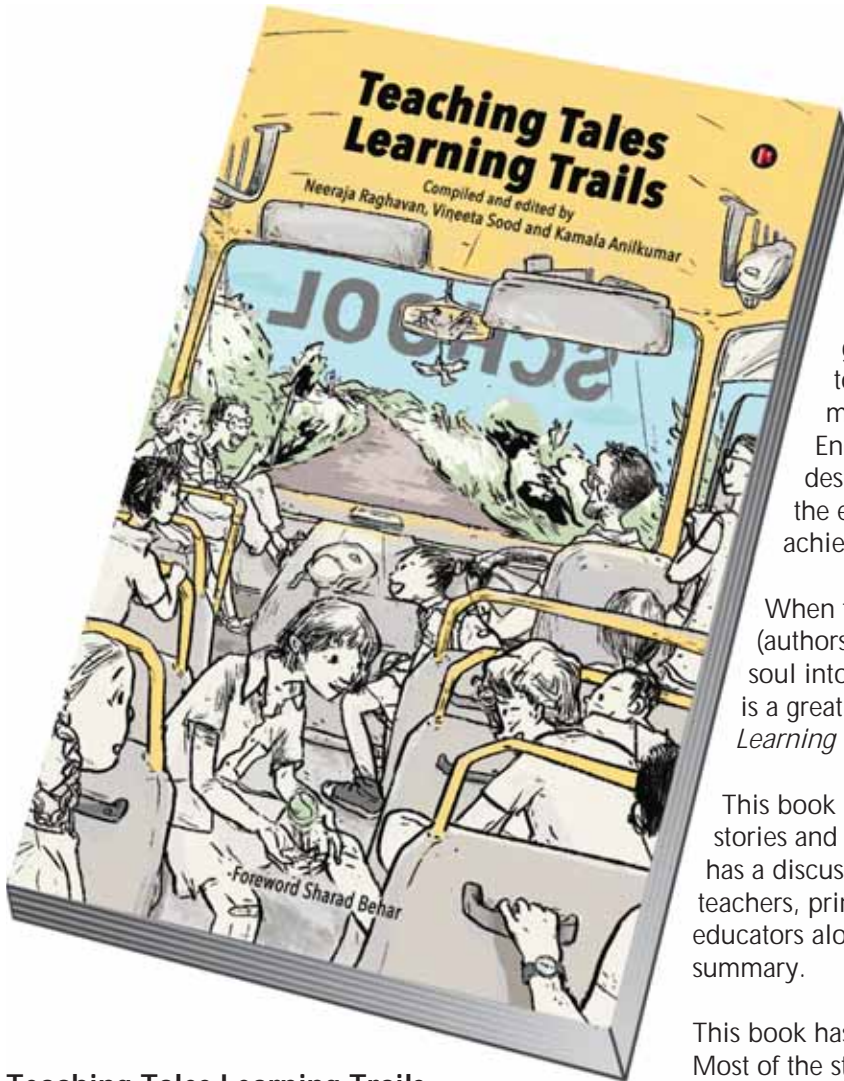


A treasure trove of amazing tales

Gururaj K S



Teaching Tales Learning Trails

Neeraja Raghavan, Vineeta Sood and
Kamala Anil kumar
Notion Press (2018)
321 pages
Price: ₹ 399

<https://notionpress.com/read/teaching-tales-learning-trails>

On reading author Neeraja Raghavan's whatsapp message to the co-authors on page 316 of the book, I am reminded of the now famous dialogue by Shahrukh Khan from the hindi film *Om Shanti Om*, which goes, "Kisi cheez ko agar dil se chaho, to poori kaynat use tum se milane me lag jati hai," when translated into English, it means "When you really desire something from the heart and soul, the entire Universe conspires to help you achieve it."

When three passionate teacher educators (authors) came together and put their heart and soul into developing an idea, what emerged is a great piece of work titled, *Teaching Tales Learning Trails*.

This book has two sections – Section one has the stories and is titled Teaching Tales. Section two has a discussion of the stories by students, parents, teachers, principals, teacher trainees and teacher educators along with an inter-group discussions summary.

This book has an amazing collection of stories! Most of the stories have been woven from true experiences and are beautifully written, interesting and insightful. Each story is unique, a masterpiece in itself, with an important takeaway for the reader.

The reader finds himself/herself connecting with many of the stories. Each character is so well etched out that as one starts reading, the characters come to life and the reader feels that the story is being played out in front of him/her. Some of the stories tug at your heart strings. The stories will push you in a subtle manner to review and reflect.

In the story titled '**Teacher Chatter**', Praveen an IT Professional, has moved from a well paid job in a multinational company, being unhappy with the competitive atmosphere there, to work in a school which promises to nurture young minds, to learn at their own pace without competition and comparison. He sees unhappy faces in the staff room where teachers talk about issues other than teaching and learning. The principal is interested in the school winning medals at the science competition. A chance meeting with a retired teacher motivates him to set up an online forum for teachers to share their experiences, views and stories.

