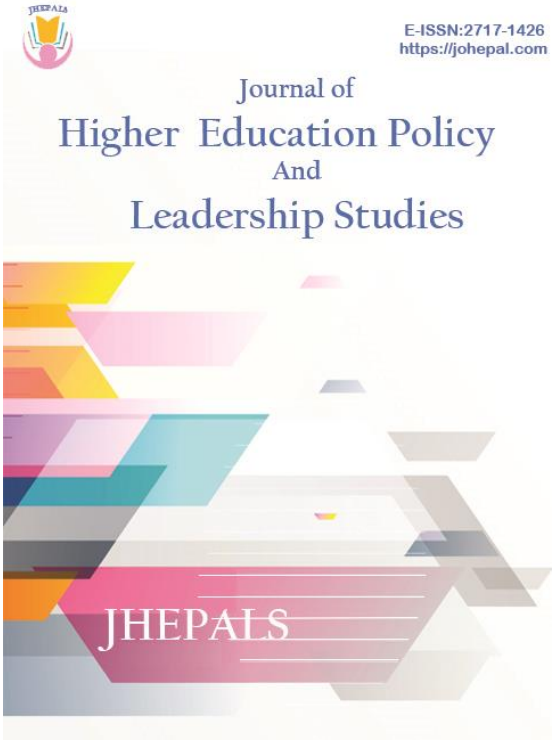
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Book Review: **Chronicles from the Classroom: The Treats, Truths, Trials and Tribulations of Working in Education**

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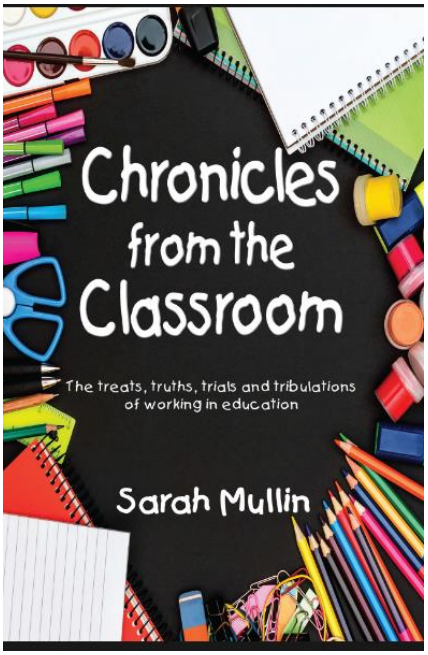
Book Review

Chronicles from the Classroom: The Treats, Truths, Trials and Tribulations of Working in Education

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Riding on the crest of her best-selling debut book; 'What they didn't teach me on my PGCE' (2020), Sarah Mullin once again reads the room with her curation of 'Chronicles from the Classroom'. This new addition to her writing repertoire not only complements its predecessor with their collective myriad of voices; celebrating and championing the teaching profession but further widens its potential readership to appeal to educationalists across a wide spectrum of experiences, roles, settings and backgrounds (McKenna, 2020). In the midst of a landscape of instability within the teaching profession, Education Support's recent Teacher Wellbeing Index (2020) highlights that only 25% of educational professionals

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feel appreciated by the general public and 51% had considered leaving the profession at the height of the pandemic. 'Chronicles from the Classroom' is a stark reminder that we are 'magic weavers' as described by one of my previous principals and it places considerable attention on the virtues of being a teacher.

