

Meeting *Elsewhere*. The Group in Adoption

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Abstract

In this article, after brief considerations of the characteristics of the “towards and beyond adoption” formative path and after a personal testimony that wishes to give voice to the children met in several institutions in the Ukraine, the consequences of the trauma of abandonment are commented on. There follows a taking under examination group modality that can be productively utilized in the sphere of the process of adoption, in all its phases with various actors on the adoption path.

In particular, we examine more closely the group applied to post adoption, in its value as facilitative setting of “elsewhere”. This “elsewhere” is a place far away in which the child's suffering parts come together, hidden in the depths of the unconscious, an apparently safe psychic place, but where confusion and fragmentation rule, where there are neither words nor depictions, where there are neither boundaries nor tenderness, where the securely bound being is transformed into the overwhelmed being. In this place, in this “elsewhere”, that we “sufficiently good” adults are called to *be there*, to find exactly that place where the child has lived a sufferance too great in respect to what has remained alone for too long. It is that place that the adult, by way of experience of the group, can exercise his function of receptiveness and empathetic closeness, to relive with the child a relational experience in a way that is finally positive, capable of restoring continuity to the brokenness of his existence.

Key Words: abandonment, adoption, group, fragmentation, integration

An Educational Course Leading Up To and Beyond Adoption

For many years I have been engaged with adoption training. I began this interest of mine at the beginning of the 1990's when a 14 year old girl arrived at my office: she had been adopted in Brazil at the age of 4 and had been a victim of abuse from age 8 to 12. Since that time I have immersed myself more and more in thousands of questions and investigations, beginning on a trip to the heart of the issues and resources typical of each phase of the adoption process, from the point of view of the child, the couple, the psycho-social workers, of the teachers and, even, the workers in the countries of the child's provenance (For a more complete view you are directed to the monographs relevant to adoption in the review *Minori Giustizia*: AA.VV., 2000, 2001, 2003a, 2003b; in the same review, also available are the following: AA.VV., 2007, 2008; cf. also De

Bono, 2006; Farri Monaco and Peila Castellani, 1994).

That which I feel pressed to emphasize is the sense of continuity that should characterize a training plan for adoption in all its phases: from education and sensitivity training that takes place in the Adoption Centers – where the couples, before even presenting their declaration of willingness to adopt, participate in informational groups to receive both an initial idea of how the adoption system works and also their first tools for self-evaluation of their own resources and capabilities – to the phase that brings them to the acquisition of the decree of suitability, then to move on to the waiting stage (now always longer and longer) and to the phase of the overseas stay (almost mandatory in the case of international adoptions, which are now chosen more frequently) up to the return home, the moment in which the phase of post-adoption, often difficult and complex, without a doubt more difficult than commonly imagined.

All along this path – that involves the couples and the workers at their side – the stages play out not only a long continuum of time and bureaucracy, but also along a continuum of growing complexity and depth: if initially there prevails a cognitive and concrete level, characterized by action and “have-to’s” there enter into the game deeper and deeper levels within which the passage from doing to being is actualized. It is a process in which the capacity to hold on to rather than to eliminate is acquired, in which the symbolic plan prevails, connoted by the process of putting emotional states into concrete thought, and in which the sense of existential continuity and emotional fertility is recovered. It deals with a process in which the capacity to be and “to be there” in the relationship takes on progressive importance (cf. De Bono, 2009, p.101-102; cf. also Luzzatto, 2002).

When one is waiting for a baby whose initial developmental process has been characterized by discontinuity and fragmentation, it is more often than not fundamental that along the entire formative route the thread of continuity between the before and the after, between the roots and the fruits, between the inexpressible emotions and the possibility of rendering them communicable and meaningful are researched and maintained: a thread that will follow in the post-adoption, that will allow the child to go back to recover that which was written on his skin and in his implicit memory, to bring him back to today and then, towards the possibility of expressing that truth made up of history, of clarification and of authenticity.

