

**Book review**

**Fostering Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking and Refugee Children: a training course for foster carers by Selam Kidane and Penny Amarena. London: British Association for Adoption & Fostering, 2004 and Work Placements – a survival guide for students by Christine Fanthome. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.**

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At first sight, *Fostering Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking and Refugee Children* and *Work Placements* may appear to have little in common. Whereas the first is a training course for the foster carers of vulnerable children and the second a survival guide for students these publications are connected through a mutual concern, namely, that of enabling young people on their journeys toward independent living. The purpose of the following manual appraisal is to highlight the unique contributions that each specialist handbook brings to this multi-dimensional undertaking. A further objective is to situate the publications in wider debates since helping children and young adults to flourish is a complex endeavour. Selam Kidane and Penny Amarena's manual for fostering children stresses the importance of individual well-being promoted through the growth of personal capabilities. Christine Fanthome's guide prepares students for the world of work. Implicit in the development of emotional health, on the one hand, and economic independence, on the other, are the politics of location and identity. This review emphasises the ways in which these issues are embedded in the everyday lives of vulnerable children and undergraduate students as they move towards maturity.

The lives of both asylum- and job-seeking constituencies are marked by uncertainty and transition. These comprehensive and well-structured manuals register some of the axes along which change is experienced. Change is attended by significant identity revision - as the resilience of unaccompanied migrant children is developed and employment by work-placement students secured. The dynamics of 'becoming' that accompany re-identifications (homeless refugee to national citizen and learner to earner) are witnessed in status change and hence location in society. Young people move from the periphery to the centre where they become valued. These shifts are interwoven with the learning of new skills and proficiencies, which the publications promote. It is in the context of personal development that the need for self-awareness is foregrounded and the guides endorse reflectivity to increase this consciousness as well as to reduce mismatches between the meeting of needs and expectations. Vivid examples of frustrations and successes are presented through case studies and quotations, which give voice to a wide spectrum of young people. Prosaically, the respective targets of training and guidance identified by the manuals are buttressed by their systematic coverage of carefully identified topics, clear English, and excellent presentation. Commenting on each in turn, the following paragraphs outline their distinctive features and indicate the ways in which the guides contribute to the leading of independent adulthoods.

### **Asylum-seeking and refugee children**

Published by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF), this two-day training course for foster carers of the 10,000 unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children in the UK is much needed. Primarily intended for use in the voluntary sector and by local authorities, the book is supported by a CD-ROM of overheads and handouts designed to familiarize experienced foster carers with the more complex issues surrounding and realities

of looking after children who have suffered trauma, injury, pain, loss, and separation. Piloted in the London Borough of Westminster, the manual gives clear direction as to how the resources can be used effectively by trainers. The purposes and learning outcomes of the eight 90-minute training sessions are summarized and accompanied by a time plan. The aims of the course are clearly stated and in preparing foster carers to participate in the provision of quality care for these children, a duty of responsibility with which local authorities are charged, key topics are covered. These embrace factual information concerning the origins of unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children, their legal definition and status, the meeting of mental and physical health requirements, dealing with ethical issues such as confidentiality, and preparing the children for leaving fosterers equipped with the social, educational and practical skills necessary to seek appropriate housing, training, and employment. Notably, a section on caring for the carers includes how to recognize and protect against stress. Supported by a list of useful contacts directed towards meeting the diverse requirements of these children the training course addresses factors crucial to the actualization of goals:

I want to be with my parents and my family more than anyone else.  
But it is not as simple as that, and as I am not able to go back to where  
I want to be, then I want to be happy, safe and successful where I am.  
I want to get good grades at school, I want to make good friends and  
get on with my foster family. I want to learn good English and get  
a job when I am older (Wellela, a 12-year-old Eritrean girl.)

The role of fostering to improve immediate conditions of existence, and help meet the aspirations of children with an interrupted education, like Wellela, is part of a many-faceted challenge to legitimate young people: as subjects; as experts on their own lives; and as active participants in society. From another perspective, and heedful of the ethnographic watch phrase 'nothing about us without us', action-research initiatives with migrant children have attempted to raise their profile on a policy platform. The innovative CHICAM project (Children in Communication about Migration ([www.chicam.net](http://www.chicam.net)) has the overtly political objective of facilitating children in making audio-visual materials about their lives in order to inform policy programmes affecting them (de Block and Sefton-Green, 2004). The resulting videos reveal the tremendous verve and talent of children who would usually be unseen, unheard, and written-off. Assisting young people in the passage from silence to speech is a worthy cause and one that links the BAAF compendium to the second book in this review *Work placements – a survival guide for students* in the Palgrave Study Guides series.

