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Leadership for Flourishing in Educational Contexts

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Book Review:

Leadership for Flourishing in Educational Contexts

Benjamin Kutsyuruba; Sabre Cherkowski; Keith D. Walker, Editors.

Sandra Linke

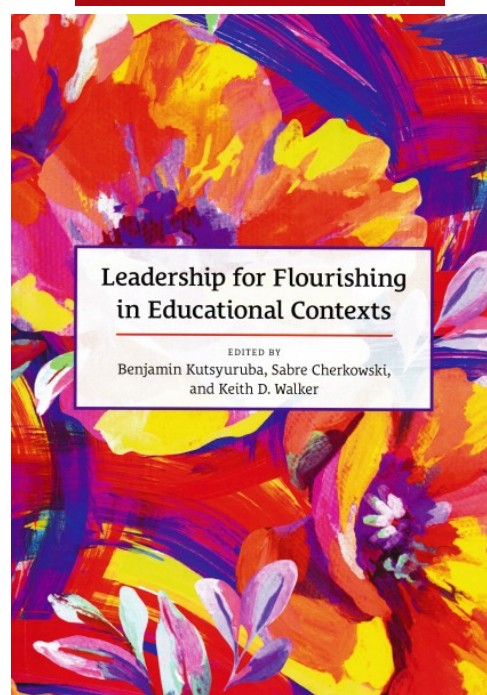
Director, ICIE, Ulm-Germany

Featuring voices from academics, practitioners, school system leaders, school administrators, and graduate students from across Canada and abroad, this unique edited collection offers conceptual discussions and empirical examples of leadership for flourishing in a variety of educational contexts. This volume affirms that by fostering positive leadership, striving for well-being, and encouraging flourishing for all. Significant benefits and new potentials will be felt throughout the learning communities. Grounded in theoretical approaches of positive leadership, positive psychology, and positive organizational scholarship, the accounts from K–12, post-secondary, and professional contexts explore the impact and influence of leadership at all levels of education. Editors and chapter authors describe their research findings and first-hand experiences of supporting educators and school leaders in learning how to grow their agentic role for fostering well-being among all members of the community.

The chapters in this book give the reader ample opportunity to reflect on their own values, and then frame their own work context through a symbolic frame, always looking for what is behind ways of thinking and doing. “This frame focuses on the relationship between people and organizations, and how people become satisfied at work, while at the same time the organization gets what it needs from the workforce to succeed.” (p. xi)

Megan Crawford (2021) indicated that this book challenges the reader to think – in this time of immense change and adaptation in our personal environments – positively about flourishing in diverse contexts through story, and to look at leadership not as rational and formulaic but as imaginative and resourceful.

The research on which this book is based draws on four Ps, namely: Purpose, passion, presence, and play—and these aspects create that framework of meaning that is so important for thriving. In agreement with Megan Crawford (2021), “this book emphasis on how individuals can work toward personal professional flourishing is extremely helpful to act as signposts, particularly for those leaders new to both a context and a particular situation.” (P. xv) ... “this book offers both the opportunity to listen to powerful stories, and to begin to share and discuss further the ideas in this area”. (P. xv) Crawford (2021) referred to Stephen Fineman (2003) and concluded that leadership is a property of the relationships in the organization, and is not about individual leaders per se. Thus, nurturing positive relationships on both an individual and a school level helps create a framework of meaning for everyone in that context.



In the introduction, “Striving toward Well-Being: Creating Conditions and Structures for Flourishing in Education”, the editors defined flourishing as the achievement of a balanced life in which individuals feel good about lives in which they are functioning well. The editors used this term to describe teachers and administrators who, within and in spite of the challenges, confines, struggles, and strains of their work, experience a sense of engagement, connection, meaning, and enjoyment in their work. The editors invited contributors to describe stories that reflected the experiences of those in school learning communities. They utilized these lenses in an opportunity to investigate how we might grow and sustain well-being in other contexts through focusing on what already works well and gives educators a sense of flourishing.

“Flourishing can be described as an appreciative mindset, a way of seeing and responding to the work of teaching and leading in schools that empowers educators to notice what works well so they may foster more of that for themselves and for others.” (Author? p. 3) Group similar ideas (flourishing, well-being) into paragraphs rather than isolating each sentence as an “orphan.” Flourishing is contagious. Educators who flourish feel a sense of belonging to a team of colleagues who are innovating and improving together toward making a difference for their students and their families. They feel safe and supported to take risks in their teaching and enjoy their time at school.

