

# EDUCATING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE

LEARNING PLACEMENTS AND CARING SCHOOLS



CLAIRE CAMERON, GRAHAM CONNELLY  
AND SONIA JACKSON

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Learning Placements and Caring Schools

Claire Cameron, Graham Connelly  
and Sonia Jackson



Jessica Kingsley *Publishers*  
London and Philadelphia

Case study on pp.106–9 includes an extract adapted with permission from the editors of an article in the *Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care*.

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First published in 2015  
by Jessica Kingsley Publishers  
73 Collier Street  
London N1 9BE, UK  
and  
400 Market Street, Suite 400  
Philadelphia, PA 19106, USA

[www.jkp.com](http://www.jkp.com)

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Front cover image source: Kibble Education and Care Centre.

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### **Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data**

Cameron, Claire.

Learning placements and caring schools : a practical guide  
to the education of children in care / Claire

Cameron, Graham Connelly and Sonia Jackson.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-84905-365-5 (alk. paper)

1. Children--Institutional care--Education--Great Britain.

2. Foster children--Education--Great Britain.

3. Children with social disabilities--Education--Great Britain. I. Connelly, Graham. II. Jackson, Sonia. III.

Title.

LC4096.G7C36 2015

371.930941--dc23

2014043320

### **British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 1 84905 365 5

eISBN 978 0 85700 719 3

Printed and bound in Great Britain



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is a collaboration between three highly experienced researchers at Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London, and the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland (CELCIS), University of Strathclyde. To both sets of employers, and our families who tolerated many weekends at the endeavour, we are grateful for the opportunity to write this practical guide.

More specific thanks are due to some individuals who volunteered their time to talk about their work and experiences. In late 2013, at a meeting of the UK Social Pedagogy Development Network in Kirkcaldy, Scotland, one of the authors (Claire Cameron) asked for volunteers who would like to share their practice about the education of children in care. Three foster carers, two in Scotland and one in Staffordshire, England, and one social pedagogue working in England, took up the offer and their perspectives enrich the book. Some of our case studies draw on specially commissioned material. Graham Connelly interviewed a mentor at Strathclyde University, and a young man who was a migrant from Africa. Sonia Jackson would like to thank Diarmid Mogg, Ellen-Raissa Jackson and Ruth Forbes for helpful advice and information. To all of them we are very appreciative of their time. Many thanks to the staff and young people in Kibble's Art department who produced art work for the front cover and in particular the artist whose work is shown.

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Front cover image source: Kibble Education and Care Centre.

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# Bringing Education into Care Placements and Bringing Care into Schools

This book is an evidence-informed practical guide to supporting the education of children and young people in public care, and those leaving care as young adults. Its main argument is that for children to thrive and flourish, and realise their potential, and particularly where they have had very difficult early childhoods, they need to be cared for in school and educated at home. The integration of care and education in daily life is key. The chapters in this book set out the argument in different ways. In the first chapters we focus on the idea of encouraging education in what we call 'learning placements' in foster care and residential care; in later chapters we examine the ways in which, in different phases of childhood, schools and other educational environments can be 'caring schools'.

In this chapter the education (school) systems in the UK are described, with particular focus on curricula and testing regimes in England and Scotland. Then, effective learning strategies are discussed, and learning profiles of children in care are outlined.

## KEY POINTS

- ▶ Educating children in care is at last recognised as important; but to be effective, care and education need to be integrated in both placements and schools.
- ▶ There are two meanings of education: broadly based development and a narrow focus on performance. Children in care need both.

## Introduction

The education of children in care is at long last in the foreground of policy attention. As Graham Connelly pointed out (2013, p.107), 'teachers, social workers and carers would need to confess to having lived on another planet' not to have noticed the plethora of information about the risks young people in care face of not getting an adequate schooling. The publication of statistical data showing the low level of educational attainment of children in care compared with other young people has helped to identify the extent of the problem in both Scotland and England. Nomination of 'designated teachers' has helped to provide support for children and young people in care in schools, yet the experience of far too many children in the public care system continues to be one of not getting sufficient knowledge through enjoyment of, or, ultimately, qualifications from, the education system.

Success in education is still one of the main means of prosperity as an adult. Being without educational qualifications or the wherewithal to attain them leaves young people highly vulnerable to unemployment and poverty as well as ill-health and diminished self-esteem. Ensuring young people in its care are educated is one of the most effective actions the state can take to protect them from further risks as adults and improve their quality of life. It is also their right. Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), to which the UK is a signatory, states: 'Young people should be encouraged to reach the highest level of education of which they are capable.'

This guide provides evidence and practical support to practitioners whose role is to educate and care for children and young people in care (such as social workers, foster carers and residential care workers) or whose role includes the education of children in care within a broader remit (such as teachers, learning mentors and advisors).

