ForeWord Reviews

EDUCATION

The Road Out: A Teacher's Odyssey in Poor America
Deborah Hicks
University of California Press
978-0-520-26649-0
(February 2013)

If all teachers today had the freedom and ingenuity to create an engaging and challenging educational program for their students similar to the one in this book, then more of our country's poor children would receive the exciting and dignified learning experience they desperately deserve.

Educator Deborah Hicks tells the story of an after- and summer-school literature program she created for a small group of poor eight-and nine-year-old girls in Cincinnati, Ohio. The author came from a somewhat troubled working-class family herself and shares poignant stories of the girls' home lives and their journeys together as she tries to illuminate the road that was her own salvation: education.

Readers learn that Hicks is a wonderful educator, creative and relentless in her drive to teach, regardless of the fact that her students are continually confronted with supersized versions of social troubles that would leave most adults stuck in their tracks. Hicks's program is supplemental to regular public school and strikingly distinct from it. Aside from her class being small, all female, and voluntary, her knowledge of her students' lives does not come from documents, social workers, or teacher-parent conferences, but through personal interactions, writing, group discussions, and vists to their homes and neighborhoods. Their shared experiences explore the students' lives in deeply revealing and necessary ways that are sometimes taboo in today's increasingly restrictive classrooms. Also included in Hicks's curriculum are some of the perks readily available to other children: a trip to a French cafe or an excursion to a bookstore to meet an author. When writing of her pupils' talents, personalities, and gifts, Hicks's reflections take on the gloating tone more commonly heard from parents or relatives of her students' more affluent peers.

Whether any or all of the girls featured find an educational "road out" cannot be wholly credited to, or blamed on, the author's efforts. But at the very least, Hicks introduced to them the notion of their entitlement. This touching book is sure to inform and remind its readers of all the difficulties faced by an increasing number of children today, and of what is lost and missing in

their education and their lives.

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