

For *Children & Society*, 25:85-6 2011

Education, Asylum and The 'Non-Citizen' Child: The Politics of Compassion and Belonging by Halleli Pinson, Madeleine Arnot and Mano Candappa.

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. ISBN 978023052468-2, 259 pp, £55.00 (hdbk).

For several reasons, *Education, Asylum and The 'Non-Citizen' Child* is a valuable resource for people in a wide range of disciplines who care for, work, and research with children and young people. First, young asylum seekers tend to be quiet about their history and work hard to appear to be 'normal'. Professionals, including teachers, are often unaware of their status. Indeed, English schools may deliberately not keep formal records, and this raises questions discussed in the book about the advantages but also risks of record keeping. It is therefore an advantage for professionals generally to be more informed and sensitive about the needs and experiences of ASR – asylum seeking and refugee – students, when they are likely to be responsible for them, knowingly or not. Second, ASR students encounter or stand in need of many different professions in education, welfare, health, social and legal services, housing, counselling and other support, and the book relates to good practices across this broad range. Third, the extreme and compound difficulties experienced by ASR students highlight problems shared to a less extent by other disadvantaged groups who would all benefit from the humane approaches analysed and advocated in the book. Fourth, social inclusion cannot be imposed from above but is about everyone joining in, which depends on an ethos of respect and inclusion being promoted in all schools and services, whether or not they directly involve young migrants. Fifth, the book includes impressive examples of young people's agency, helping to complement the concentration in so much research on their needs and problems.

The governments' dispersal policy of sending asylum seekers to anywhere in England adds to the urgency of all professionals being more aware about ASR students. This urgency perhaps particularly applies in mainly 'white' areas, where professionals and services are generally less informed and supportive than they can be in mixed urban communities. The book points out the problems posed by dispersal for all concerned. It also contrasts hostile government and news media anxieties about migrants 'swamping' and 'overwhelming' certain areas, with the generous support that many education staff and students offer.

The authors map the political and economic global background to forced migration, and how responsibility in England is devolved on to local authorities, and they present case studies of schools and local authorities. They report ten years of research and explain their ethical methods of contact with young people in schools who may wish to conceal their ASR status. Among their major themes, the authors explore varying concepts of security, belonging, citizenship and becoming 'British'.

The book is unusual in being about an under-researched subject and in combining impressive evidence and examples with sustained and illuminating theoretical analysis. When describing how school students become painfully aware of the effects of government policies of detention and deportation on their ASR friends, the authors conclude that growing political awareness and agency, and questioning of assumed values, are informed by compassion: feeling with their ASR peers. Chapter 10 'The politicisation of compassion: campaigning for justice' shows how active school staff and students can be in working against specific cases of detention and

deportation. (Although the government announced an end to detaining children in May 2010, this book is still highly relevant to many continuing problems, and it gives details of good practices and useful contacts.)

The ASR students themselves are shown to be resources and contributors and one example summarises the positive approach of the whole book. A teacher described how some students brought

'their tribal problems from Somalia with them and [were] having fights at school...And in fact it took one student, Hoban, to actually stand there and shout and scream in Somalian, at the top of her voice, "Ah! This is why we left our country, and you're going to bring it over here, and I want to be able to stop here because it's safe, aaagh!" And it worked.'

Priscilla Alderson, Institute of Education, University of London