

For *International Journal of Children's Rights*, 18, 1:659-660 2010

Halleli Pinson, Madeleine Arnot and Mano Candappa, *Education, Asylum and The 'Non-Citizen' Child: The Politics of Compassion and Belonging* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). 259 pp., ISBN 978023052468-2

Based on ten years of research by three sociologists with personal experience of migration, *Education, Asylum and The 'Non-Citizen' Child* documents and analyses the lives of young asylum seekers in England. They are an under-researched group, despite being important in their own right and also for what they reveal about contemporary childhood and youth within global forces.

The book begins with the sociology, politics and economics of forced migration and of ASR - asylum-seeking and refugee - children. A recurring theme is of children and young people, their parents, schools and local authorities coping with painfully contradictory national policies. The Government and much of the news media tend to present ASR families as intruders, problems, threats and burdens. Through inadequate financial support, through 'dispersing' families across the country and confining many into detention centres, the Government replicates the kinds of problems from which the families and unaccompanied young people hoped to escape by seeking asylum here.

The book shows in extensive, carefully researched detail how counterproductive the policies are. For example, 'dispersal' involves sending asylum seekers away from local authorities where they can find relatives and compatriots, with schools and other services organised for and with very ethnically mixed groups, and with agreed policies implemented by many experts who promote integration, ranging from language teachers to counsellors for extremely traumatised and distressed asylum seekers. On the pretext that nowhere should be 'overwhelmed' by forced migrants, national policy is often to send ASR families away from these welcoming supportive areas, to ones where they stand out as 'Other' and are more likely to be feared and harassed, and where they are left in need of basic supports and contacts.

Within such discriminatory, hostile, national policies, teachers who work to promote informed, liberal attitudes in inclusive schools face particular contradictions. How can they teach ASR students and also all their peers in the school about citizenship, which respects the equal rights and worth of every child through practice and example, within the context of discriminatory and negative Home Office and education policies? For over two decades, the pressures on English schools to succeed through high test and exam results have deterred inclusive admission and education policies. The competitive pressures, which can discriminate against all disadvantaged groups, are particularly obvious in Government advice to schools to provide support to ASR students in order to boost their academic achievement. Whereas the adults working with these students see the vital importance of also assisting their social and emotional wellbeing, their sense of hope and belonging, if they are to be able to study successfully.

The book's title refers to the ambiguity of schools educating young citizens about citizenship when ASR students' nationality and citizenship are in such doubt and they are 'non-citizens'. Especially before 2008 until the Government withdrew its reservation to Article 22, children's immigration status took priority over their human rights and best interests. On the day this book was published in May 2010, the Government announced that it will hold a review about ending the 'detention' –

imprisonment – of asylum seeking children. However, *Education, Asylum and The 'Non-Citizen' Child* is still only too relevant to the daily lives and challenges faced by ASR students and those who work for and care for them. The national context is well complemented with a survey with 58 local authorities, detailed studies of local authorities, and in-depth interviews and group discussions with school students and teachers.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the depressing policies and very sad personal accounts, the closing chapters are very encouraging. They describe how adults and students in the schools have gained and learned from the ASR students in awareness of shared citizenship and solidarity. 'Citizen' students were horrified when ASR students were suddenly arrested at dawn and detained, and some became political, in the sense of coming to question dominant values. One group produced an award winning cathartic play about why a Somali boy pulled a knife in their playground after he was taunted. Groups of teachers and students have mounted anti-detention and anti-deportation campaigns, sometimes successfully. They have lobbied MPs, held public protests, responded to hostile local newspapers, and worked with related agencies such as churches and NGOs. After a six year old, whose mother had been killed in his home country, had to watch his father being taken away in handcuffs in a dawn raid, his peers at school all gained new awareness of human rights. In the view of their head teacher, they became much more aware of how bureaucratic systems contradict the ethos in the school of anti-racism and inclusion.

Citizenship lessons in the active schools become more (non-party) political, alerting students to how the mass media pity a few migrants but denigrate many more, directly relating children's rights to young asylum seekers, and analysing the democratic methods of protest which the students and teachers are promoting. In its overviews, direct evidence, theoretical analysis and reports of wide-ranging practical action and education, this book is an invaluable resource for everyone concerned to understand and promote the rights of children and young people.

Priscilla Alderson, Institute of Education, University of London