



Teaching Tales Learning Trails

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Book Review

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The contribution of this book to the available tomes on education is unique. It presents many of the issues that arise in any school: the expected focus on examinations, methods of correction of student assignments, the inevitable staff meetings, inclusion in the classroom of children with special needs, the Principal's role in mentoring the teachers, supporting the talents and interests of all students and so on. Each theme is handled differently; one of the cases is presented as a teacher's confidential diary entries, another takes the form of email correspondence between the parents of a child, where the father is out of the country and the third is a dialogue between a child and the Counsellor. These strategies help the writers to be candid and to be treated as insiders in the episodes. Understandably, almost all of the narratives are fictionalized, but the ring of real life is a constant.

Comparing children, be they siblings, neighbours or class-fellows on appearance, talents or school performance seems to be so common in our culture, that people are not aware of how comparisons are frequently odious. Sometimes, unfavourable comparisons leave a scar for a lifetime. A stereotype tends to cling.

Children with special needs or special gifts pose a threat to teachers who prefer uniformity in classroom performance and behavior. This aspect is also raised and resolved in a couple of narratives.

The second part of the book, “Learning Trails” finds the episodes in Part I discussed at length by selected groups of students, parents, teachers and principals. To begin with, the authors of the book have a variety of impressive academic credentials. And the persons they invite for the discussions are all articulate, introspective and candid.

Although some of the vexed issues about the processes in evaluating children are raised here and there, including in the Foreword by Sharad Behar and in the questions of a new Principal on feedback mechanisms of student assignments, the school systems in India do not have a workable formula on what to examine, when and how often, how to standardize the evaluations at relevant stages and so on. Some sought-after courses and institutions make their own entrance tests, resulting in the sprouting of coaching schools by the thousands to help aspirants to tackle them. As for any method of acknowledging a student’s original and creative thinking, within the parameters of an examination system, that’s another country!

All the actors we meet in these pages are more than well-versed in the English language: they are fluent. And the world they inhabit is of well off families who seek high-fee paying, well run schools. So the much-touted ‘medium of instruction’ is an invisible factor here, or to use a current expression—is the elephant in the room. For the large majority of Indian school children, “English medium” is a magic wand. Classes in spoken English are expectedly much in demand, but viable ones are not easily available within or outside the school. Perhaps, students who have mastered the language should be conscripted during the summer vacation to help the English communication skills of other students. It’s a quixotic thought, I will admit.

In a world dominated by mobile phones and a burgeoning variety of gadgets, I hear that reading books has become a rare activity for young people around the world. I know of no method other than reading voraciously, to acquire the idioms and usages of a language. This, for the millennials may be the road not taken.

I would like to end this brief review by felicitating the team of authors. They have collected and packaged everyday school experiences with sufficient detail to endow them with an authentic feel. To the reader, my advice is to savour this volume. If you are a speed reader, it helps!

This book can be purchased online at: <https://notionpress.com/read/teaching-tales-learning-trails>

Preview of book: <https://thinkingteacher.in/teaching-tales-learning-trails/>

Kindle Ed: <https://www.amazon.in/dp/B07GK4JQ4G>

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