

First of all kudos to the three of you for coming up with a very unique idea for the book!

I am positive that there are thousands of books available in the market about the education system and also about the changing paradigms in the system.

But what sets this book apart from the rest of them were the following:

- 1) The book was not theoretical.
- 2) It wasn't judgemental about the system and its stake holders
- 3) Each story was well researched, thought about and relevant.
- 4) The stories and characters in the book could be any one of the readers. Each of us has been in those situations - at some point of time.
- 5) For the first time, an effort was made and a thought-out process was in place to involve all the stakeholders in this endeavour.
- 6) I felt that each story led the reader to think and contemplate.
- 7) It was practical and hands-on for all the stakeholders

Section One

Here is my take on about the stories:

- 1) ***Teacher Chatter*** I think schools have been using social media in the last few years more often for building PR for the school and also to showcase the school's academic and co-curricular activities. But schools rarely use social media to share and connect with other schools or teachers. In fact, I feel most often, schools want to guard their best practices and other routines as a secret and not share these. I would like to see school teachers and principals connecting with each other through social media and share their best practices - and probably, share resources, too, to a certain extent. Maybe teachers and principals can visit other schools as visiting faculty or as Resource Persons. I had read somewhere - 'imagine if each teacher could tweet about one good thing that they have done for the day'?
I agree that today most of the conferences have become only a marketing platform - recently my teachers had gone for a full-day workshop and they paid Rs.3,000/- and only 2 resource persons actually conducted the workshop and the rest of the speakers were there only to market their products. It was disappointing.
- 2) ***Correction, Please!*** I could relate to this story so much. I have a schedule for each subject from nursery to the highest class. Teachers have to submit the entire class's books - I go through them and give my feedback through post-it notes to the teachers and if there are serious issues, then I call the teacher concerned and address the issue. This review helps me to monitor the work of students and teachers. But I think, as a teacher, it is a tough job

to correct the books - especially where the class strength is 30-40 students and teachers are handling at least 5-6 different sections. I think the parent discussion group did bring to light the parental pressure on teachers - demanding that books be corrected by looking into minute details.

- 3) **Let me dance** I think that this story brings out something that every teacher and parents must connect with, and introspect on. We always think that academic excellence is more important than co-curricular activities especially as the children reach senior classes. I have seen some very promising sports students give up playing because their parents feel that they need to focus on their academics and board exams in IX and X. And after this break, students give up playing altogether. I think schools and parents must understand the significance of the activities - music, dance, art, sports - help in building the personality of a child - if a child excels or even knows one of these - it gives them an extra edge in building confidence and - who knows - this could even become their career option in the future!
- 4) **Out of the box** In my experience, most schools are not equipped to have inclusive education - in terms of infrastructure and faculty. In the absence of special educators, the B.Ed and NTT teachers are not equipped to handle them. Also the student-teacher ratio followed in mainstream schools is not conducive for children with special needs - as a single teacher in class is not able to cater to the student who needs that individual attention. Most often, the principal and the teachers are helpless, as they are not the policy making authorities in certain aspects of the school.
- 5) **The fire** I wish sometime that I could afford to start a school. Today, running a school is a nightmare, due to the bureaucracy and processes involved in getting the necessary permission.
- 6) **Who am I?** This story was very personal for me. I have been a below average student in school and college. I think apart from a board certificate that said that I had passed my X, there was nothing else that the school contributed to my personality or confidence. I am one of those who believe that each child has some strength in him/her. Schools and parents must identify this and nurture the child to blossom. Schools should not focus only on marks and academics. It is not necessary for every student to excel and score high. Considering my own journey and where I have reached today - I think each child is capable of achieving something and be independent.
- 7) **Success or failure?** I think each of us who have been teachers have been in a similar situation like the central protagonist of this story, Supriya. It is a difficult place to be in and we have all felt helpless. Most often, parents are in denial mode, or they blame the school and the teachers when the child is unable to cope with academics, or unable to perform. It is a constant struggle for me to address the need to collaborate and garner home support.

Most parents today are either 'helicopter parents' or passive parents - who strongly think that it is the responsibility of the teachers and schools to make the student perform and excel. Home environment and attitudes of the parents also make a huge difference. Recently, we had a parent whose children study in LKG. The two children have joined us this academic year, and during the PTM, the parent told the class teacher that he was disappointed that his children were not speaking fluent English even 2 months after joining the school!

- 8) **Testing Times** I think reading this story was like opening Pandora's box! Very often, teachers forget that they were also students and that they also struggled. I think it is difficult to change the obsession about marks. I really feel sad to see the number of students who end up taking their lives because they are unable to cope or because of failure.
- 9) **The stuff of Staff Meetings** I would definitely try what I had said earlier and come back to you sometime in the near future.
- 10) **Winter sun reveries** I think that story requires a lot of introspection.
- 11) **The story behind these stories** I remember watching the play inspired by the book *Diva Swapna* and I felt that despite the time difference - the situation and challenges have remained the same.

