

Book Review

Educating Children and Young People in Care: Learning Placements and Caring Schools

C. Cameron, G. Connelly and S. Jackson

London, UK: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2015. ISBN: 9781849053655

The main premise of this book is the concept of 'Social Pedagogy', a model originating in research around social care which is fundamentally concerned with creating an environment around a young person which encourages curiosity, development and learning. The central idea is of holistic education which allows a young person to develop and explore in a rich environment rather than being seen as a 'mini-adult' which needs to be optimised to begin adult life. This model draws from some well-known educational and psychological concepts (particularly the work of Vygotsky) but also introduces a far broader and more abstract philosophy which runs throughout.

The authors of this book come primarily from a social work background, although social pedagogy transcends education and care. The book is intended to act as a practical tool for any professionals wishing to use social pedagogy to support the educational progress of young people in public care. This requires the theoretical model to be distilled into the more practical aspects, particularly around introducing learning as a key aspect of care placements and 'caring' into education settings. The book then sets out to consider the different principles and potential implications for the model. The authors are successful in giving common scenarios in which social pedagogy can inform thinking to provide development for young people, but there is still a need for interested practitioners to translate this thinking into practice themselves.

The book's first section first provides a summary of the context around looked-after children, with education as a focus. This includes chapters summarising key legislation and the experiences a young person might have of the care system. The authors then move on to describing ways in which learning can be introduced to a range of care environments through formal and informal learning opportunities, particularly highlighting the importance of shared enjoyment, curiosity and play. Special consideration is given to the ways in which care placements can support the learning which happens in schools, and the way those in the early years can access rich learning opportunities.

The authors then move to the 'caring schools' aspect, highlighting the importance of relationships in schools and a caring ethos for promoting the educational achievement of looked after children. Special consideration is given to children who are not able to access mainstream schools, including those who have been permanently excluded, and supporting reintegration or learning in alternative provisions. The authors then focus on school and care support for post-16 education and for recent migrants into the country. Finally, the explored thesis is summed up as a strategic approach for policy around young people in public care.

The model of social pedagogy is well researched, and the ideas and many of the approaches presented in the book are very well grounded in evidence. The social pedagogy model is explicitly linked to thinking around the most common contexts which can be influenced by professionals, meaning that the ideas advanced in the book can be put in place all around these vulnerable young people. Case studies are presented throughout the book, and each chapter includes key learning points and potential action for the reader to take away.

The practical nature of the book means that it does not give a full account of the philosophies and thinking behind the social pedagogy model, instead directing readers to other resources if they wish to explore this. As such, the writing can sometimes be quite didactic; alternative thinking or approaches to particular situations are not always discussed. There are also implications for the time and resources needed to implement some of the ideas presented in the book, particularly the level of influence needed to produce systemic change and the need to communicate the abstract philosophy of the model in a way which is accessible to carers and school staff.

Practitioner psychologists who have a particular interest in supporting young people in public care are likely to find a novel way of thinking in this book, and the perspectives on care placements and education have the potential to inform positive change across these systems. Aspects of the model could easily inform training or intervention approaches with carers and schools supporting looked-after children, and the ideas of greater integration between these contexts have a proven benefit. However, practitioners will need considerable time in order to adapt these practically and a high level of influence over education and care systems in order to fully realise the ideas presented.

Dr Joe Wilson

Leeds City Council Educational Psychology Service/Leeds Trinity University