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Seeking a Healthy Balance as an Educator During COVID: A Look at Dr. Edith Treviño's Social Emotional Toolkits for Teachers

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As a teacher, I already knew that the teaching profession is one of the most difficult professions because of the amount of commitment, time, planning, and passion our teachers put into their work. I knew in my heart, and from what I was witnessing that they were in crisis mode.

E. Treviño, personal communication,
March 3, 2021

In the world of education, “teaching is widely recognized to be a stressful occupation, characterized by numerous and varied challenges: administrative burdens, long hours, classroom management difficulties, and lack of autonomy” (McCarthy, 2019, p. 8). Adding to those challenges are this year’s overnight changes from person-to-person teaching to virtual learning, sickness and death, and, for some, the administrative and state requirements to continue as if the pandemic had not struck. Though this pandemic has forced many to see and experience new opportunities to connect virtually with others around the world, it has also brought a whirlwind of new issues and demands, ultimately leading to educator stress, fatigue, and burnout. McCarthy (2019) writes: “When teachers judge that the demands of their job outweigh their resources, they experience stress. But that’s only part of the story—equally important is how they *cope* with that stress” (p. 12). In search of a book to help fellow colleagues combat the stresses that they were experiencing with virtual learning, I stumbled across an interesting read, written

by a unique and interesting woman. Unfortunately, the pandemic gave no opportunity to meet in person, but in reading and working in her texts, and in communicating and interviewing via email, I have learned quite a bit about who I am as an educator, just trying to make it through a challenging year, and as a human being, just as vulnerable as the next.

Dr. Edith Treviño

Along with working through her books and interviewing her, I also had the privilege of recently listening to Dr. Edith Treviño, affectionately known as Dr. ET, as the keynote speaker during a live Texas, Education Service Center (ESC) Region 13 conference, which “encompasses 57 school districts, 24 charter schools, 8 institutions of higher education, and 17 private schools” (ESC Region 13, n.d.). In her presentation, “The *Cinco* Powers of Bilingualism,” Treviño (2021) stressed the importance in empowering educators, and in doing so, they learn to empower their students. She emphasized to her listeners: “Language is a human right.” During this conference, she also encouraged educators to get to know their students, and urged educators to share who they are with their students. Without a doubt, there is a “critical role that schools play in student academic development and learning” (Dumas, 2018, p. 19). Getting to know one’s students can make all the difference in student success; moreover, it is just as important for educators to share their stories, their struggles, and their victories with students. It is just another form encouraging them to find their own path, and letting them know that struggles will always arise, but with a little work and help along the way, anyone can find success. Her advice for teachers to share their stories and their voices ties in with what she shared with readers in her first book, *Teaching in the*

Time of Covid: A Social Emotional Toolkit for Teachers. With her second book, *Teachers! "I'm OK" Is Not OK, OK? An Interactive Educator Social Emotional Guide to Well Being*, Treviño provided teachers even more outlets to understand their emotions during this trying time. She has a passion for helping both students and teachers succeed, which comes across so effortlessly in her presentations and work. She is an all-around intelligent and caring woman who rose from her circumstances and serves as a model for so many with her “commitment that no child should have to fall through the cracks for any reason” (E. Treviño, personal communication, March 3, 2021).

Born in Acuña Coahuila, Mexico, Treviño became a transnational student when her family moved to the border city of Del Rio, Texas. I wanted to know about her experience as an immigrant child in an American school; what she shared with me was humbling. As an educator with 15 years of teaching in a city on the US–Mexican border, it saddened me that her school did not provide her with the necessary support to learn and succeed. I have taught many students with similar backgrounds, and it is disheartening that they would face similar struggles. She explained: “I failed high school because I fell through the cracks. The educational system failed me. It was not until I joined the U.S. Army Reserves that I had an epiphany that maybe education could change the trajectory of my life” (E. Treviño, personal communication, March 3, 2021). She worked hard to get to where she is today, running her education consulting company, Dr. ET and Company, LLC. Throughout South Texas, she has taught first graders on up to adult learners. When asked to compare her time living and working through COVID, Treviño said, “When life gives you lemons, make lemonade” (personal communication, March 3, 2021).

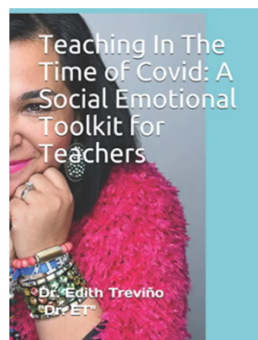
She indicated that she wishes to share with others this attitude and perspective on life, but in order to do so, she believes her readers need to understand, accept, and work on their own feelings and emotions first.

