

Lawson, J. E. (Ed.). (2022). Teacher, take care: A Guide to well-being and workplace wellness for educators

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Number 203, 2023

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1108438ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1108438ar>

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Publisher(s)

Department of Educational Administration, University of Saskatchewan

ISSN

1207-7798 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Tucker, L. (2023). Review of [Lawson, J. E. (Ed.). (2022). Teacher, take care: A Guide to well-being and workplace wellness for educators]. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy / Revue canadienne en administration et politique de l'éducation*, (203), 125–128. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1108438ar>

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Lawson, J. E. (Ed.).¹ (2022).
*Teacher, take care: A Guide to well-being and
workplace wellness for educators.*
Portage & Main Press. 224 pages. ISBN: 9781774920299

Reviewed by: Lisa Tucker, University of Winnipeg

Prompted by a desire to be of service to educators during the covid event, *Teacher Take Care: A Guide to Well-Being and Workplace Wellness for Educators* was birthed. This timely book is a powerful, practical, and rich response to the challenges that teachers encountered during this traumatic event. It highlights the need for educators to focus on and be supported in creating greater levels of well-being for themselves and their colleagues.

During this unprecedented time educators were working on the front lines, adapting to new mandates and regulations on a daily basis. Many of them were pivoting from in person to online teaching, and at times having to move between the two, while others taught in person and also streamed their teaching for students at home. Teachers are masters of improvisation, but these demands pushed their capacities to a whole new level.

A dominant theme in this book is that as teaching is a caring profession, teachers must tend to their own needs and support their colleagues in order to more effectively teach and care for their students. Teachers' levels of negative stress are symptoms of dominant education systems that are overburdened, and this has become more evident as we have transitioned from the intensity of the last three years to new ways of being, living, and working. The care that educators can extend to themselves and each other is exemplified in the care with which this book was crafted.

The book is framed by the Sacred Hoop or circle which represents Indigenous knowledge and the worldview of some Indigenous Peoples. It provides a grounding in concepts of balance and harmony, which contribute greatly to well-being. This holistic framework is expressed in the introduction, "In Anishanaabemowin, they call this Mino Pimatisiwin," which means "living a good life." (2022, p. 12). What most people desire more than anything (and particularly for their children) is to live a good life. Well-being is a central aspect of living a good life.

The contributing authors represent a diversity of life experiences and roles, including that of elder, knowledge keeper, school administrator, director of wellness co-ordinator, classroom teacher, parent, grandparent, counsellor, and life coach. They bring a breadth and depth of experience, knowledge, and wisdom to this project.

Teacher, Take Care is an inspirational collection of personal stories, concepts, perspectives, processes, and practical strategies intended to support educators in their quest for balance and well-being in their work and lives. The power of storytelling is an integral component of the book, and through sharing personal stories, the authors give the reader permission to acknowledge, validate, and share their own experiences. They create a safe space in which dialogue can occur. In a profession in which appearing weak or needy is not generally accepted, educators can suffer in silence and feel alone. These stories set the tone for the book, which is genuine, heart centred, and offers great hospitality.

Rich, thoughtful questions, through a Reflect and Respond format, are placed throughout each chap-

¹ With contributions from Gander, S., Scott R.N.S., & Kipling, S.

ter, and engages the reader to consider the key themes in the context of their lives and work. Elder Kipling and North Star's insights and experiences are beautifully woven throughout the book in key places in each chapter, and provide a thread of continuity and grounding in Indigenous teachings. The inclusion and honouring of Indigenous voices is a commitment that the authors made to address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action.

Graphics, diagrams, charts, and other visual representations reinforce many of the key concepts throughout the book. The visuals provide a structure for some of the processes and exercises and are an invitation to the reader to engage with the material in a practical manner, much as a workbook does.

This book draws on teachings from Indigenous elders and teachers, and classic and current literature from a diversity of scholars and researchers in the fields of medicine, education, psychology (mental health specifically), and sociology. *Teacher, Take Care* is an important contribution to the growing body of literature on the well-being of teachers.

The flow of the book supports the deep and often intimate work that educators must engage in as they embark on a quest for greater well-being. The first few chapters build a foundation for teachers to do deep, inner exploration with a thoughtful, purposeful approach. In doing any kind of healing work, one must allow themselves to become vulnerable. This is no easy task for many, so the entry into self-care offered here is gentle, as one would dip their big toe into the water rather than jumping in. Key themes, including being given permission to acknowledge and prioritize well-being and to then create a plan, are offered early in the book. Literature on well-being and flourishing contributes to building the foundation for this work and highlights the work of Dr. Martin Seligman. Powerful exercises are included to not only help teachers to take stock of their current level of well-being but to also begin to get in touch with their own vision for well-being. One approach that is offered is to recall life events in which a person felt vital, connected, and healthy. This exercise is an effective way to help teachers to connect with their inner self and sense of vitality, as it is not merely an intellectual exercise but rather an experience of connecting with one's true self on a much deeper and visceral level.

Part of this inner work can be supported by becoming more mindful or aware of what is happening inside and around oneself. The chapter on mindfulness supports this work by offering practical ideas for engaging in a mindfulness practice, which can contribute to increased levels of awareness. As this practice promotes well-being on many levels, which are highlighted in the chapter, the benefits are included as well as a description of multitude of ways in which one can be mindful. Engaging in a regular mindfulness practice contributes to teacher presence, which is a key factor in creating the ethos in a classroom. The Sundance is described as a way for Indigenous Peoples who engage in the Sundance Ceremony to anchor their attention to the present moment.

