at the same time it works as a sort of protection towards those thoughts that could get created when the child is left alone with his/her ghosts without clear responses of his/her doubts.

In relation to this it is interesting to see how a 10 years-old girl who had little information on her natural father who left the family after her birth, during the conversation with the psychologist refers to the father as “ a skinny dad”, who, together with mom, used to pick her up at the kindergarten and brought her some gifts.

In relation to her origins she therefore affirms not to know the reason why the dad abandoned her: “ he vanished, maybe is dead or did not get back because he did not want me”. What emerges from this image is a curious child with too little information to use as basis to build on a meaningful story that could give a meaning to all the painful events of her life. This child does not find an explanation to the loss of the biological father and she keeps waving between her personal interpretation as the self-created thought: “probably he did not want me as daughter” and an explanation that automatically cancels every cause and responsibility: “maybe he is dead”.

Letter to the Judge

The letter to the Judge represents an innovative tool created with the aim to give the children a voice and to listen his/her opinion concerning the adoption (fig. 1). The letter communicates an important message to the children who can feel to have an active role in the procedure. It has been possible to observe how the children often take this possibility enthusiastically and they realize accurate letters. Reading this behavior as positive we must take into consideration that the children have spent the main part of their life undertaking someone else's decisions. Writing this letter to the Judge the child feels to have the possibility to lead the situation, his/her personal situation. Through this tool the children become active both in their need of being listened and located at the center of the family and to be an part in the construction of his identity and future.

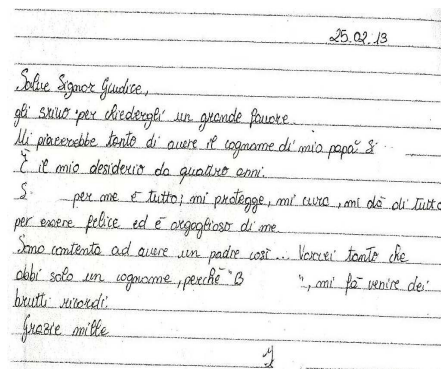


Figure 1. Example of a Letter to the Judge.

Considering the excessive weight this letter can have at the child's eyes, it has been considered particularly important to carefully tell the children how the letter does not represent the unique element to be considered by the Judge to decide, but only one of many. In this way the child can write his/her letter more spontaneously without thinking that the responsibility is all on his hands. The letter in this way becomes a communicative tool and child can analyze it with a professional, reading it a second time and digging deeper in certain aspects brought to light by it.

The border and family belonging test, double Moon

This tool ideated by Ondina Greco (1999)¹, is based on the key concept of loyalty conflict and the redefinition of family borders (Scabini, 1995; Cigoli, 1995).

Thanks to this test it is possible to consider family as a structure that lives and changes in time through different variables. First variable is interaction in here and now's reciprocal actions. The second variable is relational and constituted by what was experienced by different generations. The last variable connecting the former two is the "symbolic reference" (Greco, 1999) as the network in which the family's background settle together with the possibility to give the world a new meaning (Scabini & Cigoli, 1991).

Through this test it is possible to reconsider the family as a mutant and flexible system that varies according to variables strictly related.

The Adoptions Team has been experimenting this instrument with the children involved in this processes in the last five years. Thanks to a qualitative analysis of 10 tests realized by children during the assessment, it emerged how in 40% of the cases, children were not able to group together all those people that, in their opinion belonged to the same family (fig. 3). This aspect appears to be very important to understand the different experiences those kids went through: a big slice of those children is still recognizing and understanding what role do they have within the family, in what sense and to what extent do they belong to this family. The process is not over yet and the use of this instrument could help the children to get these answers. Through the test many significative data emerge, specifically how the children understand their belonging and loyalty towards absent biological parents or towards new parents who constitute the past and present enlarged family. For example, in the drawings of the children it is common to see how the figure of the biological father is mostly absent because he is the person who caused mom's grief and suffer.

It emerges as particularly significative the "absence-presence" relationship as the balance between the presence of the new family and the presence of the far family member (family of origin) and also the weight of idealized representation related to the past and those related to the current situation (Greco, 2006).

¹ For deliveries and the tool, see: Greco O. (1999). "*The border and family belonging test, double Moon*" in the references.

Results: the genesis of the new family and its consolidation

Thanks to the observation of these new families it has been possible to highlight some moments considered as common phases these families go through during their adoption procedure. They usually match with the important phases and passages that the new systems had to face.