Being There, Being Present

In the case of an educational course – conducted in Kiev and carried out by concentrating on professionals in the medical and social area and on helpers who worked on a permanent basis with an authorized Italian organization, promoter of the initiative – I had the opportunity to find myself in some Ukrainian institutions to live alongside the couples, but also next to those who accompanied them, the moments most involving and delicate of their becoming family (cf. De Bono, 2009; De Bono, Maiello,

2002). The following passage belongs to that rich experience, written at two different times (on the occasion of two different trips), that I often use in my educational course intended for anyone who works in the field of adoption.

<<In my notes I found a flash of one of my passages in the institutes of Eastern countries, that can constitute a valid prompt from which to begin our brief trip to the search for these children whose vital project, present in every individual, was prematurely debased.

‘If you are good, we will find parents for you’. The educators said this to a group of children between 3 and 5 years old, raised in a Ukrainian institution without parents. Among the smallest ones, several could still cry, play and argue; others began to show their adaptation to silence even if a dynamic darting of the eyes every now and then betrayed their inner light.

Among the older children some seemed like little men in miniature, especially under the severe looks of the teachers; others appeared burned-out and already resigned to their destiny as little beings without rights.

All of them, at any rate, were incredibly autonomous and orderly. The few times that they could go out in the freezing winter, no one else had to tie their shoes or put on their insufficiently warm jackets or their little mittens. It was always the children who got undressed by themselves and who put everything back in place when they came back in from the garden that surrounded the institution... a garden made of a few bare trees, old discolored metal playground equipment and a little grass burned by the cold, where ten skinny dogs were milling around, always ready, on call, to bark at any intruder.

Only little Anja, three years old, was crying. She was floundering around trying to get out of her jacket and the teacher was consoling her in a nice way, helping her but explaining how she had to do it herself.

They all had to learn early how to take care of themselves.

In a very short time all the children were in their assigned area: a room with the little desks arranged in a star for eating and playing, decorated with a lot of plants and few toys, with essential furniture and worn carpets. Then, the dormitory with 16 little colored cots and a giant stuffed bear. There was also a tiny kitchen from which their meals, stretched to the limit jumped out as if by magic. Finally the child size bath cubicles where each one had his or her own toothbrush and towel. And where I saw their strange looking bowel movements and their little rear ends, reddened and lonely.

Over everything there hung the smell of dignity and scarcity. There was little of everything and everything spoke of their thirst for warmth.

As I was passing through the dormitory, Valia, a little girl not even five yet, hurried to prove her ability to me: she pulled a little bit this way and a little bit that way on the blanket and sheet on her cot, interspersing every awkward movement with a knowing

expression and a smile and a glance seeking out one from me.

Ivan, five, wanted to show me how good he was at making somersaults on the enormous carpets that typically covered all the floors of the Ukrainian institutions. It seemed that only in that moment could he let go all his physicality.

Andrej ran to get his favorite toy and put it in my colleague's hand, showing off his best smile.

Every turn I made brought forth arms reaching out for something: '*Patti mi*', pick me up. Ringing voices, weepy, needy, still capable of hoping...

Not long after, I saw these same children again.

Anja wasn't crying any more: she had learned. No one asked me to pick them up; all of them were seated, waiting for their meager ration of a snack. Only Vova, who the first time I had seen vivacious and intelligent, was crying meekly with her glance lost in a desperate void. Even Valia, the little lady of the place, took my attention: she didn't even seem like the same little girl. Two dark circles under her eyes stood out on her face; her body no longer had any pride and her eyes were testimony to an infinite sadness.

Those children who at our first meeting had seemed the most taciturn now appeared to me perhaps to be the most 'adapted': they had learned before the others to shut down contact with their emotions, not to ask for anything, not to have expectations to find a way not to have too much hurt in their hearts" (De Bono, 2007, pp.168-169).>>

A few months longer at the institution had transformed those children, It was striking to see how much each one of them had learned to conform to the requirements of the adult world; a world that continued to demand their adaptation to the wishes and needs of others. Adult language prevailed; the needs of the children remained mute, subjected to a silence that screamed and howled within me. Only Vova still cried, showing her "knowing how to suffer", to be still a little behind in the process of alienation which carries these children towards the constitution of a False Self.