The main intention of 'Chronicles from the Classroom' is in the author's words 'to provide a space for educators to share their reflections, ideas suggestions and practical tips'. Indeed, much of its appeal and relatability is the distinctive way in which it has been compiled. Rather than placing herself front and centre throughout, Mullin provides a creative and inclusive platform for narratives to be shared by a diverse range of educationalist professionals. This blended approach allows us to hold a mirror to ourselves, as there are a plethora of practitioners and stories to resonate with and find our own truth within. 'Chronicles from the Classroom' is divided into ten chapters which have been collated into broad themes that provide the reader with a warts and all account of the trials and tribulations of teachers. Some stories are recounted in first person; others adopt a verbatim style to offer a further layer of authenticity. Nestled within these chapters, Mullin offers her vision, philosophy and steadfast conviction for teaching. It is through this lens, that she provides the springboard for the content that follows and in doing so, revealing her tireless efforts to raise the profile of teaching and advocate the multi-faceted role of a teacher. Alongside others, she does not shy away from broaching the unprecedented changes that teachers have faced throughout the pandemic and peppered between the pages, is a war cry for some fractions of society to move away from their notion of teachers as superheroes and instead focus on greater investment in the teaching profession.

The ten chapters have been structured in such a way to take us on a journey through the peaks and troughs of the teaching profession. What engages the reader is the way in which 'Chronicles from the Classroom', stirs within us conflicting emotions, memories and sensations. This is the hypnotic power of story-telling. Chapter 1 'Inspirational Moments' immediately generates a tone of positivity with an impressive array of academics communicating their personal passion for teaching and revealing their own lightbulb moments, effortlessly framing what will be unearthed elsewhere in the text. Whereas in Chapter 2 'Growing as a Professional', the dynamic changes as we are led through the keyhole to relive more raw narratives, including the tender exchanges between a teacher and their students dealing with the sensitive topic of the Grenfell tragedy. Elsewhere, humour is used to counterbalance more reflective recollections and to illustrate how unique and unpredictable teaching can be.

Another considerable merit of 'Chronicles from the Classroom' is the way in which it addresses societal changes pre and post Covid -19 pandemic. Littered throughout, are issues that reflect the classroom as a microcosm whether that is dealing with ingrained prejudices in Chapter 7 'The Challenging Times' or increasing concerns over teacher and student mental wellbeing. Writing in the 'now' as one contributor defines it, highlights the importance of us recognising and growing as practitioners from the experiences of our colleagues. This same

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chapter strips away the veneer of teaching, to reveal the vulnerabilities and self –doubt that pervade the hearts and minds of so many teachers.

However, these moments of uncertainty are accompanied by moving anecdotes demonstrating resilience, humility and perseverance; qualities that provide the impetus for us to thrive. The book includes, at times, frank admissions of mistake making but it is this candidness that is one of its key strengths, as we are reminded that teachers are not infallible but are instead constantly seeking ways to evolve. Such realisation is empowering for a profession that can be self-effacing and feel undue pressure to strive for perfection.

The honest feel of the book is not only limited to narratives from inside the classroom. Some of the most poignant and insightful stories are linked to interactions beyond it as seen within Chapter 9 'Being Employed as a Teacher.' This final part of 'Chronicles from the Classroom' is instrumental in highlighting the immeasurable value of cultural capital and a teacher's fundamental place within it. It shines a light on some of the most precious and life affirming incidences occurring during more unstructured moments. These vignettes provide a sense of completeness to the book, as they effectively capture the wider professional persona of a teacher that is too often overlooked but also the collaborative spirit of the profession that pervades much of the text.

Mullin wholeheartedly fulfils her aim of using the vehicle of story to provide a 'legacy' for the educationalists that have contributed to 'Chronicles from the Classroom' and those who will benefit from reading and learning from them. She has designed an inspirational and celebratory book that is timeless in providing a lasting snapshot of the education system in the 21st century and elevating the voices of the profession.

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Josie Clark qualified as a secondary school teacher in 1996 and has since gone on to lead four Drama departments across the West Midlands. She is currently Head of Drama, Induction Tutor for ECT's/ITT and Early Career Framework Lead at George Salter Academy; part of the Ormiston Academies Trust. She studied a Masters in Drama and Theatre Education at the University of Warwick, is a regular contributor to Drama and Theatre journal and accrued over ten years of experience as an examiner for Pearson GCSE Drama. Recently, she has been awarded Fellowship (2021) status by the Chartered College of Teaching. Her areas of research interest include the potential impact of instructional coaching on the professional development and retention of early careers teachers.

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