In agreement with Martin Seligman (2011), the authors, for the purposes of this book, considered well-being in a broad sense, entailing aspects of feeling good (positive emotions, positive relationships, a sense of meaning) and functioning well (feelings of engagement and achievement). The editors indicate that wellbeing is understood as people’s positive evaluation of their lives and includes positive emotions, engagement, satisfaction, and meaning, where a focus on positive emotions enlivens people’s further resources for intellectual, physical, social and psychological capabilities. Did the authors account for barriers to well-being and flourishing? What specifically are some of the dispositional, situational, and institutional barriers that prevent schools, colleges, and universities from flourishing? It might be a good idea to include one or two quotations that identify and explain some of the systemic barriers that may deter or hinder flourishing, Sandra. This could be interesting for readers.

This book includes (17) chapters. Through these chapters, the authors advocate for greater attention to how to support and nurture positive approaches to leadership as central to well-being across different educational contexts. These chapters reiterate and build on the key concepts and theoretical groundings of positive approaches to leadership, positive psychology, positive organizational scholarship, and flourishing schools research in general, and education specifically.

In chapter one, Randy Hetherington (University of Portland, Oregon, USA) and Corey Haley and Bryn Spence (Parkland School Division, Alberta) detail the transformation of a school, which began with the appointment of a new administrative team, their establishment of a school leadership group, and the focus on staff wellness as the foundational element of a change in school culture. This chapter provides an example of a leadership journey for a staff that highlighted the importance of a relational change process that acknowledged the necessity of wellness for all, achievement for all, and the skills and commitment of all.

In chapter two, Lorraine Godden (Carleton University, Ontario), Sandy Youmans (Queen's University, Ontario), and Eleanor Newman (Eastern Ontario Staff Development Network) describe efforts to implement the Ministry of Ontario's *Adult Education Strategy* in eastern Ontario, Canada. They foreground the importance for leaders of creating conditions and structures that enable cultures of care that allow for the building of trust, collaboration, and effective coalition.

Stephen MacGregor (Queen's University, Ontario), Chris Brown (Durham University, Durham, UK), and Jane Flood (Netley Marsh CE Infant School, Southampton, UK) in chapter three provide a case study of a professional learning network in England, with the aim of exploring how the climates of trust and innovation cultivated by school leaders (both formal and

informal) contribute to developing more complex forms of collaboration and greater levels of innovation mobilization. They highlight the critical roles of trust and context, particularly context-conscious innovation, in the models of positive leadership.

Chapter 4 offers a case study exploring the role of a principal's leadership in guiding the school to a flourishing education with high academic outcomes, moral development, and culturally responsive strategies. In this chapter, Ma. del Carmen Esper (University of San Antonio, Texas, USA) shares four findings that build toward her argument for the need for leaders to attend to the whole child through the use of effective leadership strategies, noting possible barriers to the leader's effectiveness in a diverse cultural population, opening channels of communication within the school and community, and recognizing their impact in the community for different stakeholders. Representation is a challenge in some schools, particularly in North America. Black, Latino students, and learners who have been historically marginalized benefit from positive role-models coming from similar cultural backgrounds. Representation is key.

Marco A. Nava, Delia Estrada, and Ileana M. Dayalos (Los Angeles Unified School District, California, USA) describe their qualitative study in chapter 5. With this study they sought to foster and deepen school leaders' understanding of the conceptual framework for culturally proficient practices in order to create conditions for positive leadership practices and well-being in diverse educational contexts. The results point to the importance of administrators to personally recognize and declare a willingness to engage in solutions for the issues of access and equity while supporting needs of faculty and staff. It is importance to emphasize that leadership is also a creative learning process. It is dynamic and a dialogue between teachers, school leaders, parents, community stakeholders, and education program planners is essential.

In chapter 6, Darcia Roache (University of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan), Stanley Bruce Thomson (MacEwan University, Alberta), and Jason Marshall University of the West Indies) provide a conceptual analysis of the principles and practices of positive leadership that can be implemented to sustain and maximize well-being within flourishing schools. Chapter 7 offers an example of a school's transition to becoming a middle school and the challenges and opportunities for growth toward flourishing within the challenges and constraints of this transitional process. Cherie Finley, Jake Schmidt, and Victoria Handford (Thompson Rivers University, British Columbia) outline the structural and cultural changes that contributed to a successful transition and the building of a positive middle school culture.