Learning to Understand Our Emotions

With everything teachers have experienced since the start of the pandemic, they must all take the time to collect ourselves and reflect. Though easier said than done, no one should put one’s physical, emotional, and mental health aside. Dodging COVID-19, accepting and overcoming the challenges of the virtual classroom, and remembering to take it day by day are just a few anecdotal topics that Treviño shared with readers in *Teaching in the Time of Covid: A Social Emotional Toolkit for Teachers* (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Teaching in the Time of Covid



Note: Cover from *Teaching in the Time of Covid: A Social Emotional Toolkit for Teachers*, by Edith Treviño, 2020, KDP Publishing. Copyright 2020 by Dr. ET & Company, LLC. Reprinted with permission.

Treviño has, directly and indirectly, experienced devastating and traumatic events in her life, which taught her “about trauma, crisis, and stressors” (personal communication, March 3, 2021). Because of those experiences, she has “learned the signs of trauma and the signs of crisis.” She knows without a doubt that many are suffering for one reason or another. She empathetically explained, “We have no idea what others are going through—no idea at

all.” With this in mind, she wrote a toolkit for teachers. It is short, sweet, and to the point. Treviño (2020b) stressed four focal points: self-awareness, perseverance, goals, and care. She asked readers to reflect on what is going on in their lives. She pointed out what so many teachers already know: “Teachers are caught up in the middle of this COVID-19 Pandemic” (p. 8). She posited that on “the surface we are surviving, but deep in our 'teacher souls' we are not okay” (p. 8). Sadly, this is probably true for far too many.

Treviño (2020b) acknowledged that there is a lack of research and resources when it comes to helping educators. An adage comes to mind: How can teachers care for others if they cannot care for themselves? She emphasized the importance of seeking support for educators who are physically and emotionally struggling during this time. According to research, “Pandemic-related situations such as the sudden change to online education have resulted in both physical and emotional overload for teachers. . . . Teachers described feelings such as frustration, helplessness, and uncertainty caused by the burdens of physical distance and social isolation” (see Daub et al., 2021, in this issue). A great starting point for teachers who want to address these feelings and issues caused by the pandemic is Treviño’s (2020b) toolkit. Treviño asked readers to examine their emotions and cautioned them to be brutally honest. With an empathetic tone and an almost guardian-like quality, she urged educators to become self-aware of their feelings during this unprecedented time of unprecedented events.

In her toolkit, Treviño (2020b) posed four steps for her readers. With the first step, she defined and provided examples of *self-awareness*, actualizing this concept for readers. After becoming aware of feelings and dealing with life’s challenges comes

perseverance. With this second step, Treviño explained, “We can decide, and make an effort to be positive”; teachers “have to believe it, taste it, feel it, live it” (p. 16). In creating this daily mindset, teachers can then move forward with setting goals to accomplish. Treviño wrote that it is best to chunk one’s goals, especially when feeling overwhelmed. Of course, these three steps are only possible with a system of care. With the health crisis that is COVID-19, it is easy for one to stress and worry about loved ones, especially those most vulnerable to the disease; moreover, the tendency to preoccupy oneself with others’ well-being can lead to self-neglect. Treviño encouraged readers to celebrate life and to take care of themselves.

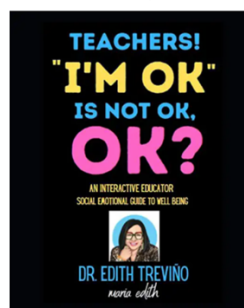
Treviño (2020b) provided educators a resource that is desperately needed right now. It is an autobiographical account of how she perseveres; she gave readers research-based evidence and practical examples of reifying each of her four concepts.

A Road Towards Emotional Well-Being

In *Teachers! “I’m OK” Is Not OK, OK? An Interactive Educator Social Emotional Guide to Well Being* (see Figure 2), Treviño (2020a) provided educators with a self-guided workbook.

Figure 2

Teachers! “I’m OK” Is Not OK, OK?



Note: Cover from *Teachers! “I’m OK” is not OK, OK? An Interactive Educator Social Emotional Guide to Well Being*, by Edith Treviño, 2020, KDP Publishing. Copyright 2020 by Dr. ET & Company, LLC. Reprinted with permission.

Organized into 10 mindset chapters, the book guides readers through steps and tasks to accomplish on their road to self-awareness. Once again, Treviño wove both research and personal anecdotes to help those in the education field face what many might be ignoring: emotional well-being.

In the first two chapters of her workbook, Treviño (2020a) asked the reader to focus on self-gratitude and recognizing and being aware of how one feels. She provided examples of using interactive worksheets and provided a blank template large enough for her readers to use with ease. In chapters three and four, she urged readers to find momentum through perseverance and evaluate who they become in this zone. In chapter five, she focused on an area that many busy individuals might not take the time to do, which is to treat themselves. She advised her readers to say “no” when necessary. In chapter six, Treviño asked readers to socialize; as difficult as this might be during COVID, it is imperative that teachers stay connected to those around them. Everyone is struggling during this time, and a friendly message or call might make someone’s day. Chapters seven through nine focused on one’s perspective on life, and as Treviño would say, the lemons one is given. Appreciating the positives instead of the negatives and finding the humor in not-so-positive situations will have an impact on one’s emotions at the end of the day. Treviño also advised readers not to compare themselves to others; she reminded the reader: “We are all different, we are all learning daily” (p. 42). Her last mindset chapter focused on gratitude. She advised readers to create a calendar to note moments of gratitude.