An educator's story of reconnecting with her Indigenous roots is shared, in which she describes the process that she engaged in restoring the circle. Through this process, she created an Integrated Reconciliation Framework which includes relationship, reflection, readiness, reconstruction, restoration, and reconciliation.

Several chapters highlight all aspects of well-being through the stories that are shared around teachers experiencing and moving through stress, illness, and burnout to recovery and renewal. The personal stories are very powerful, and within each is an offering of practical suggestions and processes for framing well-being and recovering from burnout. The holistic combination of personal stories, reflection questions, and practical processes offers much to support teachers in crisis and addresses all dimensions of the person as illustrated in the Sacred Hoop. Symptoms of burnout are included, which is key, as some people do not recognize that they are on the path to burnout. This recognition is important, and it is followed by an account of how one educator created a holistic approach to healing by integrating traditional allopathic medicine with non-traditional approaches including being nurtured by Mother Earth.

From the physical level of getting appropriate nourishment, exercise, and sleep to the importance of focusing on well-being in the workplace, these chapters offer key supports to teachers. An exploration of both positive and negative stress is included, which provides the reader with an opportunity to reframe stress. A variety of strategies for breathing that contributes to well-being is also described.

One of the key themes that is highlighted in *Teacher, Take Care* is relationships. Several chapters are strategically placed in the middle of the book, as the reader has had an opportunity to explore foundational concepts regarding well-being, and the emphasis then moves from personal, inner work to the creation and strengthening of relationships in all their forms. Indigenous teachings, wisdom, and prac-

tices provide grounding for this exploration through the understanding that everything in the cosmos is interconnected. The importance of relationship and connection is highlighted through an exploration of the Talking Circle, in which all voices are welcomed. Working with conflict in constructive, healing ways rather than punitive approaches is also described. Sharing stories in the classroom, and the cultivation of gratitude and empathy can positively affect the life of the learners and the teacher through the use of Talking Circles, being genuine, listening, and connecting to the land.

The arts are also offered as a way for teachers to care for and nurture themselves. Each art form is a unique language that allows us to express deep understandings, experiences, or emotions in ways that perhaps written or spoken language cannot. A focus here is the knowledge that we are not solely consumers, but rather we are creators. There is an opportunity here to reclaim our inherent creativity, which is generative in nature. As we are bombarded by external stimuli on an ever-increasing basis, engagement in the arts provides us with opportunities to express and externalize our innermost ideas, emotions, and beliefs to counter the barrage of others' agendas. The arts provide us with a voice. This is important to note as until recently in human evolution, the arts have been an intrinsic part of community life. A tapestry of teacher experiences with her students is offered here and exemplifies how engagement with the arts has the potential to enliven the learning environment for all and how it can contribute to the creation and sustainment of healthy communities of learners.

The book comes full circle with writings on the nature of leadership, whether through mentoring a colleague or leading a school. As it takes a community to raise a child, these stories are well placed as the beginning of the book focuses on the individual and their inner world. During the covid event, mental health came to the fore as our global family grappled with experiences and challenges that many had never encountered before. Collectively, we moved through many stages, from shock to disbelief to grieving. What people soon recognized was that to survive these challenges they had to support and care for each other in a more intentional manner.

Teachers were not only caring for themselves and their families, but also for their students and colleagues. As teachers are in a caring profession, they are used to caring for others. One of the consequences of this is that they can find it difficult to ask for help when they need it. There is a tendency for teachers to overwork and over stretch, and when they recognize that they need help, it can be difficult for some to appear weak and vulnerable. One of the themes offered here is the importance of teachers modelling how to ask for help. A diagram illustrates risk factors and protective factors for each stage of life and describes how to build in resilience.

Those who were in positions of leadership during this unprecedented event were faced with their own set of challenges. A school principal described how she focused on keeping everyone calm and healthy during daily changes in mandates and a rather bleak forecast. Servant leadership is highlighted here as an effective way of leading others as a servant leader is one who serves first and then leads. They provide the people whom they lead with whatever they need to do their job to the best of their abilities. A chart describes the ten characteristics of a servant leader and what each looks like in action.

In order for teachers to have a high level of well-being, the leadership must create and sustain a positive, supportive ethos schoolwide. They must create a safe, stimulating, and caring space in which the community can teach and learn together. One author shared that until recently she was not aware of the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace. The thirteen psychosocial factors that impact psychological health are highlighted including balance and engagement, recognition and reward, and involvement and influence.

The last three years have been extremely challenging for most beings on the planet, and teachers had a specific set of difficulties to navigate through. One positive outcome has been the much-needed focus on mental health and well-being. Our global family came to realize how important our well-being is, as it is the foundation for everything that we are and do in life. I highly recommend *Teacher, Take Care* for anyone involved in education as it is a comprehensive guide for any educator who is motivated, whether through curiosity or necessity, to create a plan to increase their overall well-being. With this focus on mental health and well-being, we have an opportunity to move in a new life-giving direction, and create teaching and learning environments in which all can thrive. Drawing on the knowledge, practical strategies, stories, and wisdom offered in this book, may we all experience Mino Pimatisiwin; living a good life.

Reference

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