Foster parent adoption: Preparing children through the use of Life Books

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Foster parent adoption: Preparing children through the use of Life Books

Fiscus, Veronica, M.S.W.

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1993

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FOSTER PARENT ADOPTION:
PREPARING CHILDREN THROUGH THE USE OF LIFE BOOKS

by

Veronica Fiscus

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Social Work

Department of Social Work
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
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ABSTRACT

The trend of foster parent adoption is increasing as more children are placed in foster care requiring a permanent family. This is an exploratory study focusing on foster children who are being adopted by their foster parents and their need for adequate preparation. In this study, a group of four children were prepared for adoption through the utilization of Life Books. Upon completion of the group, all of the subjects improved with respect to: knowledge of genealogical background, understanding reason for placement in foster care and comprehension of adoption. Adoption preparation is a preventative service that has been supported by the research as a method of reducing adoption disruption.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.................................................. iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS........................................ vi

CHAPTER
1. INTRODUCTION........................................ 1

2. PROBLEM AREA........................................ 6
   Research Problem................................... 6
   Purpose, Significance and Need of the Study..... 8
   The Research Questions............................ 10
   Objectives.......................................... 10
   Definition of Terms................................ 11

3. THE LITERATURE REVIEW.............................. 13
   Related Literature on Post-Adopt Programs........ 13
   Related Literature on Foster Parent Adoption.... 15
   Related Literature on Adoption Disruption....... 22
   Related Literature on Identity Issues............. 26
   Related Literature on Adoption Preparation...... 28
   Related Literature on Life Books................ 31
   Hypotheses......................................... 37

4. METHODOLOGY......................................... 38
   The Research Design............................... 38
   The Subjects....................................... 39
   The Sample......................................... 39
   Instrument......................................... 41
   Procedure.......................................... 41
   Session I.......................................... 42
   Session II......................................... 43
   Session III........................................ 44
   Session IV......................................... 45
   Session V.......................................... 46
   Data Collection.................................... 47
   Pre-test Answers................................... 47
   Post-test Answers.................................. 49
   Data Analysis and Discussion..................... 51

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS................. 55
   Conclusions........................................ 55
   Delimitations of the Study........................ 57
   Implications for Social Work Practice.......... 58
APPENDIX I PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST INSTRUMENT .......... 61
APPENDIX II CANDLE CEREMONY ............................. 62
APPENDIX III PHOTOGRAPH LIST ............................ 65
REFERENCES ................................................ 66
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The child welfare system has focused a significant amount of energy on the issue of permanency planning for children in the foster care system. While placement with the family of origin is preferred, adoption is favored over long term foster care (Rosenthal & Groze, 1992). The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (P.L. 96-272) mandates "permanence and familylike living situations for children who have been or may be removed from their homes because of abuse or neglect, and recognizes the advantages of adoption" (Berry & Barth, 1990 p. 209).

Time limits have been placed on the natural parent to change their living situation or possibly lose their parental rights permanently. When reunification or relative placements are not an option, the end result is countless children in need of adoptive homes. Foster parent adoptions appear to be a viable solution for a large portion of these children. Preference is given to foster parents who have provided a stable and loving environment for the child and where there is a
psychological commitment to the child. Subsidy legislation in some states was initially designed to solely promote foster parent adoptions (Meezan & Shireman, 1982). The attempt to find permanent homes for foster children not returning to their biological families has required a redefinition of foster care and the role of foster parents (Meezan & Shireman, 1985).

Adoption of foster children by foster parents is a legally and psychologically sanctioned practice (Proch, 1981). There are several advantages to foster parent adoptions: 1) the child and family are known to one another (Meezan & Shireman, 1982); 2) the child and family know the placement will work during the foster care stage and each has settled in (Barth et al., 1988; Meezan & Shireman, 1982); 3) foster parent adoptions have a lower disruption rate (Barth et al., 1988); 4) and it eliminates the need for recruitment efforts of an adoptive placement.

Until recently, agencies did not consider foster parents as adoptive resources for the children in their care (Proch, 1981; Meezan & Shireman, 1982, 1985). Foster care was considered a temporary arrangement for children who would either be returned to their biological family or be adopted by other families, and the foster parents were encouraged to keep emotionally distant from the foster children (Meezan & Shireman, 1985). The view was that foster parents were expected to accept the removal of a child from their home with little notice (Proch, 1981; Meezan & Shireman, 1985).
Child welfare personnel previously raised a number of objections to foster parent adoptions including: 1) foster parents were not as cautiously screened as other adoptive applicants (Cole, 1978); 2) it was believed that such adoptions would limit the valuable resource of foster parent homes (Proch, 1981; Meezan & Shireman, 1982, 1985); 3) some people may become foster parents as a "back door" to the adoption process (Proch, 1981); and 4) less efforts at reunification with the biological family may be made if foster parent adoption is anticipated (Meezan & Shireman, 1982, 1985). These objections still hold true today for some child welfare personnel when the child in question is adoptable and not considered to be special needs.

The foster parent adoption movement is nationwide and is growing with the increase of children placed into the foster care system (National Adoption Clearinghouse, 1991). It effects foster children of all ages, ethnicities and special needs.

Studies performed in the 1980's on the prevalence of foster parent adoptions among public agencies in the United States showed foster parent adoptions constituting 40 percent to 80 percent of all adoptive placements with an average of 60 percent (National Adoption Information Clearinghouse, 1991). The magnitude of this social issue demonstrates the immediate need of clearly outlined procedures of child preparation by social workers for the practice to be efficient. A therapeutic
A tool that can be of help to foster children is the use of a Life Book and is current practice for adoption preparation (Backhaus, 1984). A Life Book is designed to incorporate information regarding the child's biological family, past foster homes and any other vital information needed to help the child visualize his life experiences. Children are placed at risk of having identity problems if not given adequate information about their heritage. The American Academy of Pediatrics' Committee on Adoptions concluded that "determining identity is a difficult enough process for someone brought up by his natural parents; it is even more complex for the adopted individual whose ancestry is unknown to him (Sorosky, Baran and Pannor, 1975 p.18)."

The trend of foster parent adoptions over the past decade appears to be a result of the thrust to bring about permanency for children in foster care. The proportion of children who are adopted by their foster parents is substantial. The benefits of a permanent family seem to outnumber the negative beliefs associated with such adoptions as previously mentioned.

The majority of research available supports the necessity of adequate preparation of foster children who are being adopted. However, this research generally is limited to children who will be moved into an adoptive home. It rarely includes the children who were placed in a foster home under the original understanding of the placement being temporary.
This study intends to specifically explore the issues related to adoption preparation as it relates to foster parent adoption. It is designed to utilize preparation techniques with a small group from the population of children who are in the process of being adopted by their foster parents. Each child will first be tested to determine their level of understanding of their biological background and the meaning of adoption. Secondly, treatment will be facilitated in a group setting providing each child with the basic facts with regards to their background and on adoption. Life Books will be incorporated in this process. Lastly, each child will be post-tested to determine the retention of the treatment to measure its effectiveness.

Ultimately, these children are put at risk of possible placement disruption or identity difficulties if proper steps are not taken to initially prepare for the transition into adoption. Hopefully, this study will present a means of avoiding such traumatic events from the onset of the adoption process.
CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM AREA

The Research Problem

Adoption disruptions have increased substantially during the past 15 years (Westhues & Cohen, 1990). Disruption rates for special needs children range from 8% (Kadushin, 1974) to 21.4% (Boyne et al., 1984). This partially is to be expected with the increase of special needs adoptions and the obsolete term of "unadoptable children". There have been many studies conducted to determine ways of reducing the number of disruptions. Most researchers agreed that preparation of the child for adoption is crucial in order to deal with the child's past, feelings of loss and rejection and unresolved emotional conflict (Meezan & Shireman, 1982; Hornby, 1986; McInturf, 1986; & Westhues & Cohen, 1990).