In almost all cases analyzed (38 out of 39) the missing parent is the father. Often the father-child relationship never began or at some stage, it was interrupted by a divorce.

These mothers are likely to re-marry only after an accurate analysis of the risks and positive factors that a new union could bring to them and their family.

Those children, belonging to a single parent families, are more exposed to behavioral, social and emotional difficulties (McIntyre et al., 2003) and seem to perform less successfully at school (Linder, Hagan & Brown, 1992, Mulholland, Watt, Philpott & Sarlin, 1991; Wallerstein, 1991, Allison & Furstenberg, 1989) respect to children with both the parenting figures present. In particular those risks appear to be higher within ethnic or disadvantaged families represented by the foreigner mothers who undertake a migratory itinerary to Italy.

The peculiar role of mother

A new input is offered to us by the analysis of the peculiar role those women try to cover in their relationship with their child. Their role is double sided: on the one hand their duty is taking care of the baby also affectively, on the other, they assume duties that usually belong to the paternal figure.

At the beginning of the adoptive assessment, our first hypothesis was that this double role needed to be revisited as soon as the woman was keen to choose a new partner. The start-up of an adoptive assessment being a delicate moment, it was questioned what responsibilities should be associated with which partner: re-investing in a new relationship that for its nature involves a new layout of the family itself because of the introduction of a new member (the partner); creating and investing in new relationships in enlarged families; building a new parenting-axe of collaboration, these are all the aspects that have been considered.

Thanks to the time spent with these families it has been possible to see how the roles get switched within the new couple. The traditional role of the father is mainly done by the mother while the new partner has a more affective role in the growth of the children. This information was not given

to us by the parents but by the children themselves: “Daddy is good, he really understands me and he is less strict than mom”.

The more authoritative role of the mothers defined by more functional relationships, is confirmed by literature as well (Baumrind, 1967; 1971). In the single parent families, a less authoritative approach is associated with negative effects. The involvement of the “new” father is considered important but in many cases the involvement is obtained by a more affective and soft men’s approach (Crosbie-Burnett, 1984).

An aspect which the women put in the father’s hands is the economical well-being of the family: the mothers themselves take on different habits in respect to the past, both as mothers and wives.

The biological fathers

The role played by the biological father may assume different affective connotations in the children’s lives depending on several variables: the setting in which the children grow, the model they have the possibility to observe on their early childhood, the age of the children by the time of the divorce (Allison & Furstenberg, 1989) and how hostile was the mother-father relationship in that phase (Scabini & Cigoli, e 2000, Francescato 2002). Not less important are the memories that the children held of the biologic family before the separation, in particular the information given by the mother and the new family about the biological father, the information given to the child about his/her past. It was verified that in specific situations where the children were exposed to episodes of violence, even though toward the mother, the children tend to refer to the paternal figures setting up a distance between them and referring to the biological father with expression like: “ex-dad”, “ that one”, clearly manifesting anger and hostility toward the parent who did not care about their growth but exposed the family to violence and abuse.

A girl, drawing her family on the Double Moon test, represents the biological father (fig. 2) at the extreme boarder of the rectangle on the left top of the page. She affirms: “ he is outside the rectangle because he is not important to me, he is not part of my life anymore, he is an empty space”. A different tone is held by those children whose father walked away from them without causing rage and rancor as a father who allowed the child to invest his/her love on another family. A boy, on the same test (fig 3), drew the adoptive father and the biological father too, the last one was sketched as a wave “because I think that he permitted me to go in the right direction when he let me come with mum to Italy”.

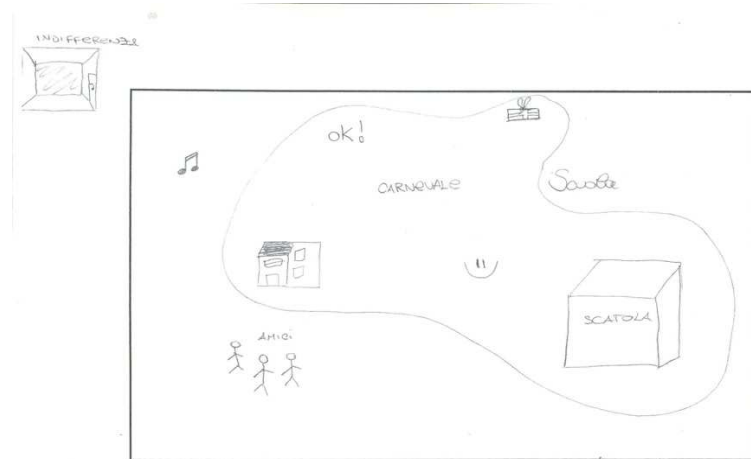


Figure 2: Double moon test; the girl (16 years old) is able to consider different boundaries. She collocates in the circle: mother, aspiring stepfather, paternal grandparents, new grandparents and the maternal grandmother who is living in her Country of Origin

