

Book Review

Heather Montgomery and Mary Kellett (Eds.) (2009). Children and young people's worlds. Developing frameworks for integrated practice. Bristol, The Policy Press, 261pp, ISBN 978-1-84742-387-0. £19.99

Children and young people's worlds: developing frameworks for integrated practice is primarily a course text, edited by Heather Montgomery and Mary Kellett, for students on the Open University Childhood and Youth Studies postgraduate degree. Nevertheless, the book raises questions and promotes thought on what exactly it means to be a child in the 21st century, making it relevant to all professions working with children, including those practising in residential childcare. Drawing its focus from the children's rights perspective, the book comprises fourteen chapters, written by eleven authors, considering this issue from a national and an international perspective. The opening chapter identifies the construct of children and childhood within a political context in the United Kingdom. Further authors examine what exactly is meant by children's participation or voice in the modern world, alongside our understanding of the realities of belonging and family, both locally and further afield. Some chapters focus on specific issues such as poverty, consumerism, race and sexuality. In the introduction, the editors explain that the chapters serve to 'provide debate and controversy rather than offer simple solutions' (p. 3). This is *Children and Young People's Worlds'* main strength. Rather than force opinion it simply offers questions, leaving the reader to apply them to his or her world. From a residential childcare viewpoint this serves as a timely reminder of how complex it is to be a child growing up in the United Kingdom today, and how the pressures and demands of society, culture and even global issues further complicate this. For example the chapter on race, ethnicity and young people highlights how youth culture is taking ethnicity outside the traditional adult views of race, colour and nationality. Music, fashion, sporting culture, hairstyles and dance, are creating new 'ethnic' groups in local areas, beyond this traditional viewpoint. Equally, the chapter on the child and the law outlines how changes to family law have increased protection, viewing children as vulnerable and innocent, whereas criminal law has increased punishment, for example via Anti-Social Behaviour Orders, viewing children as irresponsible and dangerous. All the chapters offer scope for reflection by the reader to provide practical implication and meaning to the children with whom they work or live. For further emphasis, every chapter is accompanied by a case study, bringing the reality and focus firmly back to the child's position. One such study on foster children in Denmark, in the chapter 'Children and Young People's Voice', demonstrates the power in facilitating otherwise isolated and rarely consulted children to have a collective voice. Whilst initially this research study was designed by adults to give these foster children a voice and to assist in analysing the data, as the process unravelled the children themselves began automatically to assume the role of co-researchers, effectively interviewing each other via a web forum. As a result the research process had to be adapted to include further group analysis because it was evident that the views and perspectives being shared among the foster children were understood and interpreted by them in a way that the adult researchers and anybody else exclusive to

the group of foster children could not. The true findings of the research could only be explained by the participant children. Rather than identify frameworks for integrated practice, the questioning style of the text acts as a statement of intent. Examining the chapters as a whole not only highlights the difficulties that both western and underdeveloped countries have found in implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, but moreover demonstrates how further advanced countries such as the UK have progressed in some areas but have limited themselves in others. Some of the case studies acutely highlight the need for integrated practice by considering the outcomes when such systems fail. However, the case studies offer hope and motivation for what can be achieved by primarily integrating the child with the adults and professionals in their world. At 261 pages long, whilst thought-provoking, this book is perhaps more for those wanting to research and understand the sociological aspects of the child. However, the standalone nature of each chapter enables the possibility of considering different themes relevant to current issues for the child or children with whom you work and will certainly generate discussion amongst residential childcare professionals.

Peter Evans. Student,

MSc Advanced Residential Child Care, Glasgow School of Social Work Care Services
Manager - Westmount Children's Home and Paramount Group