

Negotiating the History of Residential Child Care - A Research Approach

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In my paper I will realize this complexity of the research approach, drawing upon our ongoing research project in the area of residential childcare in Switzerland (www.placing-children-in-care). It is conducted in a research network, composed of three subprojects located at five universities in different regions in Switzerland. The goal of the project is to create an empirical and analytic framework to critically understand and contextualize the politics and practices of outplacement of children and youth in Switzerland from 1940 to 1990. During the 20th century, tens of thousands of children and adolescents in Switzerland were placed in foster families and residential care. Recent research indicates that these placements in out-of-home care were often associated with social isolation, compulsory work or even with sexual or physical abuse. Switzerland is starting to reappraise this past and is discussing about reparations. Questions of political, professional and legal responsibility arise. In my paper I will focus on the ambivalence of history writing in this conflictive political and scientific context. I will point out to traps and risks, like repeating stigmata, subordinating the "victims" under a psychiatric perspective, or just excluding the groups of service users who have no voice and lobby. Approaching history reveals that research as well as Social Work practices are placed in manifold social contradictions. In my paper I will discuss how to face up to this complexity.

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