They are the ones who are at my side when I work (and not only) with adopting parents or with adopted babies and children; it is thanks to them that I can retrace the path that, though difficult and inaccessible, leads finally to listening to and accepting this suffering that has been too long denied.

When they reach their new houses – for the most part they are pale, underweight, looking younger than they really are – suddenly they acquire a healthy color, come back within the normal percentiles, spread their arms more and more and thirstily drink from the fount of their new life. They let themselves get closer, even learn how to kiss. Without fail they are amazing for the progressive acquisition of motor, behavior and mental skills; yet we know that even this is not all, that it is only the beginning, because the inner growth of these children, the recovery from their wounds and the acquisition of

a healthy relationship with the world is a long and demanding journey, often full of trials that, if elusive and not understood, can render the developmental, individual and familiar path even steeper and more strenuous.

If the almost immediate re-flowering of these children can satisfy the parents' expectations and the need for confirmation of their own parental ability, that does not mean that the journey is completed and that the past is now far away. The risks of a new adaptation to the adults' requirements are just around the corner because these children, especially in the initial phase of their new life, can still adapt to the adults' expectations, to receive the protection they need, risking thus to maintain their growth along the track already laid out for them by their false self-realization.

“If you are good, we will find parents for you” is a terrible sentence that confirms the life of these children: it depends on them, if they have been in an institution, and because they have been “bad” that they have been left and find themselves surviving without parents. In this way defense mechanisms become sadly confirmed and empowered – identifying with the aggressor and taking upon himself the aggressor's blame, autotomy, splitting, mimicry, autoplasmic, self-destruction – that have already been used by the child in the previous traumatic interaction. At times this life of theirs can begin to manifest itself when a sensation of trust makes an inroad with them that however requires confirmation. Other times, instead, being “bad” presents itself right from the beginning with attitudes of refusal and/or opposition towards the new parents to mean the profound identification with this image of himself/herself that has allowed them to hold at a distance the intolerable pain and, at the same time, to preserve the relationship with the first figures of reference.

Michi, who is eight years old, in Italy now for two years, refers to his adoptive mother, almost without emotional attachment, an episode in his past sprinkled with serious abuse and neglect: “My first mother beat me with a stick. Mamma, *that stick* just never broke!” Like a splinter that jabs unexpectedly, the sentence ends and goes away, without leaving space for dialogue or the possibility for connecting. It is a sentence that carries the memory of disappearance into an unreachable far away, that sends us an image in which the fade effect carries the artifice of violence in the background, up to leaving in full evidence only the stick. It was the stick that did not stop beating; a stick that had no one behind it, guided by no one's hand that hindered every possibility of seeing beyond. Everything disappears, the very memory of that event dissolves.

Nine years later Michi begins therapy and from his half-sleep emerges that stick. A stick that had left him “full of bruises, with my arms broken and painful, so that I couldn't move”, as he himself had told me during a session a few days before in which he finally succeeded in remembering the episode, to open a way through to a viability and understanding that allowed him to begin to get close to the pain so absurd that he felt attacked by a caregiver that more than all others should have protected him.

“The neighbors saw me outside the house with my arms down and my head reclining, as I tried to play using my head because I wasn’t able to use my arms. I was really in a bad state. But I don’t remember very well... Oh, yes, maybe it was that time that they called the police... because my mother didn’t know... she knew only how to beat me, to mangle me. She was the guilty one, not me. If I made a mistake, she needed to teach me, not to beat me up!”. Now the fog begins to lift, now Michi can begin to be present.

When there is a profound distortion of care-giving, when fear, impotence and suffering are too great, the child lives under the condition of “not being capable”. To be able of saving himself, he goes into a state of torpor, he sees reality from the outside, as if he were someone else. Thus becomes “compromised the capacity to live the subjective meaning of the emotionally important experiences” (Albasi, Sechi, 2003, p.151). Therefore the personal subjectivity gets lost, the capacity to reflect on one’s own experience, to understand the relational meaning of that which happens in one’s own emotional life. The outcome of the action and of the traumatic reaction places us in front of a split, fragmented, dissociated personality.

