Book Review

Cameron, C., Connelly, G., & Jackson, S. (2015). Educating children and young people in care: Learning placements and caring schools. London, England: Jessica Kingsley. 256pp., ISBN 978-1-84905-365-5, £25.

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The three authors, leading researchers and writers in this field, describe this book as an 'evidence-informed practical guide to supporting the education of children and young people [from birth through to 25 years of age] in [or formerly in] public care' (p. 7). It is primarily aimed at UK students and practitioners in the fields of social work, social care, psychology, and education.

Broadly, the book falls into four parts. The first part (chapters one, two and three) sets the scene in relation to the education and care systems in the UK; chapter three is a powerful presentation of one young women's education journey in care that acts as a detailed case study in its own right, as well as the basis for a discussion about the current evidence on improving educational achievement.

The second part (chapters four, five and six), focuses on residential and foster care, and comprises chapters on learning placements, informal learning and supporting education in the care environment. The first of these chapters introduces ways of creating and sustaining a care placement as a 'learning placement', i.e. 'one where learning, both formal and informal, is to the fore, whether in a family or in an institution'. The authors argue that the practitioners' 'educational competence' and commitment to their own lifelong learning, is also paramount for children to achieve their potential.

In the third part (chapters seven, eight, nine, ten and eleven) the focus shifts from the home environment to the support structures required within education settings. Following a welcome chapter on the often overlooked topic of early years' education, the next chapter introduces the term 'caring school'; 'a caring school is one underpinned by an ethic of care, in which all members, children

and staff feel they belong and that they have a voice' (p. 137). The book details a step-by-step process on how a school can work towards becoming a 'caring school'. There then follow chapters on alternatives to mainstream schools, staying in education beyond the age of 16, and going to university from care.

The fourth part (chapters twelve and thirteen), comprises a useful chapter on supporting recent migrants, and a final chapter that, as well as drawing together the book's three key themes (compressed transitions work against education, looking forward, and education to the fore throughout childhood), also emphasises the need for a more strategic approach to be taken.

Deceptively ambitious, Educating Children and Young People in Care captures and makes sense of, in a single book, much of what the authors and others (mainly) from the UK, have learnt over recent years on this important topic. This learning, and its applicability to practitioners, is presented in a particularly clear, well-structured and accessible way. As well as introductory 'key points', each chapter contains a set of 'practice points' and 'useful resources', and throughout the book there are multiple case studies that are easy to relate to and that help to put the theory and research in context. This book is also packed with practical examples ranging from 'how to implement bedtime stories', to 'how to instil a belief in educational potential from a young age'. This is a great resource for helping students and practitioners to develop their own practice in relation to the education of children in care, and to engage more effectively with related professionals, services and systems.

However, this book is more than that. Drawing upon the field of social pedagogy, the authors also present a persuasive argument that to improve the educational achievement of children in residential and foster care, a fundamental shift in our approach and thinking is required. They contend that we need to rise to the challenge of developing 'learning placements and caring schools', that both are equally important, and that any such developments must also be well-integrated. Ending with the final chapter on a more strategic approach being necessary, this and indeed the whole book, is also something of a 'call to action' for all of those with an interest in the education of children and young people in care. Therefore as well as appealing to UK students and practitioners (and those in other countries), advocates, managers, policymakers, trainers and researchers (from within the UK and internationally), should also find much in this book that is informative and helpful.

In terms of any weaknesses, it would be good if any revised edition could more clearly recognise the differing legal, policy and practice contexts of each of the four nations that make up the UK. In Northern Ireland, numerous initiatives have been put in place over recent years including the Looked After Children in Education (LACE) inter-agency initiative (McLaughlin, 2002), and the related Making it Count training manual (Devlin, 2005); researchers at Queen's

University Belfast have also conducted important research in this area (for example, Winter, Connolly, Bell, & Ferguson, 2011). Similarly, around the time **that this book was published, the Welsh Government's** (2016) Raising the Ambitions and Educational Attainment of Children who are Looked After in Wales strategy and action plan were released; in the lead up to this, there were contributing Welsh research studies and reports from the Cardiff University Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre (CASCADE) (Mannay et al.), Voices From Care (n.d.), and the Fostering Network (2016). Furthermore, while the book does contain plenty of Scottish material, the chapter entitled Legislation Supporting the Education of Children in Care in the UK: Principles and Practice, is rather England-centric.

However, that point aside, for those of us in this field, this is the practical guide that we have long been waiting for, and even better that it is so authoritative, comprehensive, thoughtful, well presented, and easy to use; it should be compulsory reading for students and practitioners alike. As such, it would also be great to also see editions being considered for Australasia, North America, and Scandinavia etc.

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