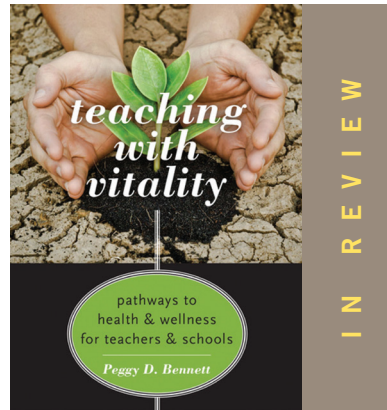


Reviewed by Rebecca Humphrey Hanaburgh

Teaching with Vitality: Pathways to Health and Wellness for Teachers and Schools

Written by Peggy Bennett

New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018



Teaching With Vitality: Pathways to Health and Wellness for Teachers and Schools by Peggy D. Bennett is a gem of a book. Everything about it appeals, from the encouraging title and compact, easily transported size, to the 101 “nuggets” of wisdom, each of which can be read in just a few minutes. This book touches upon many different aspects of school communities, with honest talk about difficulties that can be encountered and straightforward suggestions for solutions. The overarching goal of the book is to give readers an awareness of conflicts that may arise in school communities and, by offering thoughtful perspectives and solutions, encouragement and support of emotional and physical wellness. The author is careful to point out that the book includes her thoughts and opinions, which may or may not coincide with those of her readers. She encourages using the book as a springboard for thoughtful consideration and experimentation of the covered topics.

Bennett’s impressive and varied background makes her uniquely qualified to write this book. Not only is she a teacher, author, musician, and professor emerita of music education at Oberlin College Conservatory of Music, but also she is certified in basic mediation, family mediation, and victim-offender mediation, as well as being a Martha Beck-certified Wayfinder Life Coach.

Additionally, she has dedicated her life to education, learning, and teaching and is strongly committed to helping fellow learners successfully and healthfully navigate complicated issues that can arise during a teaching career.

Two of the most appealing things about the book are the variety of topics covered and the way in which the author is able to delve deeply into these topics with a succinct writing style, keeping all chapters no more than two pages long. In the chapter entitled “Behaving respectfully,” the author concisely explains the rather complicated concept that respect is both a feeling and a behavior. Knowing the distinction between the two is essential for healthy relationships. With this distinction, even if someone does not feel respect for another, that individual can choose to behave respectfully towards the other person.

Simple awareness and appreciation of the charming moments that exist in schools can feed the soul and enhance overall wellness.

Another example is a set of chapters dealing with the necessity of healthy assertiveness. The author organizes, analyzes, and explains the qualities of five different levels of assertiveness that may be encountered and/or required in educational settings. She gives scenarios for each level with accompanying examples of feelings and responses to clarify the levels for the reader.

Chapters that deal with concepts of mindfulness are particularly enlightening. One such chapter, “Look for the charm,” reminds teachers to be cognizant of the wonderful moments that happen each day. Simple awareness and appreciation of the charming moments that exist in schools can feed the soul and enhance overall wellness. The author gives examples to ponder such as the giggle of a child, the scent of a book, laughter among friends, and the beauty of a young artist making music.

“Converting stress to pressure” is another beneficial mindfulness-related chapter. The author points out that society tends to use the word *stress* to describe many different moods, thus coloring those moods with the primal response produced by our bodies during times of threat. She suggests replacing the term *stress* with the term *pressure*, and asserts this simple renaming of terms can help initiate forward momentum and build resiliency without the complication of the primal stress reaction.

Along with the aforementioned chapters, many other notable and highly applicable topics of interest, such as “Rethinking student success,” “Accepting change,” “Valuing your voice,” “Introverts and extroverts,” and “Compassion fatigue,” are included as chapters in the book.

This book is appropriate for a wide audience. Although the topics are specific to an educational setting, the wisdom gained from each one is applicable to colleagues in any setting. It is helpful reading for teachers looking for a quick motivational thought, those who are feeling weighed down mentally and physically by the teaching occupation, anyone trying to find balance in their work and home life, parents and community members seeking to understand more thoroughly the stresses encountered in the teaching profession, educators such as specialists and administrators whose jobs require them to interact with large numbers of colleagues, and new teachers looking for advice and wisdom as they enter the field. ■

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