Cultural Receptivity among Foster Parents: Implications for Quality Transcultural Parenting


Minority youth in foster care are at risk for identity disturbances when foster parents do not understand or respect the role culture plays in youth development. Assessing foster parents' ability to support a minority youth's cultural needs is critically important to the development of the youth's cultural identity and to avoid the real or perceived rejection or dismissal of the youth's cultural values or traditions. In this study, Coakley and Gruber investigated specific personal characteristics and qualities of foster parents to predict their potential for effectively parenting youth of cultures different from their own. The authors posed one research question: "What are the indicators of positive transcultural parenting that can be used in the selection and training of foster parents?"

This cross-sectional study recruited a nonprobability sample of 78 licensed foster parents who completed standardized foster parent assessments. Researchers used questionnaires included the Transracial Adoption Parenting Scale, measuring cultural competence among transracial adoptive parents raising a child from a different birth-race or culture; the Personal Dedication to Fostering Scale, measuring foster parents' dedication to fostering; the Available Time Scale, measuring the time a person anticipates that he or she will have available to complete tasks that are typical of foster parent responsibilities; the Foster Parent Role Perception Scale, measuring the perceived responsibility for different aspects of the foster parent role; and the Cultural Receptivity in Fostering Scale, measuring respondents' openness toward activities that support youth cultural development.

Discriminant function analysis classified 91 percent of respondents into two distinct groups of low and high-scoring foster parents on a cluster of demographic and fostering predictors of openness to effectively parenting culturally different children. The findings revealed that the combination of measures clearly distinguished respondents with (1) cultural competence in transracial parenting; (2) dedication to foster parenting; (3) commitment to providing the time needed for fostering; and (4) responsibility to positively support youth as predictive of openness to activities that support a child's cultural development. Conversely, respondents with lower scores on these measures were less likely to report openness toward activities that support a child's cultural development.

The results indicated the following:

- Personal dedication to fostering is likely the best predictor of cultural receptivity.
- African American foster parents were more culturally receptive than white Americans.
- Foster parents who had a high school diploma or less were less receptive to supporting the cultural needs of youth.
- Foster parents were more receptive to cultural parenting when they did not have a preference for fostering a child from a particular cultural background.
- The more foster parents were interested in building the youth's self-confidence, the more they were receptive to parenting a child of a different race, ethnicity, or culture.

The authors conclude that social workers at foster parent agencies can use assessment tools like the ones examined in the study to elicit a more thorough discussion about applicants' strengths, perceptions, and fears regarding transcultural fostering; to make decisions about needed training and supports; and to determine whether potential foster parents are appropriate candidates to raise youth who do not share their culture. Without a better understanding of the factors that could contribute to competent transcultural parenting, the recruitment, selection, and training of foster parents may not successfully work to pair youth with foster parents who will appreciate diversity and stimulate the youths' cultural identity development.
Although the authors mainly referred to the racial and ethnic aspects of children whose cultures have historically been socially devalued, they note that culture is a complex factor that extends to many other boundaries that often are not apparent or perhaps recognized as relevant. Increasingly, the challenge is to promote the development of cultural acceptance without requiring either the foster family or the youth to become any less connected to their respective cultural identities.

Using measures to test transcultural parenting potential is only part of the prescreening process; communication between the prospective transcultural foster parents and foster care professionals about their strengths and needs is also essential. Ultimately, social workers and other foster care professionals need to use their professional judgment to accurately interpret and synthesize information gathered about the foster parents before transcultural fostering decisions are made.