Section Two

01) Students' discussion: I have to congratulate the student panel. Their thought process and the way they articulated their views was outstanding. The discussion outcome showed their maturity and their intelligence. I think schools have to create many such opportunities.

When I looked at their profiles, I noticed that all of them came from very reputed schools and I am positive that their parents and home environments must have been a contributing factor for shaping those students to being what they are. Maybe we could have included students from not-so-well-known schools or government schools as well - to see their views - maybe the socio-economic background does influence the outcome of such discussions

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02) Parents' discussion - I thoroughly enjoyed reading their views. In my opinion, this stood out as the best discussion in the second part of the book. It was interesting to read their take on various issues. Most schools would be lucky to have such parents! But I think the ground reality of most school-parent bodies is different. The challenge that most schools face is absentee parenting – emotionally, they are not connected with their children - parents have unreasonable expectations from schools, teachers and their own children. Most parents forget that they too have been at a wide spectrum of scores and exam results - but expect that their children should always excel. Today, schools have become consumer-

oriented or like a service industry – and so, parents feel that they have every right to demand. Parents want the best of infrastructure, teachers and opportunities, but all this comes at a cost and there is only so much that a school can do.

Example: We had this reading program that was offered by British council and it was priced around Rs.2,500. There was lot of value in the program and I felt that this would benefit the students a great deal. When we offered it to the parents- only 3 out of 500 parents showed interest. As a result we had to drop it. Or another instance - it is a logistic nightmare for schools when children have to be sent to various inter-school competitions or events. When we ask parents to make transport arrangements or volunteer, hardly anyone takes it up. When children don't do well, then the blame is often on the teachers and schools - parents forget that they, too, have a role in their children's education, apart from being the providers.

03)The teacher trainees and educators discussion was also enriching. I could see so much of optimism in each one of them.

Today each student and their parents aspire them to become doctors and engineers and hardly anyone wants to take up teaching. Then, wherefrom are we going to find teachers? As a society, we need to start respecting teachers and also work towards making it a lucrative career. This is like a vicious cycle.

My own family and people around me used to ask me why I had taken up teaching as my career

I would like to share some of the things that I have been doing as an educator:

- a) I have put in my time, effort and resources to constantly learn new things that I can implement in my school and that can bring about a difference to the teachers and students. I have never asked any of the schools to sponsor or send me for any of the workshops. I take personal interest to attend because I have the passion to learn. I have a long journey ...
- b) I create opportunities for teachers to learn. I make an effort to send them to different workshops. It is also a rule that they have to come back and share what they have learnt with the rest of the team. I have made it mandatory for everyone to take up one Coursera module and complete it by the end of the academic year, as part of their appraisal. For the last 3 years, I have been choosing a book for teachers to read during the summer holidays and teachers then take it up and discuss the book. We have so far done 3 books - *DivaSwapna*, *The Curious*

Incident of the Dog in the Night-time and the *Biography of Steve jobs*. This year, I have initiated the setting up of an interactive display board for the teachers in the staff room - each teacher has to contribute towards the trigger cues/activities. We work 2 Saturdays in a month. One Saturday is used for some kind of learning and sharing. My personal opinion and observation is that today a lot of government schools are adopted by Companies and CSR Projects. Azim Premji Foundation and many others like them are working towards improving the quality of teaching. The elitist schools, if I may call them so - such as Inventure, Aditi Mallya ... make a constant effort to empower their teachers through lot of programs. But in the second rung schools - the average schools that are found in every corner and every area - the situation is different – one, there is a difference in the kind of teachers that the schools have, due to the salaries and second, the school's vision and thoughts about teacher training programs are different. Most schools don't invest in training programs - one of the parents brought it out in their discussions on how schools divert funds to establish other schools or infrastructure. This is my observation - most of the teachers who take up teaching shy away from learning - because of various reasons and the most common reason is because they have to take up domestic and family responsibilities. This gives them no time to learn. I wish we could do more in this area.

- c) I have introduced speaking skills for students from nursery onwards - this is taken up each month - the idea is to build confidence and communication skills among the students. We award a ribbon for the best speaker and I have seen how children blossom over a period of time.
- d) I always tell my teachers not to revise and give away the questions or set an easy question paper.
- e) I am involved in the curriculum design and have tried to make concepts meaningful for students.

I do hope that this year we take up your book as summer reading for teachers and discuss. If I am able to execute it, I will share my learning.

Once again, thank you for giving me this opportunity to be part of this learning trail.

We all need that constant nudge and motivation and a sense of direction - which your book has given me. Wishing the three of you the very best!

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