

become too easy to draw upon discontinuity and fluidity as celebratory aspects of subjectivity but what these books illustrate so powerfully, in their different ways and through diverse communities, is the importance of continuity, of holding the past and present in mind and that making a life anew is possible, though easier said than done.

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Supporting refugee children in 21st century Britain: a compendium of essential information

Jill Rutter, 2001, Trentham Books, Stoke-on-Trent, UK, £16.99 pbk, ISBN 185856185X, 300pp

1 The title of Nick Hardwick's Plenary paper at the Politics of Childhood Conference, University of Hull, UK, 22–24th July 2002.

Nick Hardwick, Chief Executive of the Refugee Council, argues that refugee children should be seen as children first and foremost, rather than simply as refugees.¹ Instead, their particular needs as children often go unrecognized. The UK asylum system makes no concessions for children, in terms of the 10-day deadline on filing an application for asylum or in the procedure for being interviewed by immigration officers, and these practices hit hard the 3,500–4,000 refugee children who come to the UK unaccompanied each year. Family and human rights legislation (protecting the right to a private and family life) might serve refugee children better than UK immigration law (see for example, Coker *et al.*, 2002), and social services might better recognize the needs of refugee children than the education system. At the initial stages, whether accompanied or not, access to education may seem a low priority. However, the education system can be a gateway to other services, and schools themselves can play a crucial role in supporting children, enabling them to begin to rebuild their lives and providing a chance for 'the genuine inclusion of all children and their families into the local community and mainstream society' (Dennis, 2002). However, nearly half the refugee children in one recent study were not accessing any form of education: it is one of the ways (health among them) in which refugee children in England are missing out (Dennis, 2002). The authors argue that the 'structure and routine of a normal school day can help provide a sense of normality and security in a child's life and is therefore a vital component in promoting their emotional, physical, educational and social development and well-being' (p. 6). This is one of the reasons for heated opposition to the Government's proposal for the segregated education of asylum seeker children in 'reception' (detention) centres, rather than mainstream schools. Critics also highlighted the value of inclusive education for the whole class and for

challenging the xenophobia seen in UK cultural politics – one of the issues on which this book has something to offer.

Supporting Refugee Children in 21st Century Britain: a compendium of essential information is a follow-up to Jill Rutter's 1994 *Refugee Children in the Classroom* (also Trentham books). At the time of writing, Jill was National Education Advisor at the Refugee Council, the largest charity working with refugees in the UK.² It is widely respected for its practical support and policy work, and its Children's Panel provides advisors (who, between them, speak over 40 languages) for unaccompanied refugee children. This book benefits from the Refugee Council's wealth of experience on issues facing refugees in general (e.g. Part 1, on Being a Refugee in the UK, and Part 3, on Refugee Groups in the UK) and on refugee children in particular (Part 2 is on Refugees in Schools).

2 www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

Part 1 is an incredibly useful guide to the law and the asylum process. It provides a chronology of legislation and of migration to the UK from Armenians in the 12th century onwards, and its chapter on reception, settlement and integration discusses health, mental health and translation issues. As a non-lawyer, I appreciated how accessible it made the detailed account of legal and welfare entitlements. I also valued its critical commentary on the effects of legislation and the difficulties people face in applying for and being granted asylum. This section provides facts, figures and arguments that are useful for contesting some of the myths about asylum seekers, for instance, that Europe takes more than its share of refugees or that the UK is chosen for its 'generous benefits'.

Part 2 contains chapters on welcoming refugee children to a school; on supporting children whose first language is not English; on supporting home language (and the benefits of bilingualism); on psychological and emotional needs; and on school links with home and community. Chapters also discuss the specific needs of unaccompanied children, 14 to 19-year-olds and regarding early years provision. The chapter on education policy clarifies national, local authority and school level responsibilities and argues that inclusive education benefits the child or young person, their family, their classmates and society as a whole. Of value to all schools, whether or not they include refugee children, is the chapter on challenging xenophobia and racism in the classroom which suggests projects for various curriculum slots. These chapters use case-studies, provide extensive reference lists, and often begin with quotations from children.

Part 3 is indeed a compendium of information: a 100-page country-by-country reference section sets the migration of different refugee groups to the UK in their political contexts. As well as describing the ethnic groups, language and religious cultures of each country, a chronology of political events helps place the differing conditions of exile for different generations of refugees from a given state. Sections vary between half a page (for Indonesia, in which it outlines five groups of internally displaced peoples and gives a couple of references), and 5–6 pages

each on Iraq, Iran, Somalia and Sudan, and 8 pages on Eastern European Roma, for instance. Inevitably accounts of political context date quickly, but these will remain useful briefings because they offer concise historical accounts of conflicts and about countries generally, and include details of the economy and distribution of wealth and about the education system.

This is an immensely valuable resource for teachers to brief themselves on the possible previous educational experiences of a child joining their class and for schools to understand, for instance, the naming conventions of another culture, such that an Iranian mother is unlikely to share her child's surname, and that Tamil naming conventions defy the first-then-family-name format we might try to map names onto. This is useful information for any service provider, and indeed for any of us who wish to recognize the particularity of our own conventions before we apply them inappropriately to others. Much of the general information in Part 1 will also prove helpful in school contexts, where the system might neglect individual needs and generalize from majority culture. For instance, if staff are aware that most girls from Somalia are infibulated (the most extreme form of female genital mutilation) between the ages of 5 and 10 groups, they may be able to ensure that the very long time it takes to pass urine does not attract the questioning and cause the embarrassment it could easily do in schools offering little privacy.

The country-by-country briefings are useful for teachers, lecturers, lawyers, health and social care professionals, as well as for those of us who wish to improve our general knowledge about new members of our communities and the political conflicts from which they are fleeing. Such briefings can also help majority cultures recognize the significance of the ethnic and religious divisions among refugees from a given country of origin.

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references

Coker, J., Finch, N. and Stanley, A. (2002) *Putting Children First: A Guide for Immigration Practitioners*, London: Legal Action Group.

Dennis, J. (2002 p.6) A case for change: how refugee children in England are missing out, First findings from the Monitoring Project of the Refugee Children's Consortium, Refugee Council, Save The Children and The Children's Society.

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