As Ferenczi affirms:

<< ‘The child is outside of himself’. The symptoms of ‘being outside oneself’ (seen from the outside) are as follows: absence of a point of view of sensitivity and wide-spread muscular cramps, followed often by general paralysis (‘to be away’). [...] although this ‘being away’ is not necessarily a not being, but only a ‘not being present’. But then, being where? One comes to know that they have gone far away, in some part of the universe; they fly at a very great speed among the stars; they feel so evanescent as to pass without difficulty across denser substances; there where they find themselves, time does not exist; past, present and future are all present; in short, they have the impression of having gone beyond space and time. Seen from this very elevated and vast perspective, the importance of one’s own suffering vanishes [...]. After a profound disappointment they remain tied with the greater part of their interest to that other world, while the remaining small part of interest is hardly sufficient to allow them to survive in a life of routine” (1932b, p.85).>>

The child gives in to the hostile environment in which he moves his first steps and renounces his feelings, his desires, his very sense of self, leaving a void that becomes occupied by the figure on whom he is dependent and who assaults him. Ferenczi teaches us that the child, in order to distance himself from his own pain identifies with the parental subject, even if lacking, absent or violent. This disappearance from external reality and from extra-psyche becomes intro-psyche: the child harbors already within himself the adult's guilt, “he feels enormously confused, or better, he is already split, at the same time innocent and guilty, and he has lost trust in that which they say are his senses” (Ferenczi, 1932a, p.96).

The traumatic situation becomes an integral part of his psychic structure and of his ways of entering into relationship with the world.

The relationship matrix taken up in the first phases of development tends to reappear at every change, at every developmental passage. Adoption itself is a change: it represents at the same time a loss and a gain, a separation and an attachment. Taking refuge in distorted relationship ways which have been acquired previously for the maintenance of a basic pseudo-security, or regressive repeating of behaviors normally attributable to previous stages of development in an attempt to receive an adequately healing solution, they must be embraced by the adoptive parents whose primary task is that of restoring that basic trust that has been torn apart earlier.

Even if we offer the child an adequate family context, we cannot expect that he will not relive the same experience as before. Time is needed to be able to reconstitute that the sense of trusting expectation that has been damaged in as serious a way as when earlier the trauma of abandonment occurred. Time is needed in order to reconnect all those fragments – each one of which with its own autonomous life – that have remained *Elsewhere*, unexamined and threatening, alternatively mute to conscience.

The Group as *Elsewhere*

The parts of the child that are suffering are found far away, hidden deep in the unconscious, in a psychic place apparently safe, but where confusion and fragmentation reign, where there are neither words nor depictions, where there exist neither boundaries nor tenderness, where being wrapped up safe is transformed into being overwhelmed. It is in this place, in this “Elsewhere” that we “sufficiently good” adults are called to *be there*, to place ourselves exactly where the child has lived a sufferance too great in respect to what has remained alone too long, up to the point of hiding and then disappearing. It is in that place that the adult can exercise his function of containment and empathetic closeness, to relive with the child the relationship experience finally in a positive way capable of restoring continuity to the discontinuity of his existence.

In adoption training the group has the function of constructing together this place, of weaving together a web for finding each other in that *Elsewhere* where the child has left parts of himself that ask to be embraced, healed and reintegrated.

The protagonist is always the child, that child, who has undergone facing life and later the separation forced on him by his parents at birth, who has felt alone in a hostile world that has brought forth in him that basic anxiety (Horney, 1950) that will guide his further orientation in the world and will condition his future possible attachments to new parental figures. Even if usually he is capable of accepting the help of new caregivers, he might at any rate be afraid to relive the desperation of abandonment and, in order to satisfy his own need for safety, might then conform to the external expectations, to the needs of others, in his attempt to hold in his fundamental anxiety.

