

**Kutsyruba, B., Cherkowski, S., & Walker, K. D. (Eds). (2021).
Leadership for Flourishing in Educational Contexts. Canadian
Scholars**

Erika Nelson et Bonnie Stelmach

Numéro 201, 2022

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1095487ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1095487ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Department of Educational Administration, University of Saskatchewan

ISSN

1207-7798 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Nelson, E. & Stelmach, B. (2022). Compte rendu de [Kutsyruba, B., Cherkowski, S., & Walker, K. D. (Eds). (2021). Leadership for Flourishing in Educational Contexts. Canadian Scholars]. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy / Revue canadienne en administration et politique de l'éducation*, (201), 105–108. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1095487ar>



**Kutsyuruba, B., Cherkowski, S., & Walker, K. D. (Eds). (2021).
Leadership for Flourishing in Educational Contexts.
Canadian Scholars. 340 pages. ISBN: 9781773382852**

Reviewed by: Erika Nelson & Bonnie Stelmach, University of Alberta

Over the last two years, the table of contents of many education journals has been dominated by concerns over teachers' and school leaders' responses to and experiences with the disruption and uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, *International Studies in Educational Administration* dedicated four issues in 2020 and 2021 to this topic (Gurr, 2020), and it will come as no surprise that despite efforts to find the proverbial silver lining in the pandemic, much of the evidence and commentary has and continues to highlight a concern for educators' and students' wellbeing in K-12 and post-secondary contexts. Thus, *Leadership for Flourishing in Educational Contexts* is a welcome foil to the sentiments of overwhelm and loss, and a reminder, as the co-editors noted in their closing chapter, that "there is almost always a place for the exercise of positive choices and agency" (Walker et al., 2021, p. 316).

Leadership for Flourishing in Educational Contexts was borne of a 2019 gathering in Kingston, Ontario, Canada, called the Positive Leadership for Flourishing Schools Forum. This forum united educational leaders, policymakers, practitioners, graduate students, and researchers around a common interest in empirical explorations of positive leadership in educational contexts, with wellbeing as a broad conceptual backdrop. This book is a companion to another similarly structured co-edited book that emerged from that same forum: *Positive Leadership for Flourishing Schools* (Walker et al., 2021). Kutsyuruba, Cherkowski, and Walker are recognized as pioneers in this domain, having conducted extensive research in schools methodologically driven by appreciative inquiry and the assumptions of positive psychology. The often-cited conceptual framework for flourishing—purpose, presence, passion, and play—was comprehensively articulated by Cherkowski and Walker (2018) in their book, *Teacher Wellbeing: Noticing, Nurturing, Sustaining, and Flourishing in Schools*. Given that the epilogue to *Teacher Wellbeing* gave the nod to flourishing for school leaders, this recent *Leadership for Flourishing in Educational Contexts* makes sense in their scholarly trajectory.

The co-editors' goal in *Leadership for Flourishing in Educational Contexts* was to create momentum for positive leadership approaches as a way to increase "vitality...sense of enjoyment, meaning, purpose, and connectedness" (p. 5) in schools. They intentionally asked for "stories of wellbeing" (p. 3) for this collection and stated that "the positive approach is a shift away from the more typical leadership approaches that tend to focus on seeking out and repairing deficits, gaps, and shortcomings" (p. 5). This echoes Crawford's observation in her forward that the book challenges readers to see leadership "not as rational and formulaic but as imaginative and resourceful" (p. xiii).

Kutsyuruba and co-editors view educational systems through Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological lens, arguing interconnectedness is key. Additionally, in keeping with the organizational theories of Mintzberg (1997) and Bolman and Deal (2017), the importance of human agency permeated every chapter of this book. Along this vein, the book endorsed leaders as having the power to create the conditions for flourishing in educational contexts. They relied on Keyes (2016) to define flourishing as "the achievement of a balanced life in which individuals feel good about lives in which they are functioning well" (p. 3). Seligman's (2011) definition of wellbeing and functioning well appeared in various chapters as the sensitizing concepts. Further, "leader" was broadly conceived as those who do leader-like activ-

ities, and not only those in formal leadership positions. Supervisors of graduate students, for example, were positioned as leaders.