The chapters in Section Two offer stories of personal professional flourishing. In chapter 8, Sharon Allan, Pamela Adams, and Carmen Mombourquette (University of Lethbridge, Alberta) describe an initiative to build leadership capacity through inquiry-based professional learning, showing how critical conversations prompted collegial engagement, increased teacher efficacy, and, ultimately, resulted in a sustained focus on student learning. Chapter 9 provides a conceptual perspective on courageous leadership. Jessica Della-Latta and Karen Burkett (Queen's University, Ontario) reflect on Brene Brown's theories of courageous leadership in higher educational contexts and provide practical examples of this theory in relation to building positive student experiences at the post-secondary level to foster learning conditions for growth, empathy, creativity, courage, and well-being.

In chapter 10, Sarah Shepherd (Sacred Heart College, Geelong, Australia) provides an examination of the benefits of embracing interoception, a lesser-known sense that she argues can contribute to building positive school leadership. This chapter emphasizes the importance of listening to our bodies in the work of leadership and outlines tools for practical use for leaders and teachers.

Rebecca Stroud Stasel (Queen's University, Ontario) paints a picture of flourishing for teachers working overseas in chapter 11 as she outlines the findings from a case study of Canadian-trained educators who have met their acculturation challenges through resourcefulness, resilience, and creativity. This chapter offers a positively different, asset-based orientation on

acculturation and demonstrates how sojourning educators could address culture shock through self-leadership as a strategy for buffering obstacles, preserving well-being, and activating resilience.

In chapter 12, Roberto Jimenez-Arroyo (University of South Florida, Florida, USA) examines the possibilities and potentials for growing well-being in and through foreign languages education in post-secondary contexts, noting how teaching and learning foreign languages may serve as vehicles for enhancing personal competencies and skills toward improving employability and enhancing quality of life.

Finally, Section Three offers stories of the impacts and influences of positive leadership in various educational contexts. In the first chapter of this section, chapter 13, Eleftherios Soleas, Heather Coe-Nesbitt, Anoushka Moucessian, and Nadia Arghash (The Wellness Research Collective, Queen's University, Ontario) offer a graduate student perspective on how to foster thriving among future researchers, scholars, and professionals. By contributing the unique perspective of professional and graduate students, this study expands on current understandings of thriving across the lifespan and notions of flourishing and positive psychology within the adult education context.

In chapter 14, Marine Miglianico, Nancy Goyette, Philippe Dubreuil, and Alain Huot (Universite du Quebec a Trois-Rivieres, Quebec) provide an overview of the implementation of appreciative inquiry (AI) in a teacher education program. The authors indicate that the AI process had a positive impact on intern teachers' psychological health, helped them envision the future with greater hope and confidence, and fostered a strengths-based supervision of their own students in the classroom. Were there any revelations of the greatest stresses or barriers that prevented emotional health? There are many stresses in educators' lives....did any of the chapters identify these stressors? It might be interesting to learn more about the stresses that interfere with teacher well-being here.

The authors of chapter 15, Vicki Squires and Chad London (University of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan), describe how collaborative leadership may promote well-being on post-secondary campuses. They highlight the key elements of a model of collaborative leadership that emerged from a multidisciplinary approach to implement a health-promoting framework for university campuses. As an additional view on well-being in the post-secondary context, Jason Anthony Singh, Tanjin Ashraf, Erica Cheng, and Joanne Lieu (OISE, University of Toronto) offer personal narratives of their experiences as graduate students that fostered their academic, personal, and professional well-being in chapter 16. The authors outline how positive leadership can foster flourishing relationships that inform and influence well-being for graduate students.

In the final chapter of this section, chapter 17, Maha Al Makhamreh and Benjamin Kutsyuruba (Queen's University, Ontario) explore the role of relational leadership in how doctoral students feel a sense of flourishing within the supervision context of their programs. The authors provide a conceptual model wherein trust, efficacy, and mentorship are the three main influential relational factors of effective supervision, and ethical, cognitive, emotional, and social competencies serve as the core relational leadership competencies for positive doctoral supervision.

We encourage our readers to engage with the discussion questions at the end of each chapter by reflecting on the topics further, applying the learning to their own educational and organizational settings, and developing strategies and implementing practices that grow well-being for all.

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