This early relationship modality, marked by the use of the Other and therefore centered within him, can lead him to a progressive distancing from his own feelings and desires, to the alienation from his True Self, “that central, intimate force, common to all human beings though unique in each one, that is the profound determinant of the development of an individual” (*Ibid.*, 15). Only when the possibility to express himself constructively is precluded, that is, when the environment does not facilitate the expression of his potential, does this force of self-fulfillment of his become destructive.

Following the interpersonal perspective of Karen Horney, we know, however, that the human being, though part of a favorable environment, has an innate tendency to develop its own potential abilities (*Ibid.*, 135), to reorient its own particular growth towards the realization of its own vital project. Onto this holistic vision, of great trust in the potentiality of the human being, of the child, is placed, therefore, not the firmness of that which is and has been, but the plasticity and the possibility of change to the mutation of the environment that has care of him.

By all that has been said up to this point, we can then understand how fundamental it is to offer to the deprived child a fostering environment capable of nourishing that psychic change that leads to recovery and expression of his own growth potential; and how much, therefore, the training of the most significant figures that enter into relationships with him becomes important, figures that, each in his own time, can benefit from an environment that facilitates them to live in first person that which they can then offer to the child. In this light the adults become active co-protagonists in co-creating a new relationship scene in which the child can put down his roots and find again the road toward self-recognition, towards the affirmation of his constructive and integrative strengths that finally return to prevail over those that are destructive and disintegrational. In the wake of the principal concepts of Horney and Morrone applied to group analysis – those basic anxieties, psychic change, innate push for self-realization and facilitating environment (cf. Horney, 1945, 1950; Morrone 1995, 2012; Garofalo, 2001; Morrone, De Bono, 2007) – group modality can be used productively in the sphere of the adoption process, in all its stages and various actors along the adoption path: groups of hopeful adoptive couples and of adoptive parents, but also groups of adoption workers that at whatever title can enter into contact with the child and his parents.

If, indeed, it is relationship experiences that determine those compulsive ties that hinder the constructive forces from being expressed toward self-realization, if it is the quality of the relationship realm in which adult and child move that facilitates or not the development of internal contents that predispose the adult to a capacity for listening to the authentic needs of the child, then the group experience constitutes a precious opportunity for sharing and comparison that stimulated in the adult the latent growth potentials in himself and the capacity to relate to another with the entirety of oneself.

In an accepting climate facilitated by the leader – the exertion of his function of receptiveness, support and stimulus –, the group mental space favors the mental

conceivability of the life experiences and emergence of authentic thoughts, not yet realized by oneself. With the progressive reduction of basic anxiety, each member of the group can get close to and recognize with awareness his own needs, wants, fears, doubts and expectations, expressing them to the others in a reflexive, not reflective way, to predispose himself to the relationship with the actual child with an opening up to his genuine growth needs and, in particular, towards their parts that require listening to and healing (cf. Morrone, De Bono, 2007, p.117).

Some Cues from the Group Experiences with Adoptive Parents

A brief historical premise is necessary to explain how we arrive at the make up of the support group for adoptive parents, a method I have used for years.

The first experiences – that date back to the beginning of the 1990's when there still existed the so-called “Do-It-Yourself” – were made, within an Association, with couples who were already in possession of the decree of suitability for adoption and were waiting to leave for the birth countries of their children. The action plan, that was in place continually from the time when it was run from within the Territorial Services, planned a development course including both the pre-adoptive and post-adoptive journeys. The first included as a norm three talks with the couple and an experiential group path; the second allowed the adoptive parents, at their request, to take part in monthly groups for at least two years from the moment of their child's arrival in Italy, but with the possibility of making use of the groups even later.

The model had been thought of in looking ahead to the imminent ratification in Italy of “*The Aja Convention on the Protection of Minors and the Cooperation on the Topic of International Adoption*” (1993), effected only in 1998 with Law 476; but above all the behavior of the couple, once determining their desire to be parents, tended to disappear, as if wanting to cancel the past, their own and that of the child, including that relative to the relationship held up to this point with the Services and the Association, seen often as intrusive and judgmental, if not actually persecutory.