Sandwiched between the co-editors' introduction and concluding remarks, the seventeen chapters of *Leadership for Flourishing in Educational Contexts* are organized in three thematic sections: 1) Stories of School Level Flourishing, 2) Stories of Personal Professional Flourishing, and 3) Stories of the Impacts and Influences of Positive Leadership. Section 1 is the largest, with seven chapters offering conceptual work and findings from qualitative and quantitative studies from K-12 schooling and beyond. Wellbeing and morale were specifically explored through various topics such as adult education programming (Chapter 2), whole-child education (Chapter 4), professional development for leaders' cultural responsiveness and proficiency (Chapter 5), and innovations in experiential learning (Chapter 7). This section shows the potential for explicating the concept of flourishing through related concepts and from a variety of perspectives, which can enhance our understanding of it.

Through first-hand accounts, Chapters 8 to 12 in Section 2 provided insights into flourishing-related experiences through, for example, inquiry-based professional learning models (Chapter 8), international, adult, and online learners (Chapter 9), international teachers (Chapter 11), and foreign languages education (Chapter 12). The co-editors described this section as eclectic, perhaps owing to the fact that there is a diversity of contexts but also that authorship ranges from doctoral students (Chapter 12) to established scholars (Chapter 8).

In contrast to Section 2, Section 3 is the most homogeneous because all chapters are reports emerging from the post-secondary context. Topically, however, the authors in this section also explored varying perspectives and inquiries, such as graduate students' passion for and thriving through their research (Chapter 13), pre-service teachers' development of professional identity (Chapter 14), wellness as a policy initiative in 10 Canadian post-secondary institutions (Chapter 15), and the relationship between supervisors and masters and doctoral students (Chapters 16 and 17). Because this section focuses on the impacts of positive leadership, this section might be most inspiring to practitioners who are immediately interested in taking action to lead to good outcomes; whereas Sections 1 and 2 have more chapters that are conceptually or theoretically framed, which may appeal to researchers or graduate students. The focus on interoception in Chapter 10, for example, adds novelty and an element of interdisciplinarity to the book. What links the chapters in all three sections is a concern for positive educational experiences, whether as a pre-service teacher, experienced teacher, or leader, regardless of the type of educational organization or program one is in. This potentially gives the book wide appeal.

This co-edited book can be read as an entire work to gain varying perspectives on positive organizational systems. But we imagine it could work equally well and perhaps even better to read selectively by section or chapter based on specific needs and interests. A consistent feature at the end of each chapter is the list of discussion questions. These questions encourage both philosophical and practical thinking. They may serve as reflective guides most suitably for individual learning, given the variety of foci and contexts. But those participating in leadership development programs or book clubs where the intention is to gain familiarity with positive leadership and related concepts, including flourishing, trust, morale, wellbeing, vulnerability, efficacy, agency, and courage, may value this book. Indeed, a strength of this book is that it demonstrates how positive leadership as a practice and flourishing schools as a goal can be explored and articulated in conceptually and methodologically diverse ways. For example, theoretical frameworks such as transformational leadership for social justice and methodologies such as grounded theory, survey, and autoethnography are part of this collection. We think the inclusion of a quantitative analysis of the association between staff members' perception of positive leadership practices and their innovation and sense of connection with others (Chapter 3) is important to complement the mostly qualitative approaches that characterize this area of study.

Edited books are a challenge to assemble. We commend Kutsyuruba and colleagues for creating a resource on educational leadership with contributions from teachers, school leaders, organizational administrators, graduate students, and academics of all ranks from national and international sites. A book containing explorations in educational leadership in K-12 and post-secondary school contexts is equally rare. Capturing the presentations from the forum in book form is ideal for making the conversations accessible, but consumed cover to cover, it tends to read like published conference proceedings. With some instruction to contributing authors to read and refer to each other's chapters, and more editorial oversight to eliminate repetition of descriptions of positive leadership and positive psychology principles, continu-

ity and coherence would have been achieved. On the bright side, by the end of the book, the reader will understand positive leadership. More specifically, we felt Chapter 6 could have been the initial chapter because this is where a comprehensive definition of positive leadership is provided and where the reader learns how flourishing is situated in the positive psychology scholarship. Someone familiar with these strands of literature will be well-positioned to navigate the conceptual and theoretical range of how the contributing authors have interpreted positive leadership and flourishing, but newcomers may benefit by skipping to Chapter 6 to get a more solid footing for the rest of the book. Similarly, if the flourishing framework were explicated at the beginning rather than the end of the book (pp. 318-320), the novice reader would be able to differentiate between what Kutsyruba et al. call the “lexicon of key characteristics” (p. 318) of flourishing schools and the “animating values” (p. 319) that constitute flourishing as a dynamic model to systematically apply.

