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" The 'Socio-Dynamic' paradigmatic approach to Social Representations: Anchoring, Positioning and Normative Context. Complementary Methodological and Transferable Skills Seminars "



European / International Joint Ph.D. in
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Social representations and Social construction of the problem of child emotional abuse in Quebec

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Presentation outline

- Brief overview of Quebec child protection services and Youth Protection Act definition of child emotional abuse (CEA)
- Current state of the doctoral thesis
 - Questioning the construction of social problems and its relation to social representations
 - Blumer and the concept of social problems public carrier
- Research question
- Anticipated methodology

Evolution of Quebec child protection services

- Legal text first adopted in 1977
- Direction of Youth Protection created in 1979
- Many reforms to the legal text
- Last reform in 2006 modified the grounds for endangering situations
 - “Psychological ill-treatment” formally appeared in the legal text in 2006

Youth Protection Act

- Sections 38 : grounds for endangering situations
 - A) Abandonment
 - B) Neglect
 - C) Psychological ill-treatment
 - D) Sexual abuse
 - E) Physical abuse
 - F) Serious behavioural disturbance

Psychological ill-treatment and Child emotional abuse

- Is defined as “a situation in which a child is seriously or repeatedly subjected to behaviour on the part of the child’s parents or another person that could cause harm to the child and the child’s parents fail to take necessary steps to put an end to the situation.”
- “Such behaviour includes in particular indifference, denigration, emotional rejection, excessive control, isolation, threats, exploitation [...] and exposure to conjugal or domestic violence.”

Constructivist perspective of the research

- Constructivist perspective underlines that definitions of social problems are rarely objective nor consensual;
- On the contrary, they are the result of a conflictual activity involving many different actors (Blumer, 1971; Spector et Kitsuse, 1977; Schütz et Luckmann, 1986).

Constructivist perspective of the research

- The focus, traditionally oriented towards the causes of social problems, is then moved to the conditions of their definition as problems for society. (Dorvil et Mayer, 2001)
- « [...] comprendre comment une société donnée envisage, à un moment donné, la nécessité de régulations, d'interventions politiques, collectives, réglementaires afin de résoudre des zones de tension devenues incontournables. » (Martin et Chopart, 1988, p. 85)

Blumer and *Social problems as collective behavior* (1971)

1. Emergence of social problems
2. Legitimation of social problems
3. Mobilization of action
4. Formation of an official plan of action
5. Implementation of the Official plan

Research questions

- How did CEA social representations participate to the development of CEA public carrier as a social problem, from it's emergence, to it's legitimation, the formation of an official plan of action and the implementation of this plan?

Social construction of CEA as social problem

Point of interest:

To understand how Quebec society has come to define child emotional abuse as a child protection services matter or not, and which means are chosen to face it, and the participation of social representations in this process.

Social construction of social problems

- S'en suivent habituellement des luttes de pouvoir entre les divers groupes pour la disposition des « ressources » forcément limitées.
- L'action collective formelle qui en résulte prendra différentes formes selon le type de société, les moyens et ressources disponibles ou possibles à développer aux fins de l'action, la conception même de l'action à entreprendre et les groupes en présence » (1987 : 16).

Interrelationship between social representations and the construction of social problems

- Special attention to objectification and anchoring processes at each phase of CEA public carrier

Objectification and anchoring mechanisms (Hoijer, 2011)

- Anchoring
 - Naming
 - Emotional Anchoring
 - Thematic anchoring
 - Anchoring in antinomies
 - Anchoring by metaphors
- Objectification
 - Emotional objectification
 - Personification

Anticipated methodology

- Document analysis
 - Grey literature
 - Media archives
 - Archives of National Assembly proceedings
- Semi-structured interviews
 - Social workers working in different child protection services departments

Anticipated methodology

- Data analysis
 - Content analysis (Negura, 2006)
 - Identify social representations of CEA
 - Textual analysis
 - Mostly based on the work of Norman Fairclough (2003)

Child protection services operation

- 1. Receiving and processing a report
- 2. Evaluating the child's situation
- 3. Choosing protective measures
- 4. Implementing protective measures
- 5. Reviewing the situation
- 6. Ending the intervention
- 7. Referring to other resources

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