Foster parent adoptions reportedly have a lower disruption rate because the child and family have already learned whether the placement will work during the foster care stage (Barth et al., 1988). However, in the study of "Predicting Adoption Disruptions" Barth, Berry, Yoshikami, Goodfield, & Carson (1988) found that this stability holds only
for white children who have been in care for longer than one year.

Meezan & Shireman (1985) discovered in their study of 43 caseworkers, failure of foster parent adoption was related to lack of appropriate preparation for the transition of foster care to adoption. It was further pointed out that this transition is not as natural as one might expect.

The research that has been completed on the need for children to be prepared for adoption appears to be limited to those children who are going to be placed into an adoptive home as opposed to being adopted by their foster parents. This is unusual since the majority of all special needs adoptions are made to the foster parents (Barth & Berry, 1990; National Adoption Clearinghouse, 1991).

The preparation of children being adopted by their foster parents appears to be a relatively new research area. The double standard used for the two above mentioned adoptions ought to be closely examined in order to protect the identity needs of the child; to possibly prevent adoption disruption; and to develop a method of providing service to this population effectively.

The lack of attention in the research on preparation of children for foster parent adoption indicates the necessity for this study. Additionally, this study will provide an example of a group preparation style that can be useful when
working with this population.

**Purpose, Significance and Need of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to develop a model of providing adoption preparation services to children who are in the process of being adopted by their foster parents and to determine its effectiveness. Particular attention will be devoted to the need and use of a Life Book during the preparation process as a means of maintaining self identity.

The significance of this study is based on the large population of children that are affected by foster parent adoption and the lack of current standards or expectations of child welfare workers who facilitate their adoptions.

Hopefully, the contribution of this study will educate child welfare workers who work with the children being adopted by their foster parents. The current practice of completing such adoptions as a formality needs to change. The child needs to be involved with the adoption process in order to be effective.

Presently, studies indicate that the prevalence of foster parent adoptions among public agencies in the United States constitutes 40 percent to 80 percent of all adoptive placements with the average being 60 percent (National Adoption Clearinghouse, 1991). The magnitude of this population alone
requires intensive research to determine if the current services available are adequate for their particular needs. It is important to distinguish this population's uniqueness in comparison to adoptions where a family has been specifically recruited for a child.

The majority of the available research on preparation of special needs children for adoption focuses little attention on foster parent adoptions. This oversight or neglect of attention, insinuates foster children who are being adopted by their foster parents require little if any preparation for the adoption process. Those foster children are potentially at risk of having little understanding of why they are placed in foster care, why they did not return to their biological parents and of the legal aspects of the finalization of adoption. Additionally, these children are not aware of the change in status from foster care to adoption.

The foster parent adoption domain is a growing phenomenon which requires further research. The research in this area is particularly sparse and limited. Families are at risk of possible disruption and children risk losing their biological identity if efforts are not made to prepare children before the adoption is finalized. This study is designed to examine the current literature available on foster parent adoption and preparation for adoption. Additionally, this study will provide a protocol of preparing foster children for adoption in
a group setting using the tool of Life Books. The children will be given factual information including: parents names, siblings names, place of birth; reason for placement in foster care; and definition of adoption.

The Research Questions
1. What are the needs of foster children in the process of being adopted by their foster parents?
2. What effects does the use of a Life Book have in the preparation for adoption process?

Objectives
The objective of this study is to examine the need of adequate preparation of foster children being adopted by their foster parents in hopes of maintaining heritage, identity and avoiding disruption. Also, to determine what can be done to provide services to this population once the need has been determined. The second objective is to examine the effectiveness of the Life Book in the preparation process.
**Definition of Terms**

bonding - forming of a close specialized human relationship such as loving, caring and trusting that takes place between the adopted child and the adoptive parent (George, 1990).

disruption of adoption - an adoptive placement which has been initiated and terminated, whether finalized or not (Hornby, 1986).

fost-adopt - placements in which a child not legally free for adoption is placed in an agency foster family home with the expectation that the foster parents will eventually adopt the child (Mica & Vosler, 1990). This is also known as "legal risk", meaning the family is taking a risk that the child may be returned to the natural parents (George, 1990).

foster care - temporary care for children by families who are licensed by county or state social service agencies (George, 1990).

foster parent adoption - refers to the process by which a child is placed into a foster home on a temporary basis however the child later becomes free and the family chooses to adopt (Proch, 1981).
special needs children - refers to children who are of a minority ethnicity, over the age of five, or a part of a sibling group. It also includes children who have physical, mental or emotional disabilities (Samuels, 1990).

termination of parental rights - the severing of legal parental rights of a biological parent generally for the purpose of adoption.

These terms are most commonly used in child welfare and adoption agencies and will be utilized throughout the following literature review. The literature review will discuss foster parent adoptions, fost-adopt, disruption of adoptions, identity issues, and preparation for adoption techniques including the use of the Life Book.
CHAPTER 3

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Related Literature on Fost-Adopt Programs

Gill (1975) researched the development of a program whereby children who were not legally available for adoption were placed with foster families who were interested in adopting the child and were willing to take the legal risk that the child may be returned to the biological parents or relatives. During the two year period the study was conducted, seventeen children were placed of which seven conversions to adoption were made. At the time of the study, none of the seventeen children were returned to the natural families. This type of study was an early example of a successful attempt to strive for permanency at the beginning of the foster care experience instead of twelve to eighteen months after wardship and it proved to be successful.

Gill and Amadio (1983) completed further research on the development of the fost-adopt program and identified eight categories of children appropriate for such a program:

1. A child who has been relinquished by the mother and the identity of the father is unknown.
2. A child relinquished by one parent and a diligent search completed does not reveal the whereabouts of the other parent.

3. A child where one parent relinquished and it appears that the other parent may also relinquish.

4. The child has been abandoned and there is an indication the parent intended to give the child up permanently and their identity is unknown.

5. Termination of parental rights has been granted by the trial court but the case is on appeal to a higher court.

6. The child comes from a family in which other children have been freed for adoption.

7. The child lives in a state where courts require a child be in an adoptive family before petitioning for involuntary termination of parental rights.

8. The child's parent is mentally ill or developmentally disabled and unlikely to ever be able to parent the child (Gill & Amadio, 1983).

This type of program requires cooperation and open communication between the caseworker and the foster family in order to be successful. The above specific examples provide a method of selecting appropriate children in order to avoid placing children in fost-adopt homes when reunification is truly a possibility. Although fost-adopt families are aware of the legal risk involved in such a placement, every effort should
be made to place the child in the most appropriate home.

Mica and Vosler (1990) completed research on foster adoptive programs. Their literature review discovered limited research in this area. They further discovered the need for studies to provide workers, administrators and policy makers with empirical data on identifying who the foster-adoptive children are and whether this type of placement leads to increased permanency. Furthermore, the study concluded that it needs to be determined what problems can emerge in requesting foster-adoptive families to commit themselves unconditionally to a child prior to termination of parental rights.

Related Literature on Foster Parent Adoption

Children who previously have been in long-term foster care are now being freed for adoption in increasing numbers (Meezan & Shireman, 1982). This pattern is likely to continue as more child welfare agencies focus their philosophy on permanency planning out of response to the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 (P.L. 95-068) and the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (P.L. 96-272).