Musical note	Herself
Gift	Mother
Ok	Stepfather is always positive
House	Grandmother in her Country of Origin
Smile	Grandmother from stepfather's side.
Box	Grandfather from stepfather's side.
Little men	Friends
School	
Carnival	Auntie "overbundant and cheerful"
Empty space, out of the rectangle in the left-top of the paper	Biological father " he is like an empty space, he is not part of my life."

The core role of the kids within the new family' construction.

Thanks to the collected stories it was possible to observe how, for the woman, the choice of the new partner and the building of the new family is often related to an inescapable condition: the new partner and child's relationship. It seems that among the new partner and the child a sort of

“implicit agreement” is progressively built. The balance is reached according to the timing of the new relationship. This appears to be, according to the recent dedicated literature as a positive point for a future solid hold of the family. Many studies highlight in fact, how good is within stepfamilies the relationship between the stepparents and the child that guarantees the solidity and the well-being of its members. This is different from what happens in intact nucleus where the solidity and the quality of the family are often related to the quality of the couple-relationship (Crosbie-Burnett, 1984; Dowling, 2005).

The new family gets created from the “falling in love” of the biological mother and the new but already in the starting phase family includes the children. What emerges from the family-stories the Adoptions Team collected, is how the children have been informed from the beginning about the start of a new relationship between the mom and another person. A little-girl says in regard to the first meeting with mom’s new partner: “there has been a good feeling since the beginning, I actually encouraged Mom to start the relationship”. It is not unusual in fact that the children assume an active role in the choice and acceptance of the father’s substitute, binding mom’s choices about her life. Another situation sees at the second appointment with the new partner, the mother later affirming: “I would like to understand if it was worthy” considering the relationship between the child and the partner as a fundamental factor for her future decision of marriage. If that affinity is not felt there is the risk that the relationship will not continue. On the one hand, the mom dreams to build the new family she has long wished. The child on the other hand, takes this situation as an opportunity because he/she is seriously aimed to get his/her identity “confirmed”.

He/she is focused on this new life but he/she feels afraid that the reconstruction won’t include him/her again, so he/she fears he/she could be abandoned again. The child is concerned that in the new relationship there would be a place also for him/her together with a personal involvement as part of acceptance of his existence.

“I asked him if I could call him “dad”; he was happy. From that day we became a family, I have never had a dad like him, I am happy to be protected by him and he is happy to have a daughter”. Those children are often characterized by a fragile personality who constantly needs confirmations. For this reason, they need to be sustained in their self-esteem project. Sometimes the new partner himself, has a big task in this sense. In order to effectively endorse the relation with his wife, the father affectively invests on the child and proposes to adopt him/her. The father dedicates himself to the children in a particular way and he tries to share

mutual interests never considered nor by any paternal figure nor by the mother who is busy with the organization of those practical issues that she has always had to care of on her own. The future dad has now the time to ride the bike with the child, to take him/her to football matches and to support him/her; to share the passion for music, to play an instrument: *“My new dad is more tolerant than mom. Now she feels more secure because she can count on him and for me everything is more convenient. I used to do everything by myself because I could not give all the stress on mom ‘shoulders, she already has much, but now at football matches I also have a daddy who supports me”*.

The new father must be keen to try a new and authentic relationship: ready to welcome the past history of her partner and her son without prejudices and negations, supporting both through the operation of repairing that private pain due to the absence or the negative and dangerous presence of the biological father.

The reconstruction of the enlarged family

Not less relevant is the child for the enlarged family. An important slice of the new family is made by maternal relatives, grandparents and uncles and sometimes the relatives of the biological father, but particularly important appears the family of the future adoptive father. This element frequently appears in the tests that we use: in the two examples, reported in the final section (fig. 2 and 3), what emerges is that the step-grandfathers are pivotal figures the children feel they can trust.