'**Let me dance**' is the story of Kalpana, a student studying in class X. She is good at dancing and English. The mathematics teacher Mrs. Subramaniam and Ms. Kashyap, the chemistry teacher feel that maths and science are the most important subjects and constantly pull her up in front of the entire class for her poor performance in these subjects. They also feel that missing classes for dance practice is not good for Kalpana. Kalpana records her feelings in a diary. Kalpana's parents understand, support and try to help their daughter.

Why are marks the only yardstick to measure a student? Why are students not allowed to choose anything else than what they are good at in school?

Mr. Manas, the English teacher's brief explanation of the importance of English and humanities is very interesting. Mr. Manas's reply that "Sometimes it helps to examine our expectations of others against what we missed on," is a thought that lingers on.

'**Out of box**' has two stories in one and both with a happy ending. Parents of little Aarav are shocked when the head of a school refers to their child as a special child. Saritha's (the mother) trauma as she meets doctors and consultants and takes the child to an Institute for various tests and finally her happiness when she finds a school where her child is allowed to learn at its own pace under caring teachers becomes the readers' own. The story ends with a beautiful poem written by the mother.

The second story is that of Prarthana, a young teacher who has a skin allergy and has tried every treatment available and finally meets a counsellor who helps her overcome this stress induced allergy. The lesson that little Aarav imparts to the

young teacher, that children can express their understanding in different ways is the takeaway.

'**The Fire**' is the story of a mother who wants to provide the right learning experience for her children and her quest for learning leads her deeper into the realm of education. Encouraged by her husband and in-laws she sets up an inclusive pre-school in her neighborhood. She runs the pre-school for 12 years and later teaches in a residential school for 13 years, always with the youngest group.

The story captures her experiences and challenges. Page 89 has a few lines on **Never Do's** with Children. That is an important takeaway for parents and teachers.

In the story '**Who am I**', Tina is the younger sibling and Tara the older one. Tina has always been compared to her elder sister and expected to follow in her footsteps. Parents and teachers are disappointed and feel that the child is not good at anything. In their efforts to help her, they make decisions for her; complete her class work and homework for her. There is no effort made to speak to the child, understand the child's interests, to provide an opportunity to explore. The child also feels inferior and unhappy that she falls short of her parents' expectations.

Tina, now a 22-year-old, has completed her B.Com and is pursuing an animation and graphics course. Roshan Chopra, the father, feels his younger daughter is not interested in anything. He wants to help his daughter. This leads him to the doorsteps of an experienced and wise life coach, Ms. Neera. After a series of sessions with Ms. Neera, Tina starts coming into her own, becomes confident and starts exploring her interests in art. The transformation of Tina from an unsure girl into a confident person who makes her own decisions, makes this story an interesting read.

'**Testing Times**' – Supreeta, a XI grade student is the editor of the school magazine. She and her three friends are given the responsibility of coming out with a magazine which will be remembered for years to come. They decide on the theme of the issue as "Examination". They invite articles from teachers, suggestions from students and interview parents. This chapter makes one examine the idea of exams, marks and grades.

What does examination mean to students? Why do students fear exams and get stressed? Should students be judged only by their academic performances? What should be tested? How do the students want to be evaluated?

Of the 10 stories, 'Winter Sun Reveries' was one story, I found difficult and did not enjoy reading.

The story titled 'The Story Behind These Stories' captures the painstaking effort and process followed by the three authors before publishing this book.

The second part of the book titled "Learning Trails" contains details of discussions about the book, conducted with students, parents, teachers, principals, teacher trainees' and teacher educators, moderated by one of the authors. The moderator poses questions to the participants and elicits answers. The participants share their experiences

and views. The key takeaways are captured at the end of each discussion.

I am not from the teaching profession. I love stories. I therefore enjoyed reading the first section more than the second.

This is a book to be treasured. A resource that teachers, principals, parents and those who work with children would like to refer again and again. The stories can be used as case studies for discussion by the faculty and students of teacher training courses.

The reviewer is a Senior Human Resources Manager for iTriangle Infotech. He has worked earlier for the Azim Premji Foundation as a Resource Person. He can be reached at < ksgururaj@gmail.com > .



LIBRARY EDUCATOR'S CERTIFICATE COURSE 2019 (English)

Library Educator's Course is a *first-of-its-kind* professional development course for librarians, teachers and others who work with children and books. It enables practitioners to imagine the library as an innovative and creative space that is open and active and to build their skills for designing effective library sessions with children. The course is supported by **Parag**, an initiative of **Tata Trusts** and conducted by **Bookworm Trust**.

Applications are invited for LEC English 2019

- The course is offered over 7 months starting from April 2019
- Course offered in a blended mode with 3 contact periods spanning 12 days (5+4+3)
- Distance-mode includes online discussions, course readings, assignments & field project
- Blend of theory and practicum
- Course language is **English**
- On-going mentoring support for participants
- Opportunity to engage with a rich collection of curated children's literature
- Contact sessions will be conducted in Goa

Course Prospectus and Application Form can be downloaded from: <http://bookwormgoa.in/lec/>

Last date for submitting applications is 25th February 2019

For any queries, please write to us at lec@bookwormgoa.in