In the mid-1970's when agencies became increasingly more concerned about formalizing permanent plans for foster children, foster homes began to be considered for adoption. From this concept, the foster parent/adoptive parent continuum
originated (Gill, 1975).

Foster parent adoptions have become an acceptable mechanism of providing a permanent home for a child who might otherwise "grow up" in the foster care system (Meezan & Shireman, 1982). The belief of Goldstein, Freud and Solnit (1973) was that foster parents become psychological parents during the extended periods of time when children have little contact with their biological parents. They further stated that since continuity of this psychological parent-child relationship is essential to healthy emotional and social development, foster parents should be encouraged and permitted to adopt the foster children in their care.

The Division of Child and Family Services manual for the state of Nevada (1992, Section 705 D4) states "adoption of special needs children by their foster parents is encouraged, if suitable." It further states that consideration should be given based upon the family's ability to meet the child's special needs now and in the future. Also, evidence that indicates the child is an integrated member of the foster family must be addressed.

There are certain conditions that must exist before a foster parent adoption is deemed appropriate. Namely, the ties between the child and biological family must be legally severed (Meezan & Shireman, 1982). Terminations of parental rights are performed quicker and more comfortably when the child will
remain in his or her current home (Gill, 1975).

Secondly, psychological ties to a biological family must be openly acknowledged and worked through between the child and foster family (Meezan & Shireman, 1982). The children need to be told that their parents are unable to care for them; their parents can't overcome their problems, and that it is not their fault (Jones, 1979). If feelings are repressed the new adoptive relationship may be distorted by the child and fantasy may cause future disruption in placement.

Thirdly, a "bond" must have developed between the child and the foster family (Meezan & Shireman, 1982). Proch (1981) suggests that preference is also associated with the length of time the child has been with the foster parent and the attachment that has developed. Over time, the foster child has learned to trust that the foster parent will provide for his/her needs.

Lastly, the agency must be conscious not to impose a hardship on the foster family by the facilitation of the adoption (Meezan & Shireman, 1982). The availability of financial and medical subsidies are particularly useful in this capacity. Foster parents who otherwise would not have been able to adopt out of financial reasons, now are capable of adopting with continued foster care payments and medical cards.

The practice of foster parent adoption forces child welfare agencies to put more effort at the beginning stages of
foster care including: assessing the child's needs to insure the foster placement is appropriate in the event the home becomes an adoptive home (Proch, 1981); placing children in same race placements to continue heritage and avoid transracial adoptions (Rosenthal & Croze, 1992) and asserting all efforts to keep siblings together to maintain already developed sibling bonds (Division of Child and Family Services Manual, 1992).

Proch (1981) completed a study in which questionnaires were sent to the adoption specialists in the state public child welfare agency in every state and the District of Columbia. She wanted to determine whether foster parents were given preference to adopt a child in their care that were free for adoption. It was determined that 43 states and the District of Columbia give foster parents preference to foster children in their care. Furthermore, 9 states and the District of Columbia give preference by legislation, 15 states give preference by agency regulation, 19 states give preference by practice and 3 states do not give any preference.

The conclusions from this study suggest that: preference to foster parents should not be further extended through legislation and agency regulations because foster care practices should not be designed to prevent adoption by default under existing preference policy (Proch, 1981). The results further imply that since foster parents are receiving preference for adoption, greater care must be given in
selecting a foster home for a child due to the possibility the home may become permanent. Also, this study demonstrates that an effort must be made to place siblings together and to place children in same race foster homes.

Meezan and Shireman (1982) completed a literature review on foster parent adoption. They discovered that literature on the conversion of foster homes to adoptive homes was scarce. The researchers discussed a study of 69 foster families, half of whom adopted children in their care. Caseworkers identified enjoyment of the child and sensitivity to the child's needs as reasons foster parents chose to adopt (Hargrave et al., 1975). Reasons foster parents were reluctant to adopt were: age or health; child's degree of handicap; fear of adolescence; lack of bonding between foster parent and child; and fear of loss of agency support (Fanshel, 1979; Hargrave, 1975; and Jewitt, 1978).

This paper suggested that the failure of foster parent adoptions were related to problems in the worker's assessment of the family and child. Also, a misjudgment of the family's readiness to make a permanent attachment (Churchill et al., 1979; Unger et al., 1977). Foster parents further reported that the social worker did little preparation with the parents or the child in the transition of adoption (Hargrave, 1975). Emphasis was placed on the necessity of adoption workers to prepare families and children for adoption as a means of
mitigating difficulties and possibly avoiding disruptions in the future.

Proch (1982) completed further research which involved 130 randomly selected adopted children between the ages of 7 and 13 who were adopted by their foster parents. The researcher interviewed a total of 29 children in their homes using a semistructured interview. The results revealed that only 8 of the 29 interviewed could distinguish between foster care and adoption. The remainder either did not know what they were or considered them to be one and the same (Proch, 1982). Although the study is limited and not generalizable to the public at large, its findings demonstrate the effectiveness of foster parent adoptions and the perceptions held by both foster parents and adoptive children.

Meezan and Shireman (1985) investigated the framework of foster parent adoptions in terms of characteristics of foster parents who chose to adopt; characteristics of foster children who are adopted by their foster parents; the type of relationships between the two; and the perceptions and experiences of foster parents with the agency and its policies in relation to those who adopt and those who do not. Although the sample size was reportedly small and was conducted in an urban population through the use of interviews, the findings determined that the actual number of previous placements the child experienced was less important than the reasons for these
previous placements terminated. Also, the meeting of initial parental preferences were less important. Early attachment to the family was less important than the experiences between the family and the child over time. Knowing the child's biological family was also associated with deciding to adopt. The research showed a positive relationship between well functioning families who felt the worker knew them well.

The data suggested that children for whom action was taken in a timely way were more likely to be adopted. Poor preparation appeared to be associated with adoption failure. Open discussions seemed to be important to the children, and the quality of worker-child relationship was associated with the adoption decision. Meezan and Shireman (1985, p.218) suggested "children appear to need time to recapitulate their own lives and to come to terms with the nature of their ties to their families of origin. A number of techniques have successfully been used to accomplish this. Most common is the preparation of a life book." Such a book helps the child understand what happened to them and why and it also clarifies their relationship with the people in their lives.

Rosenthal and Groze (1992) completed a study concerning special needs adoption with intact families, in which the children were 4 years or older at the time of placement. Questionnaires were mailed to a sample of 1,413 families. The questions asked such things as: support from family and
friends; handicaps and disabilities; the perceived helpfulness of social work and supportive services, school attendance and grades; behavior problems; and family functioning. Factors such as age, gender, out-of-home placement history of the child, type of adoption were analyzed.

There were reportedly 331 or 51.1% foster parent adoptions of which a large proportion stated they experienced good outcomes with regards to adoption services. The researchers further report that adoption by foster parents is associated with stability. The increased stability is possibly due to the fact that foster children who are adjusting well are more likely to be adopted than those who are not.

Although the overall literature presented is sparse, studies focusing on foster parent adoption indicate that special needs adoptions work and that it proves the philosophy, of "no child is unadoptable." The current practice of foster parent adoption appears to satisfy the need of placement resources for special needs children.

Related Literature on Adoption Disruption

The research on the practice of foster parent adoption suggests the goal to be maintaining already formed attachment and providing a permanent home for a child. However, the following research indicates foster parent adoptions are more apt to become disrupted like other adoptions if precautions are
not taken. Foster parent adoptions commonly involve older children. Research has consistently indicated that adoption disruption increases with the age at adoption (Kadushin, 1974).

