

REVIEWS

The Happy Teacher's Handbook: From Overwhelmed to Inspired—Helping Teachers Embrace Resiliency

A review by Mark Knapik

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At first glance one might overlook (as many teachers do) a mere 100-page booklet written for teachers by a teacher invoking “happiness” in teaching. When initially questioned “Why’d you get into teaching in the first place?” most teachers would probably not answer, “To be happy!” But this book suggests happiness is teaching’s greatest gift.

As a 21-year veteran of teaching elementary to college students, I have heard plenty of teachers share their hopes for and challenges with teaching. A recent advisee of mine was overwhelmed and scheduled an emergency conference with me. Distraught, she told me that maybe she wasn’t up to the task of teaching. She was concerned she was not ready to continue studying for her vocation because of the many challenges teaching presents. After our first five minutes of conversation, I congratulated her on coming to the most real, authentic awareness of her true self. Understanding her doubts to succeed as a teacher challenges and enhances her commitment to the craft, and I wanted her to see this self-reflection as evidence of her potential. To me, her willingness to engage in such difficult self-reflection showed that teaching was, in fact, a true calling for her.

The Happy Teacher's Handbook (HTH) by Ohio Teacher Jen Molitor assures teachers that while “teaching is intense,” the teacher possesses “amazing stories.” They are on the front lines of educating children to provide the ultimate best outcome for their lives. The student is essential in making this happen; however, because the teacher is often called to be teacher, counselor, mentor, coach, nurse, surrogate parent, etc., the job is all embracing. Molitor quotes one educator as sharing that a teacher is “a savior of humanity.”

The HTH is a marvelous walk-through of what to expect when you are a teacher. It is filled with help to get teachers through the “am I worthy” moments with monumental force. It reminds the reader that as a teacher, you *will* change a student’s life...forever. Molitor authentically shares her own true-life stories

and practical results. She writes about her own career, sharing casual mentoring she was given by seasoned veterans and offering many examples of how she handles classroom situations in ways that empower students.

Practicing teachers can’t help but recall their college studies of childhood development, classroom planning and student discipline through the likes of Piaget, Vygotsky, Bloom, and Gardner. Molitor encapsulates the learning specialties of great thinkers that came before her and provides a realistic view of what this can look

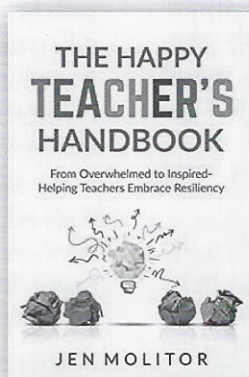
like in today’s classroom. This reads like *true* a handbook that shows the reader how to build a rapport with students and find ways to embrace and relish the wonderfulness of this challenging profession.

William Arthur Ward wrote many maxims. One famous maxim reads: “The mediocre teacher tells...The good teacher explains...The superior teacher demonstrates...The great teacher inspires.” Molitor shows any teacher how all this is possible, providing a checklist and sharing pertinent information to help form your students into self-regulated learners – all while having fun alongside them!

She empowers her students in the many teaching activities she shares. More importantly, she spends much of the book describing how essential teacher-student rapport is built and magnified, beginning with each student individually and thus transforming her classroom community. The ultimate focus of the book is to share how to inspire the students, but Molitor also shares the resiliency she has needed to continue to engage and encourage her students. Ultimately, it is the “engagement that eliminates misbehavior” making the teacher a “superhero in the classroom,” because “teaching is a superpower.”

For rookie teachers, this booklet is a condensed bible. For veterans, it is a welcome reality-check to ensure you are using your teaching skills to inspire your students long after they graduate.

Highly Recommended.



Mark Knapik is an adjunct instructor at Lake Erie College in Painesville, where he teaches writing courses and English Language Arts education courses. He also teaches at Notre Dame College in South Euclid, OH. He is a published freelance writer and photojournalist. He can be reached at mknapi@lec.edu.