The plan begun with the couples before adoption showed itself to be indispensable for nurturing, through putting into thought their own needs and short-comings, both a parenthood more aware of specific needs of the child who carries within himself the wound of abandonment, or a trusting openness toward further occasions of meeting a reflective comparison. The productivity of this formative approach was prized by many couples who had chosen on their own to follow up with the monthly groups their individual and family growth experience, at a time when little or nothing was done for the post-adoption period.

Collaboration with the Association (which had been the authorized entity since 2001) ended in 2004. I received on the part of some of these couples requests to continue the experience privately.

Group for support for adoptive parents began, composed initially of couples, indeed, that

I had already followed in the Association during the pre-adoptive stage and who had finished the post-adoptive stage, to whom also were added, in later plans of in newly formed groups, other couples who had conducted privately with me their preparation and training for adoption of those who had come to me for particular difficulties manifested by their child at the time.

At the present time, there are four groups in progress, each one of them being composed of a maximum of five couples with school age children. Every cycle calls for nine meetings of two hours each, on an average once a month, during the period from October to June every year. At every new cycle the couples can decide freely whether or not to renew their participation. In almost all of the cases the couples have re-enrolled many times, having experienced being able to gain from the group and from their own inner worlds those emotional and relationship abilities that often are revealed as fundamental to understand signs from the child and to reorient in a way more in keeping with their own answers in order to avoid crystallizing certain of their behaviors.

Without any pretense of thoroughness, and being fair to offer some points of reflection, I will speak only in an overall view as to what happens in the groups, in an atmosphere where one can breathe.

At the beginning the group is made up as a space where one is presented with the true adoption story. Understanding is immediately born, the feeling of being among peers with whom one can share particular real details, but also unforgettable episodes and moments of one's own adoption experience, incomprehensible to the others. The initial phase of "a nascent group state" (Neri, 1998) is determined almost instantaneously; the participants, in fact, come for the most part from a previous formative experience that has rendered them already receptive and permeable to the *stimuli* of the leader, always oriented to the maintenance of a space of acceptance, reflection and working on the personal life details relative to themes that recur in the adoption experience.

Quite early on, the group meeting becomes an awaited appointment, in which one resorts to the possibility of living in first person that which then is possible to offer to one's child: a welcoming receptacle into which one can pour one's fears, uncertainties and "black holes"; a place in which to discover and give together new senses, new connections and new ways of thinking about that which before could come out to be unapproachable and unspeakable.

One takes on with pride in a special place, looked at with curiosity by other parents, biological ones, who would like to have a place like this for themselves, because being a parent is always difficult. Vicissitudes met along the way are spoken of that preceded their joy at finally being a family, from the first meeting with the child, to retrace one's steps toward the difficulties of the stay in a foreign country and the adoption procedure back even to what had brought them to the choice of adoption.

From the first encounters often the problems of the child's school difficulties recur and

weighs heavy with anxiety and urgency but also of the emotional upsets, of their behavior that puts the parents to the test in a harsh way and lets old sufferings re-emerge. Finding themselves again in the midst of the words, the experiences and the emotions lived fosters a sense of belonging and a climate of sharing that allows the group to be formed as “one mind” (cf. Bion, 1971) able to receive and think about others.

Within this free story telling, desires, needs and wants blossom – the parents’ and their child’s – that constitute the initial plot from which progressively, as the sessions continue, will emerge new connections, meanings and awareness.

In the continuation of the meetings the atmosphere of reciprocal reassurance allows the reduction of the anxiety that opens the way to the desire to narrate and confront each other with more intimacy and in a deeper way. Joys, hope, fears and pain alternate and mix together, creating threads of emotions from which the dominant themes of that return over and over again with different modes, results and times according to a spiral movement that reflects the phase in which the group finds itself and the depth and the self-awareness reached by those diverse components. In fact, after a first phase in which generally prevail similarities and in which one tends to deny or minimize the difference between adoptive parenthood and biologic parenthood, the theme of diversity is maintained constantly in the background by which re-emerges repeatedly, enriching every time with new colors and new potentials.