Barth, Berry, Carson, Goodfield and Feinberg (1986) reviewed research on rates of, and contributors to adoption and foster adoption disruptions. They report that various characteristics of family and child are specifically related to adoption disruption. Specifically, families with less flexible family roles and rules are more apt to become disrupted than families who are more flexible (Cohen, 1981); families who had insufficient training or information about the child (Nelson, 1985) and in families where the parents and child are too different to foster a good relationship (Unger et al., 1977). The researchers pointed to attachment as potential factors relating to disruption. Children who were removed from their home due to abuse, neglect or abandonment may not have developed abilities to make attachments (Kirkan, 1983).

According to Barth et al. (1986), data on outcomes of foster parent adoptive placements are sparse. The research indicates that foster parents who were less satisfied with services felt pressured into adopting because of the threat that otherwise the child would be removed to be placed in an adoptive home. It was recommended that data on foster adoption and adoption disruption are needed. The recommended services
to improve the adoption process were parent preparation, pre-adoption groups, adoption subsidies, sibling placement, and postplacement services (Barth et al. 1986). This study concluded that to significantly reduce adoption disruption, additional information and program and practice developments are needed.

Hornby (1986) studied over 200 families, a quarter of which had disrupted adoptions. Disruption in the first three years was reportedly less than 10 percent. Physical abuse was a common factor in 86 percent of the children studied. Older children and those who have been available longer for adoption are more vulnerable to disruption. It was suggested that insufficient work to help the child gain a true understanding of his or her past was associated with adoption disruption. Furthermore, preparation is needed to deal with the child's memories of both biological and foster families, behavioral difficulties, feelings of loss and rejection and unresolved emotional conflict. This study indicated that the technique used to prepare children for adoption most effectively was the use of Life Books. However, this tool was found to be used only in 58 percent of the cases studied.

Barth et al. (1988) researched adoption disruption and attempted to identify predictors in such cases. They studied 13 counties in California with 1,155 adopted children. There was a total of 94 cases that qualified as disrupted. Foster parent
adoptions totaled 733. Foster parent adoptions were reportedly more stable than non-foster parent adoptions however, this was only true for white children. Foster parent adoptions for girls were more stable than boys. Foster parent adoptions were found to be no more stable for children who previously had been placed for adoption or who were in the home for less than one year before the adoption took place. The researchers were able to equate stability of foster parent adoptions with longer preadoptive relationships between the child and family. The study suggested the need for intensive adoption preservation services, including in-home crisis intervention or temporary out-of-home care as a possible prevention of adoption disruption.

Westhues and Cohen (1990) completed a similar longitudinal study which included 58 families who adopted 79 children. They found that a family who adopts special needs children require the active participation of the husband/father as well as the wife/mother. The researcher made reference to reducing the number of disruptions by improving training of workers making special needs placement, providing postplacement services for adoptive families and better preparing older children for adoption.

Berry and Barth (1990) studied disrupted adoptive placements of adolescents from a sub-sample of their previous study in 1988. They determined the overall disruption rate to
be 24.2 percent with foster parent adoption disruptions of 19 percent. It was further determined that foster parent adoptions are successful when they involved adoption by foster parents who are age-appropriate in relation to the child, when there are other foster children present in the home, and when adoption subsidies are sufficient to cover the needs of the child and the family.

The available research on adoption disruption indicates that, overall, special needs adoptions are successful and are a better alternative to long term foster care. The studies made valid points that ways of avoiding disruptions include the availability of subsidies, precise assessments of the adoptive families ability at parenting a child with special needs and adequate preparation of the child for adoption. The preparation needs to include information given to the child regarding his biological family for the purpose of maintaining its own identity.

Related Literature on Identity Issues

The foster child being adopted today generally has spent several years in foster care, and may have been in at least two foster homes (Jones,1979). Also, the child has had several different caseworkers as a result of high turnovers in staff. Thus, older children who are being adopted have had a number of different individuals involved in their lives with little or no
consistency. As a result, the child suffers from the lack of knowledge regarding his biological background as it relates to identity.

Sorosky, Baran and Pannor (1975) completed a literature review regarding adoptees and discovered that this population is vulnerable to the development of identity problems in late adolescence and adulthood. Erikson (1967) stated "the problem of identity is that it must establish a continuity between society's past and future and that adolescence in all its vulnerability and power is the critical transformer of both." The identity conflicts appear to be related to the struggle to find out information regarding genealogical background.

Frisk (1964) believed that "the lack of family background information in the adoptee prevents the development of a healthy "genetic ego," which is then replaced by a "hereditary ghost"." The adopted adolescent is unable to rationalize his likeness in looks and behaviors to generations past. Also, the rejection by the natural parents reinforces the adoptee's feeling of inferiority and the feeling of being abnormal. Normally, attention is not paid to one's genealogy; it is simply a matter of fact. Wellisch (1952) pointed out that the lack of knowledge of ancestry can cause maladjustment in children.

Sants (1965) described the term of "genealogical bewilderment" as the state of confusion and uncertainty that develops in a child who has no knowledge of natural parents or
only uncertain knowledge of them. This can lead to the development of poor self esteem and a confused sense of identity.

Foster parent adoptions differ from other types of adoption in that secrecy is not as prevalent. Many times, the foster parents have met the biological parents and have general information about them. However, as years pass, memories tend to fade and valuable information regarding the child's genealogy is lost. It is the responsibility of all parties involved, i.e. the foster parents, the social worker, and in some cases the child, to record the vital information so that it can be retrieved at a later date. The facts are the solution to minimizing fantasy in the adopted child and instilling self worth.

Related Literature on Adoption Preparation

Research has been completed on the need to prepare children for adoption. Chestang and Heymann (1976) made the following suggestions when working with children for the purpose of adoption. Clarification needs to be made with regard to their relationship with natural parents. For example, "people who give birth to children do not always have the ability to care for them. This does not mean that they don't love you but that they do not have enough to give (Chestang & Heymann, 1976 p.35)." They further stated that children tend to
blame themselves for being in foster care and it is necessary to clarify that this is not their fault. Thirdly, the child needs to understand they are entitled to parents and have the right to parents of their own.

The researchers gave suggestions to caseworkers to reassure the child that he or she is not going to ask them to do anything they are not ready for. Also, reassurance that the agency will stand by the child and allow them to move at their own pace. The researchers made reference to the need of the child to work through the rejection of the natural parents in order for him or her to attach to the adoptive family.

Jones (1979) completed similar research on adoption preparation. She discussed four different stages, the first of which is termination with the natural family or cutting the emotional bond. Most foster children fantasize that they will be reunited with their natural family. For placement in an adoptive home, the child needs to be helped to dismiss this myth and deal with the grief of the loss. The researcher suggests the child be told that their parents are unable to care for them; their parents can not overcome their problems and that it is not their fault. The researcher states that the grief of the termination with parents is similar to the grief about death and follows Kubler-Ross's (1969) stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.

The second stage of preparation is differentiation of
foster and adoptive placement. The goal is to explain to the child foster care is meant to be a temporary placement and adoptive placement is permanent.

The third stage is the clarification of self concept. The researcher states that foster children who have been in a number of different placements usually have a vague self concept, with no sense of who they are or where they came from. She recommends the use of the life history book as a means of clarifying the child's history.

The final stage is the development of the adoptive relationship. The goal of this stage is to "develop a relationship between the child and adoptive parent that will culminate in finalization of the adoption and continue until the child is an adult (Jones,1979 p.33)."

Court (1980) described the use of the "Time Line" as a treatment tool for children. This tool can be used for children between the ages of five and eight. The purpose is to help children sort out chronologically the major events in their life from birth until present and to cope with the emotions attached to the events.

