

Leadership for flourishing in educational contexts

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Book Review/Recension d'ouvrage

Leadership for flourishing in educational contexts

Edited by Kutsyuruba, B., Cherkowski, S., & Walker, K. D.

Canadian Scholars, 2021, 358 pages

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This volume, based on the September 2019 forum in Kingston, ON (i.e., the *Positive Leadership for Flourishing Schools Forum*) provides multiple perspectives on flourishing in schools, written by a cross-section of researchers of teacher well-being and teacher leadership from a variety of contexts. These perspectives provide entry points to a broad picture that spans much of the work of education in Canada: K-12 and post-secondary, including teacher education, teaching internationally, adult education, and graduate programs; early years education is perhaps the only notable omission.

While the contexts of the individual articles may differ, the volume provides some common threads which serve to tie the work together and make for an engaging and satisfyingly coherent read. As much of the research incorporates or relies upon some aspect of story, including descriptions of applications of appreciative inquiry (and other inquiry-based learning experiences), positive organizational structures (e.g. Stasel, pp. 191-210), cultures of care (e.g. Godden, Youmans & Newman, pp. 33-54), and myriad different discussions and descriptions of leadership (e.g., courageous, authentic, servant, collaborative, and empathetic), readers will likely find rich food for thought regardless of their specific contexts. For example, the step-by-step process outlined in Hetherington, Haley,

and Spence (pp. 15-32) includes direct applications of positive, servant, and authentic leadership to create meaningful change centred on individual and collective wellness and would be applicable in most schools. MacGregor, Brown, and Flood (pp. 55-75) describe how to conduct an analysis of networks within a school system to investigate the interconnectedness of relational patterns within schools, positive leadership, and the development of innovative practices. Miglianico, Goyette, Dubreuil, and Huot (pp. 243-258) describe an application of appreciative inquiry that could be adapted for many situations.

Across all chapters, the book has an “emphasis on how individuals can work toward personal professional flourishing” (Crawford, 2021, p. xv). Via a consistently strengths-based and appreciative lens, this volume investigates (and often elucidates) how educators might focus on what already works in their specific contexts to grow and sustain well-being: to “see the work of educators and leaders from a new perspective—one that would open up and highlight the experiences of well-being that we intuitively know are in evidence but are too rarely showcased in the research” (Kutsyuruba, Cherkowski, & Walker, 2021, p. 1). While the conceptualization of leadership employed throughout the articles is heavily weighted towards those educators in positional roles (i.e., principals), there is potential to engage with this work through a broader and more inclusive leadership lens as well. As the editors affirm in the final entry,

The chapters in this book are intended to provide lift and momentum to those who will be affirmed by seeing their own stories in those told by these authors; others will have been gifted the insights provided by these authors, as they have endeavoured to describe or express the phenomenon in relatable and relevant ways that inspire hope. It is a human feature that we want to experience meaningful transformation in our personal and learning community lives. As we strive for transformation, we have offered these chapters as momentum-building encouragements to readers (Walker, Cherkowski, & Kutsyuruba, 2021 p. 325).

The somewhat narrow and frequently hierarchical mental models of leadership notwithstanding, this volume provides an excellent impetus for educators in all roles to take on the work of growing well-being within their own locales.

The volume is organized into three sections: school-level flourishing, personal professional flourishing, and stories of the impacts and influences of positive leadership in various educational contexts. While the third section is specifically focused on stories,

the use of story as a means of understanding what is working in a place and ensuring that efforts to support flourishing are equitable and contextually relevant appears in work throughout this book, which is a strength of the collection as a whole. Another strength of this text is the continual return to the theme of interconnectedness: the recognition that, although how each of us “shows up” at work as individuals is critical, flourishing and leadership are not individual endeavours but collective ones and must also include systems awareness if the climate and culture of a place are to nourish “humanness” in schools.

This research collection challenges readers “to think positively about flourishing in diverse contexts through story, and to look at leadership not as rational and formulaic but as imaginative and resourceful” (Crawford, 2021, p. xiii) in order to focus on “‘not just fixing what is broken but nurturing what is best’ (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p. 284)” (as cited in Stasel, 2021, p. 194). To this end, the contributing authors provide highlights and overviews of a variety of approaches and strategies to help support teachers’ development of “their professional identity in order to become reflexive professionals who are engaged in their environment as well as in their own development” (Miglianico, et al., 2021, p. 243). This includes exploration of themes including agency, reflexivity, reflectivity, and resilience, much of which is positioned within a “positive organizational support” leadership approach.

Regardless of a reader’s specific position or role within the field of education, it is likely they will find something of value for their work within this volume. It is a welcome addition to the well-being-in-schools literature.

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