We appreciate that the co-editors cast a wide net in their call for contributions. Although the chapters relate in some way to the notion of positive leadership, it is less clear whether flourishing was part of the authors’ original conceptualizing. Some authors were successful in showing a connection, but the link to the title seemed like an afterthought in some chapters if flourishing was mentioned at all. As noted at the outset, this book uniquely promotes an appreciative posture instead of reinforcing educational leaders’ role as primarily problem-seeking. The appreciative inquiry approach is a clear thread among the chapters. The weave is looser, however, with respect to flourishing. The flourishing model offers four particular paths to concrete action, and these should not be diluted by the assumption that anything that results in people feeling heard or safe in an educational setting constitutes flourishing. Trust and wellbeing, for example, contribute to flourishing, but on their own they are not synonymous with it. Thus, for the uninitiated, the co-editors’ peer-reviewed articles may be a more suitable introduction (e.g., Cherkowski & Walker, 2016; Cherkowski et al., 2020).

To what extent does *Leadership for Flourishing in Educational Contexts* advance our understanding of educational leadership? Unequivocally, a positive “life-enhancing” (Crawford, 2021, p. xv) expression of leadership is timely. An underlying assumption the authors hold is that positive leadership that moves toward flourishing is a collective aspiration but, ultimately, an individual accomplishment. This may be both hopeful and despairing. Flourishing requires a shift in mindset, and this is refreshing, but structural elements may create inertia. By structural inertia, we do not mean the perennial lament about lack of funding and resources, but rather the increasing expectations for educators to take on functions traditionally assumed by institutions such as family, church, and community that result in overwork and stress. The academic function of schools, for instance, is crowded by the pastoral and social functions (e.g., breakfast and lunch, mental health, socialization), an outcome exacerbated by the pandemic. Work intensification has been a common experience among school leaders, according to research coming out of Ontario (e.g., Pollock & Hauseman, 2015) and internationally (e.g., Oplatka, 2019). The solution has been to teach individuals about time management and how to establish and enforce boundaries. Do a positive leadership approach and flourishing mindset similarly locate the problem and the solution in school leaders? Of course, we did not expect this book to venture into all ontological corners, and we offer this as a potentially compelling question for the co-editors’ future research. We hope that flourishing will be as “contagious” as the co-editors suggested in the introductory and closing chapters. We hope that practicing educational leaders may see themselves in these stories and be inspired to take positive steps toward creating their own context for flourishing.

References

- Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (2017) *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice, and leadership* (6th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Cherkowski, S., Kutsyruba, B., & Walker, K. (2020). Positive leadership: Animating purpose, presence, passion, and play for flourishing in schools. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 58(4), 401-415.
- Cherkowski, S., Kutsyruba, B., & Walker, K. D. (2021). *Positive leadership for flourishing schools*. Information Age Publishing, Inc.
- Cherkowski, S., & Walker, K. (2016). Flourishing leadership: Engaging purpose, passion, and play in the work of leading schools. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 54(4), 378-392.

- Cherkowski, S., & Walker, K. (2018). *Perspectives on flourishing in schools*. Lexington Books.
- Cherkowski, S., & Walker, K. D. (2018). *Teacher wellbeing: Noticing, nurturing, sustaining, and flourishing in schools*. Word & Deed Publishing.
- Crawford, M. (2021). Forward: Bringing out positive leadership in uncertain times. In B. Kutsyuruba, S. Cherkowski, & K. D. Walker (Eds.), *Leadership for flourishing in educational contexts* (pp. xi - xvi). Canadian Scholars.
- Eacott, S. (2020). The principals' workday: A relational analysis. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 25(2), 258-271. Advance online publication.
- Gurr, D. (2020). Educational leadership and the pandemic. *Academia Letters*, Article 29. <https://doi.org/10.20935/AL29>.
- Mintzberg, H. (1997). Managing on the edges. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 10(2), 131-153.
- Oplatka, I. (2017). Principal workload: Components, determinants, and coping strategies in an era of standardization and accountability. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 55(5), 552-568. Doi: 10.1108/JEA-06-2016-0071
- Pollock, K., & Hauseman, D. C. (2015). Complexity and volume: An inquiry into factors that drive principals' work. *Societies*, 5(2), 537-565.
- Walker, K. D., Cherkowski, S., & Kutsyuruba, B. (2021). Concluding thoughts. Momentum for future striving. In B. Kutsyuruba, S. Cherkowski, & K. D. Walker (Eds.), *Leadership for flourishing in educational contexts* (pp. 315 - 327). Canadian Scholars.
- Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and wellbeing*. Free Press.