The Time Line is simply a line drawn across a piece of paper. The beginning of the line is the child's birth. The line proceeds in one year increments. The child's feelings about the events are recorded and pictures drawn by the child can be included. This is in some ways similar to the Life Book.
This tool organizes the child's life so that it is understandable in a visual sense. The advantages of this tool are: by discussing the child's past, the therapist makes the feelings safe for the child; the therapist can help the adults in the child's life feel more comfortable discussing the child's past; the child is able to work through feelings with a visual aid; and the events are less threatening on paper and helps the child elaborate on feelings related to the events.

Related Literature on Life Books

Aust (1981) completed research on the use of Life Story Books. She noted the Life Book was credited to Mary R. Horn of the Children's Bureau of Los Angeles who developed it in the late sixties (Horn, 1980). The Life Story Book is a scrapbook that begins with the child's birth and holds momentos, snapshots, drawings and memories from the child's life experiences. The researcher further states the Life Book has been used in such themes as adoption or child treatment in agency training material and books. Furthermore, the purpose of this process is "to improve the child's self-concept and ego functioning by providing identity models that compete with the child's faulty identification with the primary parent (Aust, 1981 p.553)."

Aust (1981) states that this tool was used in the Specialized Foster Care Department of Child and Family
Services, Inc. Each of the social workers in the unit made Life Books for many of the children on their caseload.

"Each worker has found the Life Book process invaluable in helping a child talk about and begin to understand who he is, who his parents are, and in what ways he is like them and different from them. As he is helped to separate from them he can more easily identify with healthier models (Aust, 1981 p. 553-554)."

The children reportedly went through the normal amount of crises in their daily lives regardless of the workers' completion of the Life Book. However, the child will need additional attention during the time he is working on the Life Book (Aust, 1981). The positive change each child experienced differed. Most of the children reportedly had: a more positive self-concept; a more realistic and accepting view of self, parents and environment; a better understanding of their living situation; improved memory and behavior; a more realistic view of their situation as opposed to one that involves fantasy; improved interpersonal relationships; and increased tolerance for separation and change (Aust, 1981).

The researcher states that the Life Book process assists in re-educating the child's beliefs congruent with Ellis' Rational Emotive Therapy (Ellis & Greiger, 1977). That is,

"in helping a child understand the reality of his life to date, one must find and dispute the irrational, negative
beliefs that the child holds about himself and his parents in order to allow him to see himself, his life, and the future in a more positive and realistic way. New, more positive messages must be presented at the child's level of understanding and with respect for defenses (Ellis, 1977 p.558)."

Aust concluded with the fact the Life Book gives the child a history and a source of reference that can confirm his identity and self worth long after the basic Life Book work is done.

Backhaus (1984) researched the effectiveness of Life Books and reported its helpfulness in working with adopted children to resolve ties to birth parents or previous foster families and to increase feelings of self worth. She states the Life Book includes a narrative describing what has happened to the child, when, and why, and what the child's feelings are about what happened. She warned the Life Book would not cure problems for children in placement but are nonetheless invaluable (Backhaus, 1984).

The researcher completed an exploratory study in which she interviewed fifteen social workers to determine their opinions regarding Life Books. Ten workers reported using Life Books in adoption cases, five in specialized foster care, and one in a residential setting. The researcher found, overall, the social workers believed the Life Books were useful for the child to understand and integrate the past, present and future.
Also, the child is given access to their own history without any misconceptions. The Life Book was credited to giving the child continuity and helping to develop an intact sense of identity. All of the workers except for two felt Life Books had potential for use with all children on their caseload (Backhaus, 1984). The most common problem reported by the workers regarding preparing Life Books was amount of time needed to complete it. Additionally, the workers reported the children acted out during the process of preparing the book while dealing with painful memories.

The author discussed Biggert's (1978) belief that foster children are subjected to repeated moves and lack of continuity which makes it unusually difficult to develop complete and intact personal identities. The information that forms identity is fragmented or absent from the child's conscious memory. Children who leave foster care without facts regarding their history will find it impossible to integrate those years into their life experience.

The author further suggests that the Life Book is useful in helping the child understand the reasons for the separation from the natural family and eliminate the belief that they caused or had control of the separation. The Life Book reportedly is useful in cases where the child is freed for adoption. The birth parents are given the chance to provide photos, information or a letter. This has been found to relieve
the guilt held by some birth parents (Backhaus, 1984). Also, this allows the child to have closure with their parents in order to continue with the rest of their life.

McInturf (1986) completed a study which built upon Jones' (1979) study of the four stages of preparation that was previously discussed. The author simply added to the stages the use of the Life Book for gathering and storing all of the background information on the child. He states that after the child completes the five stages the life story is written in a factual and nonjudgmental manner allowing for some of the "why" and "feelings". The goodbyes are also documented. He notes that it is crucial for the child to examine the story for accuracy before the final copy is completed. McInturf (1986) concluded that adequate preparation is essential to the child. Furthermore, to place a child in an adoptive home without adequate preparation increases the chances of adoption disruption.

The research available on successfully preparing children for adoption appears to strongly support the use of the Life Book as a tool for accomplishing the goal. The research also supports the fact children need to be adequately prepared before adoption. Emphasis was focused on self worth and identity of the foster child and the fact that foster children are unable to comprehend their complicated past without assistance.
The global topic of preparing children for adoption was for the most part devoted to special needs children who were in the process of being adopted by a family other than the foster family. This suggests that either little preparation is needed for this type of adoption or this population has been overlooked and/or neglected. Nevertheless, additional research is needed to examine the needs of this specific population. It will then be possible to assist in the adoption process in an attempt to avoid disruption of placement or identity problems in the future.

The theoretical aspects discussed in this review include Kubler-Ross's (1969) stages of grief which was incorporated in the model used within this study with the group of children being prepared for adoption by their foster parents. The belief is that the child must be able to work through the different stages of grief before being able to accept the idea of adoption. Ellis' (1977) Rational Emotive Therapy, Erikson's (1967) theory of continuity of identity between past and future, Frisk's (1964) "genetic ego" and Sants' (1965) genealogical bewilderment have all been applied in this study. The model used was designed to provide as much factual information as possible to each child in order to correct any inaccurate information. Also, to hopefully raise the child's confidence about his or her awareness of the past.

In summary, the literature supports the use of Life Books
as a treatment tool when working with children on adoption issues. Again, the literature appears to be narrowly focused on this tool being used with non-foster parent adoptions. Therefore, this study is designed to use the Life Book specifically with children who are being adopted by their foster parents since this population appears to be neglected by researchers. The use of the Life Book is crucial to this study. The Life Book is instrumental in storing information regarding the child's past and is available to the child at anytime. Further, it remains consistent and reality based minimizing inappropriate fantasy.

The following hypotheses have been derived from the available literature:

1. Foster children who have been adequately prepared for adoption have a clearer understanding of their background than those who have not been prepared.
2. The implementation of Life Books would assist foster children in the adoption process.
CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

The Research Design

There exists the need for further research on adequate preparation of foster children who are in the process of being adopted by their foster parents. This study is designed to determine the current level of understanding of the subjects involved related to basic genealogical information, reason for placement in foster care, and meaning of adoption. Therefore, this study will provide a model of providing adoption preparation services including the use of a Life Book and will attempt to determine its effectiveness.