The children can feel the acceptance by all the enlarged family members as a new challenge. The support and the presence of the enlarged family appear as core elements in the selection of the new partner or in the woman’s decision of whether continue, formally, the new relationship. The possibility to create an intimate and safe relation with the relatives of the adoptive father, seems to help the recovery of the child who understands how, also in legal terms, the new relationship is created.

The sustainment and the help offered by the new family really appear as core and central elements while choosing the new husband and while the new relationship parents-children is being confirmed. It is therefore important by the new couple to keep a balance deciding and timing the phases of the introduction of the child to the enlarged relatives. A safe and happy cooperation between all three persons in the family nucleus, mother, biological father, adoptive father, seems to be very important in order to create and consolidate the emotional connection with the child. Those

connections could be fundamental to overcome unavoidable future identity and evolutionary crisis.

For the child, the chance to create an intimate and safe situation with the relatives of the stepfather is important and seems to help the process of reorganization of the child who understands how the juridical path is being validated and sustained by the new nucleus too. It is therefore important that the new couple will proceed balancing the forthcoming events and considering the best time to insert the child in the new enlarged father's family. A happy and peaceful collaboration among the three nuclei, the mother's, the natural parent's and the stepparents' one appears to be very important to trigger all those processes of construction and consolidation of affective relationships. The latter could later help the children crossing the unavoidable crisis in the developing of their identity.

Discussion

“Special case” adoption is nowadays a way to legally ratify the new family but also encloses different complex elements. It is important to consider that in half of the cases the protagonists are foreign women for whom the journey to Italy directly follows their relation's breakdown. They travel to Italy looking for job opportunities while the child stays in the origin country with the maternal family, while they wait for the re-joining phase (Bimbi & Trifiletti, 2006; Bonizzoni, 2005; Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2004; Vianello, 2009).

All those events need to be elaborated from the people who are part of them but, particularly they ask the Social Services to face those needs and gather all the proper instruments to understand those new families and sustain them, posing particular attention on the children.

In fact, if all the phases the family goes through are critical and vulnerable moments for the adults, even more critically can they be felt by the children so that these phases can be considered risky factors for them.

In this specific context what appears relevant is how to listen the children and what instruments can help him/her to express his/her opinion and his/her needs.

To use psychosocial tools created on purpose to give the children “a voice”, as the Double Moon test and the Letter to the Judge, even though still in an experimental phase, means to give those children the possibility to recover their past, give it a coherence, rebuild it and make it meaningful however full of painful memories. The painful memory remains but if it is elaborated and dressed with a new meaning it could be turned into a safe-base from which to start again. At the same time, the involvement of the

children in the assessment firstly answers their needs to openly manifest their feelings and secondly, it turns them to be the main actors of their life project.

The studies conducted allowed us to recognize some common features of these new families. In time-succession: the new role of the mothers who within the new couple consider more the duty aspects and not the care aspects of the mother-child relation, the core role of the biological father whose children need to understand and give him a collocation, the affective relationship between the new parent and the child, the relationship with the enlarged family.

What appears fundamentally important for children while building up this new relationship, is the establishment of a reciprocal warranty agreement. This agreement is needed in order to make this safe relationship continuous and characterized by a “nevermore” phase of loneliness, pain, abandon and lack of a well-build family. As Winnicott (1990) affirms: “in a safe environment the child is able to achieve his personal growth according with his own personality. It follows that the sense of existence, the sense of himself, finally becomes autonomy”.

Adding the surname of the new father to the original, is felt like the moment that sets forth the connection and makes it public. Thanks to this the child feels as properly and fully belonging to a new family and in some way his/her identity gets completed because it finds the missing piece.

Conclusion

The deep cultural and socio-economic transformation that took place in Italy in the last 40 years determined a plurality of family forms. It is known in fact that the increasing number of matrimonial stability, the big change experienced in the woman’s role, the increasing number of migrations, and more generally, globalization, are all factors that contributed to create “new forms” of family that appear to be increasing, as the stepfamilies.

The work presented here, even though it aims to be a focusing moment on the elements that are common to those new families as well as their needs and their weaknesses, also wants to highlight the instruments and the settings though which those families are supported and helped. The social and psychological professionals want to find a way in order to actively involve the children in those paths. To surpass the vision of the child as object of the professionals requires a deep change that must start from the operators themselves. Implementing and supporting new instruments that focus on listening and understanding the children and create those

opportunities and situation in order to let the children express themselves and would be able to give their opinion and their point of view.

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