



Book Review

Trapped in Education: From leadership to running out of the classroom, a teacher's true tale from burnout to recovery

Sheetal Smith-Batish

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
narrative inquiry, lived experiences, teacher education	This article reviews the book, <i>Trapped in Education: From Leadership to Running Out of the Classroom, a Teacher's True Tale from Burnout to Recovery</i> . It contextualizes the book in the larger field of narrative inquiry, especially in exploring lived experiences in memoirs. It further explores the way this work can emphasize larger cross-cultural issues in teacher retention. Finally, the review juxtaposes it with other books that explore both teacher burnout and their lived experiences working in the post-COVID era. Lastly, it emphasizes the importance of using such books to teach in both educator and administrator programs.
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In a time where modern teachers in the West feel silenced, more literature is emerging that gives them a stronger voice than ever. Lived experiences have recently surged in modern history studies as scholars pose questions about society and culture's impact on the individual with narrative inquiry becoming an increasingly popular method across the social sciences. According to Summerfield, life-writings can especially provide "opportunities... to pursue questions framed in terms of consciousness and emotion" (Summerfield, 2019, p. 28). Indeed, Smith-Batish's book helps scholars contextualize the cause of teacher burnout which has become prevalent in the Anglo-Western world, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic.

The tome is brief at 100 pages, so it focuses on only the high points of her experience while discussing various key elements in the British schooling system. Her experience is conceptualized in three parts: her teaching career; her breakaway from education then path to healing; and key themes ranging from becoming a Special

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Educational Needs Coordinator (SENDco) to balancing career and motherhood, especially as a single mother. In this sense, her work becomes both a primary and secondary source. Primary because she writes in memoir style her lived experiences, allowing scholars to understand crucial elements to teaching such as sound mentorship. It later functions as secondary because she writes in a detached style in the final third of the book, giving readers a guide of British programs and an overview of Indian women in work. However, her work is strongest in the first part as she grapples with challenges and opportunities in the school system. In one example, she writes that under mentorship, “I spent countless hours perfecting my craft and often losing myself in the colours and textures of my work” (Smith-Batish, 2024, p. 13). Another example describing the turmoil of high expectations from administration and parents when the technology required to teach the American Revolution became unavailable. Smith-Batish (2024) wrote,

Just when I thought things couldn’t get worse, the fire alarm went off...sending everyone into a frenzy. [After the drill] Leaving my class in the hands of the teaching assistant, I trudged to the principal’s office...Principal Jackson looked up with a serious expression...It turned out that some parents had called in, upset their children weren’t given the full, interactive experience that had been promised at the beginning of the term, but Principal Jackson wasn’t in the mood for excuses. I left the office feeling chastised and demoralized (p. 28).

In this particular passage, Smith-Batish exemplifies not only the anecdotal reality of many post-COVID researchers, but her voice is supported by research emerging in the last five years that exhibit administrators’ and parents’ roles in teacher burnout. Pressley (2021) found that lack of teacher support was an area for concern for teacher burnout, with one recommendation in the post-COVID world fixating on the issue: “[D]istrict and school administrators need to provide supportive environments and instructional guidance to teachers in order to ease anxiety around instruction by providing guidance on instructional expectations and support from the top-down. Providing more support for teachers may also influence teacher efficacy” (pp. 325-327). Indeed, Smith-Batish’ pull between the two stakeholders in this scenario speak to a lack of support and guidance in the era an important factor in how teachers felt undermined and disrespected.

The author shined light on the lived experience teaching as an Indian woman in a variety of British schools, both rural and suburban. Smith-Batish (2024) recounts feeling unwelcome in racially homogenous schools, “From the moment I step foot into the building, I am looked up and down and automatically it is assumed I am uneducated and probably an unqualified teacher who can’t speak English well” (pp. 39-40). In this sense,

her work is part of a growing body of literature of minority educators who juggled both COVID-related stress and burnout produced by constant racism seeded in their careers, presented both as microaggressions and blatant incidences that contribute to the cause of minority teacher burnout. Her book would compare with titles such as *Women Educators' Experiences during COVID-19: On the Front Lines* (2023) by Hernández, Heinz Housel, and Knotts. Further, while Smith-Batish's is a British experience and needs to be contextualized within the greater context of colonialism, race, and labour, her experience lends a voice to era-specific studies which contend, in general, "Daily microaggressions are depleting and can negatively impact the performances of people of color in various settings" (Mahatmya, Grooms, Kim, McGinnis & Johnson, 2022, pp. 58-59). Indeed, her narrative would provide an effective foundation for a transnational study on the topic as educational researchers explore the Western phenomena of post-COVID teacher shortages.

Both teacher education programs as well as educational administrator programs must begin assigning life-writings and focus on narrative inquiry if they are to truly understand the teaching crises across the Western world today. Batish-Smith's is well worth the read in the education space, and it is one sure to prompt discussion within both undergraduate and graduate classrooms who seek to understand how to cultivate, support, and retain quality, holistically-trained teachers.

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Bio:

Allison Millward is Assistant Professor of History at Rowan College at Burlington County in New Jersey. She is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Southern Queensland where she is researching the lived-experiences of Allied nurses on the Western Front. She previously earned her M.A. from the State University of New York at Albany and her B.A. in government and international politics from George Mason University. With an academic background in war and society, her research interests include women's experiences in war, life-writings of participants in conflict, wartime art and media, and women's work.