The research design is explorative in an attempt to examine what awareness the subjects have before the group experience and after the group experience. The design is considered to be quasi-experimental due to the lack of random sampling or comparison to a control group.
The Subjects

Approval was received from the Human Subjects Committee to complete this study. The subjects involved in this study include four foster children who are currently wards of the Juvenile Court in the custody of the Division of Child and Family Services. Those chosen include two Caucasian males, ages 9 and 11, and two females, one African American and one Caucasian also ages 9 and 11.

The Sample

The type of sampling procedure used was nonrandom and purposive in nature. This was chosen over random sampling because of the nature of the study. The minimal number of subjects used was in part due to the limited availability of acceptable subjects. Additionally, a larger group would require more time and facilitators than were available.

The following factors were taken into consideration when choosing the subjects for the group: the child must be in the process of being adopted by their foster parent(s), age, sex, length of time in foster care, number of foster care placements, intelligence, cooperativeness of child and foster family, availability of participants, child has not previously been
formally prepared for adoption or completed a Life Book.

It was important to choose children who were being adopted by their foster parents as opposed to children who were being adopted by an unknown family. Also the children needed to be of similar ages and needed to be old enough to comprehend what was presented to them. Very young children who have limited capabilities would not be appropriate for this type of group preparation. The children needed to have memories of living with their biological family and previous foster families.

It was significant to choose children who had been in foster care for at least three years. Generally, a child who has been in care for this length of time has experienced at least two foster care placements and more than one caseworker. The lack of consistency in the child's life could result in misunderstanding the child's past and requires clarification. Three of the children have been in foster care for 5 years, 5 months and the other child had been in care for 4 years, 3 months with an overall mean duration of foster care 5 years, 1.5 months. Three of the children had 2 caseworkers and the remaining child has had 4 caseworkers. This made the mean number of caseworkers being 2.5.

Intelligence was taken into consideration for the purpose of comprehending the material presented and being capable of completing the assignments within the Life Book. All four of the children were of at least average intelligence and received
at least C grades.

In choosing the children it was necessary to pick those foster parents who would assist in transporting the child to the group sessions, complete necessary homework, encourage the child to discuss the material at home and who were overall supportive of the group. Additionally, the child had to be willing to attend and participate in the activities.

Lastly, to avoid repeating services, members of the group should not have already received formal preparation or completed a Life Book.

Instrument

The instrument used was designed by this author to establish the general awareness of the child's genealogical background, reason for placement in foster care and definition of adoption. The instrument has not been found to be valid or reliable and is meant for exploratory purposes only. See Appendix I.

Procedure

Each of the four children were first tested individually using the instrument in Appendix I to determine the current level of understanding of each child. The child was not told
whether the answers were correct or not. This author designed the group to take place in five sessions over a five week period lasting one and one half hour each session. The exercises for the Life Books were mainly used from the American Foster Care Resources (1991) kit for Life Books which is intended for children in substitute care. Unfortunately, it is not possible to reproduce the material in this paper.

Session I

The first session was devised to discuss the purpose of the group, introduce the members of the group, discuss the rules of the group. The children were shown a completed Life Book as a visual aid to what they would be doing over the next five weeks.

A discussion was then held to discuss individuality and the uniqueness of each group member. An exercise was conducted whereby each child was fingerprinted to demonstrate their uniqueness and to bring to light that adoption will not change their individuality.

Each child was then permitted to decorate the cover of their Life Book, to personalize it and make it theirs. Afterwards three Life Book exercises were completed. "All About Me" includes a recent photograph and general physical information such as age, height, weight, hair color, eye color
and date of birth. "Things About Me" involves the child's likes and dislikes including foods, activities, and favorite animal, color, flower and holiday. "Facts About Me" is designed to have the child focus on characteristics that describe them. Each child was also asked to draw a picture of themselves and their birth families. These exercises were designed to have the child examine themselves in a positive image. The group ended with a discussion of sharing feelings, ideas or questions regarding the group experience and exercises.

Session II

This session started with a discussion on definition of foster child. Each child was encouraged to discuss their feelings and ideas on the subject. Distinctions were made between birth family and foster family.

Four exercises were completed, the first of which was entitled "My Baby Picture". This exercise included a picture of the child during infancy and general birth information. This author was able to obtain baby pictures from various relatives for three of the four subjects. Each child was permitted to review their birth records to obtain the information for the exercises such as their birth weight and length. The second exercise was entitled "Family Tree" which involved placing names of their birth family on individual apples. This author
provided information to the child regarding birth family members when they did not remember. This exercise provided each child with the basic facts of who is included in their birth family. The final two exercises included "I Am Loved" and "I Love". These were used to help the child understand whom they love and to give permission to love both their birth family and their foster family.

Finally, each child was asked to write a letter to their birth parents telling them whatever they wanted to tell them, to ask them questions that they were not given the opportunity to ask, to express feelings towards their parents, and to eventually say good-bye. This session was designed to provide necessary background information to the child regarding their birth families and to allow them to terminate their relationship.

Each foster parent was given a homework assignment to write a letter to the child explaining why they wanted to adopt their foster child. Also, it was suggested that they include their lifelong commitment to the child to insure permanency.

**Session III**

This session started with a discussion about love. Specifically discussing how many persons someone can love and whether it is permissive to love birth parents even though they
are no longer available to the child.

A demonstration was used entitled "The Candle Ceremony" which appears in an unpublished manual for Group Preparation for Adoption prepared by social workers, Kitty Hardy and Dorothy Paul (1989), helping the child to visualize through the use of candles that they can still love their birth parents even though they love their foster parents. See Appendix II. Each child was then asked to write a letter to their foster parents stating why they wanted to be adopted or why they did not want to be adopted by their foster parents.

Five exercises were then completed for their Life Books. "Family Tree" was used this time including the members of their foster/adoptive family. An exercise titled "School Memories" was completed which included information regarding current school, grade, teacher, friends and favorite subjects. The three following exercises, "Sports and Games I Like Best", "My Favorite Seasons" and "My Favorite Foods and Drinks" were performed to determine the individuality of each child and to demonstrate that it is acceptable to have different tastes.

Session IV

The fourth session was designed to discuss different types of feelings, such as anger, happy, scared and to talk about the appropriateness of feelings. An exercise was completed whereby
each child would pull a picture of a feeling from an envelope and would then share an experience when they felt like the feeling they chose. The remaining group would attempt to decide what feeling the child was describing. The exercise was intended to demonstrate to the child that their feelings are normal and that other children have the same feelings through validation. Four exercises were completed for the Life Books including, "I Feel Happy When", "Why Worry" and "How I Show My Feelings" which requests the child to give examples of experiences of what makes them happy, what causes them to worry and how they express their feelings.

Each child was given a list to complete including the different schools attended, previous foster homes, their pets, activities they like to do, and their favorite places to go. See Appendix III. This list was used to individually take the child to the different schools and foster homes to take pictures for their Life Books. The purpose was to give the child a visual reminder of the past to help provide confidence regarding knowledge of their history. This was done between sessions IV and V.

Session V

The final group was focused on the meaning of adoption and how adoption will affect their life. The children were able to
share their feelings, fears and excitement with one another and to see that they are not alone. Each child was then asked to draw a self portrait and a picture of their foster/adoptive family.

Finally, each child was provided with an outline of their history and they dictated to this author their Life Story including their feelings at each stage of their life. This story was later typed and read by the child to insure the story was free of errors.

Approximately one month after the final session, this author individually tested each child on the same questions asked before the group was held. See Appendix I. Afterwards, the child was given their completed Life Books with their life story, completed exercises, letters to birth parents and foster/adoptive parents, letters from foster/adoptive parents and pictures.