Diversity and acceptance of *otherness* are features that characterize every parental relationship, but in particular the adoptive one who has the job of accepting a child born to others, with a past not shared and unknown, who asks to be accepted and integrated into the family story.

Even in the group the capacity to welcome and tolerate diversity and see oneself reflected in others through introspective work makes headway, work with which one expresses parts of the self that before have been far away and are now accessible to comparison and visualizing in the mind.

The topics spin around within the suffering of abandonment, to manifest themselves in regressive attitudes and behaviors in the child, to the very identity of parent, to his or her own wounds, ideal and actual image of the child. The parent questions himself about the best way to talk to the child about his adoption and his past, what to call the biological mother (“tummy mama”, “mama from before”, “lady”, her given name) how to act with his questions or his memories without being in a hurry to rely on immediate solutions that would have as its only aim filling space to make the child feel better.

Contact with the suffering from abandonment allows the grief tied to procreative incapacity to emerge, a grief that is often expressed in pain for not having been able to generate a child of one's own and in a veiled sense of guilt at not having been able to alleviate the suffering undergone by the child in the first part of his life.

The connection between the trauma of abandonment and the trauma of the impossibility of biological procreation arises from stories of everyday life that present a precious

opportunity to put oneself into the relationship without denying the story that each person bears, to open up to re-visitations, new developments and reciprocal transformations, without splits, denials or idealizations.

Through the exploration and the mental work of the joys and the sufferings brought out by the stories, often similar and shared, new senses and new meanings take form. In the group there is experimentation with the possibility of tolerating uncertainties, expressing one's own life experiences – even those relative to parts of oneself that had not been given voice during childhood. One faces, gets closer to and is enriched by the presence of the Other. The punishments and the rigid educational principles – evoked defensively, sometimes acted out, to guarantee one's own parental identity, to cover the fear of disappearing, of not feeling legitimized as a parent – progressively leave space for the emotional sphere, from which emerge parts of one's own story and that of the child, which, once revisited, take on a new understanding.

The emotional disposition to listening to oneself and to the Other fosters in the parent an empathetic and receptive attitude that leads toward those fragments of the child left *elsewhere*. In this *being there*, now and then, the parent can thus help the child transform his emotional experiences and sensory content tied to the trauma he has lived into mental and psychic contents with which he can begin to build a positive and integrated image of himself (Bion, 1973).

If the adult has been able to activate his own restorative capacities and remain in that growth process that renders him always open to listening to himself, the child also will be able to do the same: he will be able to feel the receptive and transformational support of an adult equipped to restore a feeling of closeness and of thinking about the child's own pain and story; he can begin to perceive himself and his difficulties no longer as a source of danger that generates fear within himself and others, but as a world which, together, can be approached, discovered and appreciated.

Supporting the adoptive couples in a continuous and constant work of sharing, reflection and facing of doubts, fears and difficulties represents therefore important precautionary work for the path of growth for the adoptive family. This family, that more than others is a family in continuous evolution, has a notable task that unfolds with time: to gather up and accept those fragments of personality in which lies the trauma lived by the child, in order to foster healing and transformation.

The group becomes, therefore, a training ground where the capacity for tolerance of frustration and uncertainty is exercised, where the capacity for empathizing with the needs of the Other is honed and where trust in one's own resources is acquired, the capacity to integrate difference and belonging and the capacity of cultivating positive expectations even in the absence of immediate results.

The experience of the years with the monthly groups has witnessed that parents, capable of self-interrogation and of putting themselves truly into play within the relationship with the Other, have learned how to offer a more genuine relationship scenario in which

the child has been able to experiment with new intro-psychic and emotional modalities that have allowed him to reorient his own growth in an integrative and constructive sense.

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