

The book is clearly written and well structured. While it is aimed at graduate-level students within social work, health and educational professions, it would also benefit any professional with an interest in residential child care or children’s needs and development. It brings together theory, policy and research and is discussed in such a straight-forward way that it can be easily understood and related to practice.

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Managing children’s homes: Developing effective leadership in small organisations.

Leslie Hicks, Ian Gibbs, Helen Weatherly and Sarah Byford.

London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2007. 224pp,
ISBN 978-1-84310-542-8.
£25.00.

This book details research which aimed to identify the ways in which the managers of effective residential homes work. The research involved the collection of quantitative data from 45 homes in England and Wales, 30 homes from the local authority and 15 homes based in the independent sector. It looked at managers’ roles, as well as providing a consideration of resource use and leadership style. The research was motivated in part by the fact that previous research into this area, whilst highlighting significant variation in standards of practice, did not identify clearly those characteristics of managers that contributed to effective leadership. As such, the research upon which the book is based outlines the relationship between structure, process and outcomes.

Separate chapters detail the structural characteristics of the homes involved in the research. It examines the processes involved in managing the children’s homes, with a particular focus on aspects of practice and its management that are common to all homes. It provides an analysis of how such information contributes to a conceptualisation of leadership in children’s homes. It also explores the cost-effectiveness of residential care for children and young people. Finally, it provides an analysis of how such factors have an impact on the outcomes for children and young people. Undoubtedly, different sections of the book may have varying levels of appeal or relevance for readers, depending on their role and motivation for reading the text. A particular strength of the book is that the separate chapters have their own focus on different aspects of the research. As such, different topics can be identified and accessed quickly. Hence, students, residential managers and those responsible for commissioning and planning services may all be able to access the material relevant to them with the minimum of fuss. Additionally, appendices provide a more detailed overview of the research methodology and sampling techniques employed.

The book is at its strongest when drawing together the different strands of the research and considering implications for practice, policy and training. Strong and important themes emerge. The authors found that structural characteristics of residential provision varied markedly. Effective leadership was associated with a manager’s ability to achieve a collaborative team dynamic that worked consistently over time. Analysis of cost-effectiveness, whilst largely exploratory, did suggest that higher staff-to-resident ratios resulted in higher costs but did

not necessarily translate into improved outcomes for children and young people. Indeed, findings related to outcomes emphasised that the process of providing care – what managers and staff teams do – determines much of what children and young people achieve as opposed to the number and availability of staff. Accordingly, the research concluded that the effective leadership of children’s homes was paramount to positive outcomes.

Finally, the authors consider the implications of the research in terms of the ways in which managers work, the management of staff, the overall process of working for and on behalf of young people, and the implications for training. Perhaps most significant, is the final comment that collaborative cultures where success is a shared concern of all leads to positive outcomes for young people. The challenge for leaders and managers is to achieve such cultures. The fact that the research was carried out in England and Wales does not diminish its relevance for Scotland in any way. This accessible book has much to offer anyone interested in the study or practice of management and leadership in residential child care homes.

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Autobiography of my dead brother.
Walter Dean Myers (author) and Christopher Myers (illustrator).

New York, Harper Collins, 2005. 224 pp,
ISBN 978 0 06058 291 3
£11.99.

Autobiography of my dead brother portrays the life of teenage Jesse, living in the ganglands of Harlem, downtown New York. As Jesse matures into another anonymous black teenager, he finds his life divided. Childhood friendships, traditional family values and church on the one hand, clash with the demands of ‘being in the ’hood’, gang warfare, guns and drugs on the other. Walter Dean Myer’s graphic novel highlights the daily realities of being a black teenager in the city, and the fear and danger that have to be overcome to stay alive.

Jesse is the narrator of the story. He comes across as being a ‘good’ kid, who is growing up and struggling to understand the lure of gangs that his older friend, Rise, seems to be getting tangled up in. The two friends come from honest, traditional families, whose parents fear for them every day as more news breaks of drive-by shootings and teenage boys being killed.

Jesse is a gifted artist. As Rise becomes disillusioned with school and tries to make his mark and find his identity, he ‘commissions’ Jesse to draw an autobiography of his life. But as Jesse tries to put his closest childhood friend on paper, he finds that in every way Rise has changed so much, that he doesn’t recognise what he draws. As Jesse says: ‘I’ve been with him all his life, or at least most of it. The thing is, he’s been changing so much, and I’m looking at him and I’m seeing him, but somehow the picture I did of him isn’t right...’

Jesse, Rise, C.J. and Calvin, the childhood friends, had taken on the legacy of their fathers’ black social club, The Counts. As the boys grow older, Rise is keen to make his mark on the street by calling The Counts a ‘gang’. Suddenly, Jesse finds himself implicated in all sorts of trouble, from fire-bombing a local shop, to being questioned with connection to drive-by shootings. Jesse is troubled to learn that Rise is involved in these criminal activities, and worse - that he has taken to dealing drugs. When he realises that his life is in danger, and that keeping a low profile isn’t how he wants to live his life, Rise decides it’s time to move onto ‘greener pastures’.

Jesse realises that only Rise can finish his autobiography; Jesse will not follow him to the greener pastures, and even if he did, he no longer knows the man who was once his closest friend. He does not understand why being a black teenager means ignoring all your parents’ warnings and putting your life and