Data Collection

Pre-test Answers

Subject "A", is a 9 year old, Caucasian male, who has had two foster care placements and two caseworkers. He was placed into foster care over five years ago due to destitution by his mother. He was able to correctly state his mother's name, his
brother's and two sisters' names. He did not know his father's name. He stated he was placed into foster care because "my mom couldn't afford to have us or take care of us. She put us in Child Haven." His definition of adoption was "adoption means you be with those parents you're living with right now. When you get adopted you are their child."

Subject "B" is an 11 year old, Caucasian male, who is a half sibling to subject "A". He has had two foster care placements and one failed reunification placement with his mother. He also has had two caseworkers and was placed into foster care over five years ago due to destitution by his mother. He was able to correctly identify his mother and his brother's names. He did not know his youngest sister's name, his father's name and incorrectly identified his other sister's name. He stated he was placed in foster care "because we were living in a car and decided to move to Las Vegas. My mom decided it wasn't a good idea to live in the car so she put us in foster care and we were all split up in different foster homes." His definition of adoption was "adoption is when your family isn't there and you live with another family because your family can't take care of you, so your family puts you in Child Haven and then you are adopted."

Subject "C" is a 9 year old, African American girl who has had one foster care placement, one failed relative placement, and was returned to her original foster home. She has had four
previous case workers. She was placed into foster care over five years ago due to destitution and drug abuse by the mother. She was able to correctly identify her mother's middle name which she normally used and she was able to identify her brother's and sister's names. She did not know her father's name. She stated she did not know why she was placed into foster care but could only remember she was four years old at the time. She defined adoption as, "they (foster parents) become your mom and dad and the other mom isn't your mom no more."

Subject "D" is a 11 year old, Caucasian girl who has had four foster care placements and one failed reunification placement with her mother and step-father. She has had two caseworkers. She was placed into foster care due to drug abuse of parent, environmental neglect and financial instability of parent. She was able to correctly identify her mother, father and four siblings' names. She did not know why she was in foster care. She defined adoption as, "when your parents have problems or if they die, then you go to Child Haven then you get placed in a foster home who then adopts you."

Post-test Answers

Subject "A" was again able to identify his mother, brother and two sisters names. He was also able to identify his father's name. When asked why he was placed into foster care he stated,
"because my mom couldn't afford to keep us in a house and she couldn't give us food." He defined adoption as, "when you become somebody's official child."

Subject "B" was able to identify his mother and brother's name. He was again unable to name his father however was able to identify his two sisters correctly. He stated he was placed in foster care "because our mom was in poverty and she thought it would be best to put us there." He defined adoption as "when somebody is put into another family as their own."

Subject "C" was able to identify her mother's full name and her brother and sister's name. She was also able to correctly identify her father's name. She stated she was placed into foster care because "my mom had a problem with drugs so she took us over to her friends house and never came to get us so the friend called Child Haven to get me and my sister." She defined adoption as "your mom is still your mom but your foster becomes your mom too. You go through a lot to be adopted."

Subject "D" was again able to identify her parents' names and her siblings' names. She stated she was placed into foster care because "my mom and step-dad were on drugs." She defined adoption as "when your parents can't take care of you, you go into foster care, and then you get adopted forever."
Data Analysis and Discussion

Subject "A" was overall, knowledgeable about his genealogical background. He was consistent in his answers with regard to identifying his mother and siblings' names. He was unable to identify his father's name in the pre-test but was able to do this on the post-test. His understanding of being in foster care initially was vague. However, on the post-test he was able to include two specific reasons why he was in custody such as not having a house or food. Subject "A"'s original definition of adoption was global and suggested that everyone becomes adopted, however he did note belonging. His final answer was more specific and noted legality and belonging.

Subject "B" was confused about names of his family members which is most interesting in comparison to his younger brother, Subject "A" who appears to be more informed. Subject "B" was consistent in correctly identifying his mother's and brother's names. He was unable to identify his father's name both in pre-testing and post-testing. His understanding of the reason he was placed into foster care was fairly consistent, however his post-test answer suggests that his mother was thinking of their best interest as opposed to the living situation was "not a good idea". Subject "B"'s definition of adoption improved in the post-test and was more positive suggesting belonging to another family as opposed to simply the end result of parental neglect.
Subject "C" was generally unaware of most of her history during pre-testing. She was able to identify her siblings' and her mother's middle name only. Her post-test answers were much improved. She correctly identified her mother's first and middle name, her siblings' names and her father's name. She was able to specifically describe why she was placed into foster care which she was unable to do during the pre-test. Subject "C"'s original definition of adoption implied that she would be losing her birth mother by adoption. Her post-test answer was more positive in nature stating that adoption will give her two "moms". She also noted the work involved in becoming adopted.

Subject "D" was well informed regarding her family members however had little understanding about the reason she was in foster care or the definition of adoption. She consistently identified the members of her family in both pre-testing and post-testing. She was able to state minimally why she was placed into foster care during post-testing which is much improved from her pre-test. Subject "D"'s answer to the definition of adoption was essentially the same for both pre-testing and post-testing however she added permanency by stating "you get adopted forever".

The results from the pre-test from this study indicate little awareness of their parents' and/or siblings' names. Particularly, their fathers' names were a mystery. The lack of
this knowledge could potentially lead to identity problems in that they would not be able to establish continuity from their past to their future (Erikson, 1967). Additionally, the child could be at risk of maladjustment due to their limited understanding of their genealogy (Wellisch, 1952).

It is interesting to note that two of the children had no memory of why they were in foster care. If the child is not aware of the reasons behind their removal from their family of origin, potentially he or she will either put blame on themselves or fantasize their family will eventually "rescue" them in the future. It is imperative for the child to know that there is no possibility of future contact or placement before they reach adulthood. Furthermore, the child needs to be aware of his past in order to feel confident about themselves and not harm their self esteem (Sants, 1965).

The general comprehension of adoption was not considered to be a positive and exciting event. Adoption to them was a natural course of events, i.e. "you are placed in foster care, you can not return to your family of origin, so you are adopted by the foster family." Therefore, by their belief, all foster children who do not return home, are adopted by their foster families. The problem with this view is, that the child has no voice in the matter nor does the foster family. The child needs to understand that the foster family is choosing to adopt them and wants to make them a permanent member of their family out of
love. Also, the child needs to be aware that he or she has the option of not being adopted by the foster family or by any family if it so desire.

Each of the subjects of the group made some significant gains from the group sessions in comparison to pre-test answers. All of the children were capable of identifying their mothers' and siblings' names. All but one of them were able to identify their fathers' names. Their understanding of why they were placed in foster care improved and was more detailed in nature. The groups perception of adoption also improved and reflected positive images such as belonging, lasting forever and legality.

It was surprising to learn that the younger children showed greater improvement and understanding than the older children in the group. Also, the gender of the child did not appear to play a role in their performance.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The foster parent adoption domain will continue to expand as more children enter the foster care system and as child welfare workers attempt to comply with regulations of permanency. The child welfare system needs to examine its current effort at providing preparation services to children who will permanently become members of their foster families. This study provided an example of an adoption preparation technique, specifically for children who are being adopted by their foster parents, through the use of a Life Book.

The first research question of this study focused on the needs of children who are being adopted by their foster parents. The literature in this paper strongly supports the use of the Life Book as a tool for preparing children for adoption. The research discussed in this study indicated that this target population requires that the child be adequately prepared
before finalization of the adoption to assist the child in the adjustment. Lack of preparation of the child and family have been noted to be contributors to adoption disruption (Barth et al., 1986; Hornby, 1986; Westhues & Cohen, 1990).