## Work placement students

Christine Fanthome's skilled interviewing was honed during a career in broadcasting inspired by a work placement at London Weekend Television. Her talent is used to good effect in each of the guide's eleven chapters, which contain verbatim accounts of students, tutors, and employers. Potent in its enthusiasm and counsel, for in Fanthome's thesis no effort, application, or skill is wasted since all experiences can be turned to advantage, some of the book's key words are initiative, priorities, networking, attitude, reflectivity, and organization. An exemplary feature of Fanthome's guide is its own organization. Beginning with reasons for doing a work placement in the first chapter and ending with job search strategies, the issues covered are signalled by bullet points, sub-headings, and articulate summaries. A particular quality of Fanthome's writing is the use of non-dogmatic language, perfectly pitched at the guide's designated undergraduate audience. But how useful too as a point of reference for parents, employers, schools offering vocational GCSEs, teachers visiting work-experience pupils, and to inform thinking about GAP years or embarking on a foundation degree.

In that placements provide 'new' spaces of learning for the young, who have in recent times been excluded from these adult domains, Fanthome's book offers useful guidance in

navigating unfamiliar terrain. Its publication is allied to the expectation that by 2008 work placement will be experienced by half of all those in formal education. Required to be 'more flexible and entrepreneurial' (Davies, 2002, p. 7) in an increasingly competitive and deregulated job market, the guide makes a valuable contribution on how to 'survive' these conditions. Encouraging self-audits Fanthome urges students to 'try to think of yourself as a commodity' (Fanthome, 2004 p. 18) which is a sound advice when 'economic literacy' and 'enterprise learning' are the order of the day as the *Davies Review* makes clear. Sections on how to find an appropriate placement, construct a strong CV and application, prepare for interview, and derive maximum benefit from placements are designed to avoid the 'lose/lose situation' (Fanthome, 2004, p. 103) of Amelia's theatre administration experience from which neither she nor her employer gained.

The two chapters devoted to case studies offer insights into student achievements and disappointments and make compelling reading. In dealing with commonly-faced problems, often the result of assumptions, remedial strategies are suggested including advice on what to do if there is no tutor (Fanthome, 2004, p. 83). Rightly stressing that work experience is 'a bridge between theory and practice, and between learning and earning' (Fanthome, 2004, p. 9) the guide helps students to prepare for university-assigned written and oral coursework. The emphasis on writing logs, diaries, reports, and reflective essays sustains links between academic and vocational education. In that 'learning on the job' can distance people from critical reflection what *Work placements – a survival guide for students* reinforces, is the continuing need for education to be informed by intellectual engagement with ideas.

## Responding to change

The principal value of the BAAF and Palgrave publications lies in the specificity of their responses to changing conditions in the UK. As the number of asylum-seeking and refugee children grows and work placements become the norm, the needs of disparate but not mutually exclusive groups require attention. These step-by-step manuals make valuable additions to the existing literature in their respective fields. The joint concern of Kidane and Amarena to develop the emotional literacy of asylum-seeking and refugee children is laudable and their careful representations, which register the uniqueness of personal life histories and ambitions, work against tabloid stereotypes. Their affirmation of individual distinctiveness, indexed by cultural, religious, and racial particularity for instance, moves beyond discourses of provision and protection. It encourages participation and promotes social agency in the hope that the challenges of citizenship can be approached creatively. Similarly, Fanthome recognizes the enormous potential of work-related learning to promote the life chances of undergraduates. The conversion of intellectual capital into economic capital is aided by the ability to be reflective. To constantly self-question, it is asserted, helps ensure an empowering correspondence between faculty and employment trajectories. The scope of personal achievement is broad and gauged by different measures. What the manuals make clear is that enabling young people to gain independence involves pursuing more than a single route.

## Bibliography

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