Concluding Thoughts

Though this pandemic has thrown its worst at everyone, teachers must take a step

back to reflect on their current situation and the emotions they tend to stow away. Treviño’s social-emotional toolkit and workbook helped do just that. Her interweaving of research and anecdotes gave a personal touch and a sense of caring for those reading. Each book was written to guide readers to think, ask themselves, and respond. The physical and emotional tolls that teachers are experiencing now, and might continue to deal with long after, are not to be trifled with. District and school administrators should invest in such workbooks for their employees because not everyone is OK. Everyone is dealing with this pandemic, and the demands of overnight teaching; it would be more than helpful to have an empathetic voice walk teachers through a much-needed self-evaluation. When asked about a takeaway she would love her readers to have after reading her books, Treviño said, “I want my readers to know that we are all in this together and that they are not alone . . . not by a long shot” (personal communication, March 3, 2021).

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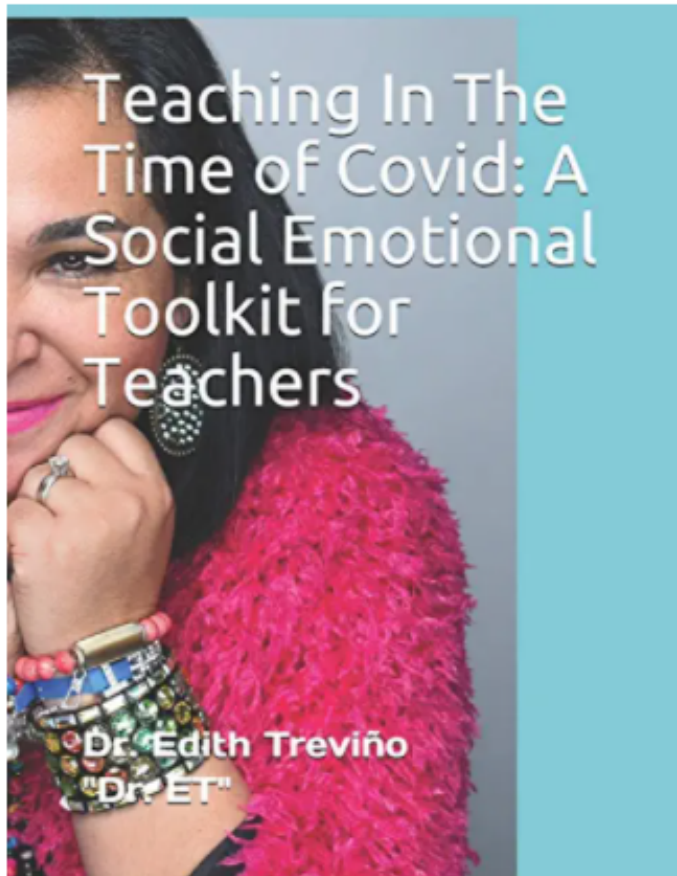
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Appendix A

Figure 1

Teaching in the Time of Covid

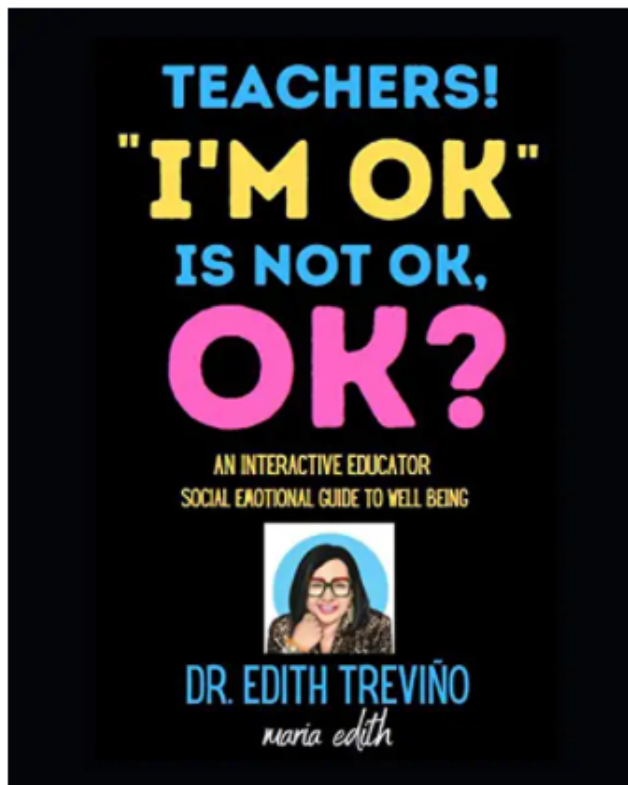


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Appendix B

Figure 2

Teachers! "I'm Ok" Is Not Ok, Ok?



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