The results of the pre-tests from the subjects of the study indicate little awareness and confusion regarding their background and the concept of adoption. Additionally, the children have minimal understanding of why they are in foster care. These weaknesses most likely resulted from the number of failed placements the children experienced; the rejection and loss associated with the frequency of the moves and the periodic change in caseworkers. The children's lack of knowledge exposes the need for proper preparation in hope of avoiding identity problems or future disruptions. Additionally, attempts to avoid unnecessary moves or changes in caseworkers would provide consistency and security for the child.

The second research question concentrated on the effects of the Life Book in the adoption preparation process. In this study, the Life Book was quite useful and effective for preparing these children for their upcoming adoption. For example, Subject "A" was unable to identify his father's name on both the pre-test and the post-test. However, should he want to know his father's name in the future, he has a point of reference available to him. Additionally, should the children confuse certain facts about their past, their Life Book will be
available for clarity. The findings of this study were consistent with previous research regarding the findings usefulness of Life Books with children who are going to be adopted (Aust, 1981; Meezan & Shireman, 1985; Hornby, 1986; McInturf, 1986). In summary, this tool has been valuable in providing factual information and storing precious pictures and memories of the children.

**Delimitations of the Study**

One of the limitations of this study, is the lack of representation of the population. This type of study required purposive sampling to insure the subjects were appropriate for the group and were capable of participating in the group. Additionally, the limited number of subjects hinders generalizing to the population at large. Therefore it is possible that the findings are biased.

The instrument used was designed to gather minimal information regarding the child's background and understanding of their placement in foster care and adoption. It has not found to be reliable or valid and is meant for exploratory purposes only.

A final limitation of this study was the lack of available research completed on this topic to determine if the findings are comparable. The research tended to focus more on preparing
children for adoption when the plan was for the child to be removed from their foster family, instead of being adopted by the foster family. However, the gap in the research indicates the need for more in-depth study. Additionally, research is needed with regards to adoptions that failed and to identify what was missing. These findings may assist in avoiding future adoption disruptions.

Implications for Social Work Practice

If foster parent adoption is going to be the child welfare system's solution to providing permanency to children in foster care, then time and energy needs to be spent determining the needs of this population. The topic of preparing children for adoption by their foster parents appears to be relatively new research ground. Attention needs to be given to the negligence of child welfare workers who assume these children require little or no preparation because their physical placement will not change. These children need and deserve the attention of the system as much as any other adoptive child.

Too frequently, the child welfare worker does not respond to the need of foster families until a crisis is in progress or until it is too late to salvage the placement. If preventative measures are taken, such as the group preparation model discussed herein, adoption disruptions could possibly be lessened. Additionally it is recommended that future research
be done to determine causes of adoption disruption and what effect preparation could have for these children.

Furthermore, it is recommended that child welfare staff be properly and adequately trained on the importance of preparing children for adoption and the specific methods of doing so. Specifically, attention should be given to the value and usefulness of the Life Book. Although Life Books have been used with children in all types of placements, it would be unrealistic to recommend Life Books for every case. Therefore, the worker needs to be trained to prioritize which child would most benefit from the Life Book and focus their attention accordingly. For example, a child who has been living with an aunt since she was an infant and has regular contact with extended family would probably not require a Life Book. In contrast, a child who has a complicated past including several foster care placements, numerous case workers and exhibits confusion regarding its past would be an excellent candidate for the use of a Life Book. Funding would also need to be available to the workers for purchasing of the supplies necessary to complete the Life Book.

Since the biggest complaint regarding the completion of Life Books appears to be time, then time management skill training should be available to the child welfare worker. Life Books could be standard procedure in adoption cases if: the worker is trained on the tool's importance and value; given
training on how to compete the Life Book; provided with adequate supplies; and offered skills in arranging the time to complete the task.

To be truly effective and complete, Life Books should be started as soon as the child enters the system. Pictures of the biological family become priceless once termination of parental rights has taken place. Opportunities should not be passed to take pictures of family members and of the children at various ages and important events, such as birthdays and holidays. Foster parents can be instrumental in saving momentos for the child's Life Book and even assisting in the completion of such. There willingness and skills should not be overlooked.

Child welfare workers and foster parents should expect and prepare for behavioral problems during the completion of the Life Book. Additionally, counseling needs to be readily available to the child in the event the behavioral problem puts the child at risk.

Finally, efforts should be made to insure the placement of a child in a foster home appropriately meets their needs in the event the placement becomes permanent. This also needs to include efforts at placing children in families with their same ethnicity and attempting to keep siblings together. Providing proper placement to a child at the beginning of the foster care experience hopefully would avoid future disruptions in life.
APPENDIX I

PRE-TEST/POST-TEST INSTRUMENT

NAME:__________________________
AGE:___________________________

BIRTH MOTHER'S NAME:_________________________
BIRTH FATHER'S NAME:_________________________

SIBLING(S) NAME(S):__________________________

WHY WERE YOU PLACED INTO FOSTER CARE?__________________________

WHAT DOES ADOPTION MEAN?__________________________

61
APPENDIX II
CANDLE CEREMONY

Objective: To let a child know that he can love a new family without giving up his parents' love or his love of his parents.

Social Worker hands candle to the child. Social Worker says,

"When you were born, you had the gift to give love and to get love. This gift is like a light; it makes you feel warm and happy."

Social Worker then lights the candle representing the child. Social Worker says,

"At first you got used to your mom. She probably cuddled you and fed you. You felt close to her."

Instruct the child to place his lit candle next to the un-lit candle that represents the birth mother until it, too lights.

Social Worker says,

"and you lit a love light with each other."

Then following the child's history you might go on, saying,

"your dad thought you were really special. He played with you when he came home from work. You felt close to him..."

Have the child put their candle next to candle for the father.
until it lights,

"...and you lit a love light with him too."

Then depending on the situation you might say,

"your first mom and dad had some grown up troubles. They had never learned how to take care of a little boy/girl. It was decided that you would need to live somewhere else, even though their love for you still burned and your love for them was bright."

You may move lit candles away from child to represent separation but leave flames burning. Now you continue with the child's story in chronological order for placements showing how a love light was lit with each set of foster parents and showing that the flames are still burning on his birth parents' candles.

"you went to live with Mr. & Mrs. Smith. They will be doing some of the things for you that your mom and dad used to do when you lived with them. In time, you got used to them helping you with things and you felt connected with them."

Have child light a new candle(s) representing the foster parent(s).

"When that happens, there will be one more person for you to love and who loves you. The important thing for you to remember is that the light of love you feel for your mom/dad/siblings, will not go out. Loving is not like soup that you dish up until it is gone. You
can love as many people as you get close to. But no one will make you blow out any of your candles. You do not have to take the love you feel for your mom/dad/siblings away to love another parent figure."

With whatever variation fits, you need to give the child permission to grow close to a new caretaker.

Repeat this for each placement, explaining why the child had to leave, in a positive manner.

Because the candle was chosen for its symbolic connection with how children perceive love, as light and warmth, it is important to close the ritual carefully.

"I can see, you understand about loving. I don't think you need the candles any more today to help you. This candle is not really your mother/father. She will not stop loving you if we put it out. Are you ready to help me blow it out?"

The child then blows out the candle representing his/her mother father. This needs to be repeated for each candle before it is extinguished.
APPENDIX III

PHOTOGRAPH LIST

SCHOOLS ATTENDED:


PREVIOUS FOSTER HOMES:


MY PETS:


THINGS I LIKE TO DO:


MY FAVORITE PLACES:


65
REFERENCES


League of America, LXIX(3), 209-224.


Welfare League of America, LXIV(2).