The authors have worked in the field of research, practice and development of services for looked after children and their education in England, Wales and Scotland for, cumulatively, many decades. They have arrived at the conclusion that the continental European approach of social pedagogy has much to offer children's services in the UK. Social pedagogy, often translated as 'education in its broadest sense' is becoming better known in the UK, particularly

among those working with children in public care, through training and development programmes, books, professional magazine articles and conference presentations.<sup>1</sup>

In this book, we introduce some ideas associated with social pedagogy. First, we argue that care and education are integral to each other: a conceptual and organisational split between care and education services is not helpful. Hence 'learning placements' and 'caring schools'. Second, we argue that the everyday environment of 'upbringing' and 'care' is just as important as the 'educational' environment. Indeed, the professionals charged with looking after young people in foster homes and residential care spaces are 'experts in everyday life'. We return to this idea of everyday expertise throughout the book. The third social pedagogic idea is that, following Pestalozzi, the practical (represented by hands) must be integrated with the relational (represented by a compassionate heart) and theoretical knowledge and empirical evidence (represented by the head). In this book we reflect this range of contributions to knowledge and practical guidance. We have used a range of sources: theoretical and empirical evidence; personal testimony; and accounts of doing and being together. We have interviewed some foster carers, social pedagogues, young people and others specifically for this book.

We have also drawn, to a considerable extent, on a research project that two of the authors (Cameron and Jackson) took part in between 2008 and 2010. The YIPPEE project was a five-country study of the post-compulsory educational pathways of young people who had some educational qualifications. It used multiple data sources, including detailed accounts of the lives of the young people aged 18–24, interviews with relevant professionals, a survey of local authorities and analysis of national statistics (Jackson and Cameron 2014). The experience of this study, carried out in parallel in Denmark, Hungary, Spain and Sweden as well as England, inspired us to write this practical guide. The third author, Connelly, brings an invaluable Scottish perspective. Perhaps starting later than England, Scotland has energetically pursued the issue of supporting the educational potential of young people in care, with a multi-disciplinary perspective that complements the social pedagogic approach. Since 1999, devolution of powers within the United Kingdom has meant

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1 Thempra.org gives a good overview of social pedagogy resources in the UK.

diversifying policy and practice. While we would have liked to cover all four nations equitably, in reality most of our material has its origins in England and Scotland. We hope that practitioners in Northern Ireland and Wales can nevertheless take some inspiration from these pages.

This chapter provides a broad framework for thinking about the issue of education for children in care. First, we argue that there are two meanings of 'education', one broad and one narrow, and both are required for the fulfilment of young people's educational potential and wellbeing. This discussion includes an overview of the school systems in England and Scotland. Then we introduce the ideas at the core of the book: 'learning placements' and 'caring schools'. We discuss some factors that have a bearing on learning for the particular circumstances for children in care, who have often had traumatic and extended difficulties in their lives, and introduce the idea of the 'everyday expert' for children in care, who has a critical role in promoting and enriching learning.

## Two meanings of education

### Broadly based development or upbringing

In a broad definition of education, it is not the sole province of schools and classrooms but happens everywhere. Education is about helping people form their thinking and action. It is about learning, which happens through the everyday experience of being brought up in families and communities. According to the German social pedagogue, Klaus Mollenhauer, education is the central task of upbringing, which parents undertake on behalf of society. Upbringing is not well defined, but in the English language, in general terms, it refers to the effect of care and treatment on a person's moral codes. For Mollenhauer, upbringing means passing on 'valued cultural heritage' to the next generation through the actions of adults in relation to children. Such adults include parents, people undertaking a parental or upbringing role such as foster carers or residential care workers, youth workers, teachers and any other societal role models. Through their everyday educational actions, adults are helping young people form their values, views about the world around them and 'how to be' in relation to others. From this perspective, it is an



educational upbringing act to show a young person how to behave in a shop queue or to greet a stranger in accordance with societal norms and expectations. For Mollenhauer, adults in general serve as both the midwives of children's development and their moral censors by opening up or closing down their opportunities (Smith 2013).

From this perspective, education is about enabling children to grow up as citizens of a country, equipped to take advantage of opportunities and realise ambitions, which may be both individual and social. By encouraging young people to adopt certain socially defined values and skills, education has a role in social cohesion, economic prosperity and in upholding democracy.

Wetz (2011) argues that this broad developmental role of educator as mentor to children's development was the primary underpinning or classical understanding of being a teacher in the UK for much of the twentieth century. No doubt there were exceptions, but on the whole, teachers understood their educational role as a developmental one.

## Education as performance

In the UK, however, and particularly since the early 1990s, the definition of education has narrowed so that 'education' signals what happens in schools, and 'teachers' are responsible for education. Moreover, competency-based approaches have become dominant, and these define teaching as providing education in terms of subject knowledge, pedagogic strategies, orderly classroom management, assessment and recording, and continuous professional development. According to Wetz (2011), the role of the teacher has become a technical one, delivering the curriculum, and the mentoring relationship has become the province of specific specialists.

In 2009, the Cambridge Primary Review argued that an increasing emphasis on 'the basics' and 'standards' in primary schools was compromising the kinds of learning that require time for problem solving, dialogue and extended exploration of ideas. Being able to memorise facts was becoming more important than understanding the world around children. They recommended that children's wellbeing and active engagement in learning should be at the forefront of a renewed primary education, and the teaching strategies adopted should support this through a collaborative