

# BOOK REVIEW

## THE EMERALD HANDBOOK OF WELLBEING IN HIGHER EDUCATION: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON STUDENTS, FACULTY, LEADERS, AND INSTITUTIONS

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Walker, K. D., & Kutsyuruba, B. (Eds.). (2024). *The Emerald handbook of wellbeing in higher education: Global perspectives on students, faculty, leaders, and institutions*. Emerald Publishing Limited. Pages: 378. Price: 220.99 CAD (hardcover).

### CANADIAN CONNECTION AND BOOK LAYOUT

This handbook was edited by two Canadian researchers, and many of the chapter authors are Canadian. It has a total of 24 chapters, divided into 3 sections. The first section focuses on student wellbeing. The second section targets faculty and leader wellbeing. The third section focuses on institutional and systemic wellbeing interventions.

### PURPOSE AND RELEVANCE OF THIS BOOK

The editors of the book describe the overarching purpose of the book as being “to explore the programs, initiatives, developments, and innovations in higher education that promote wellbeing, encourage flourishing, grow virtues, and develop appreciative, strengths-based, positive approaches to teaching, learning, and leading in higher education contexts.” (p. 3).

Specifically, the book offers important information relating to wellbeing of students, faculty members and other staff in higher education roles. In addition, it delves into systemic issues in a crucially important way (including some-

times overlooked aspects such as physical building structures). The book is written in a way that predominantly targets individuals who are in leadership/managerial positions in higher education (although some of the content is directly applicable to students and staff).

### ITS VALUE

The Emerald guide of wellbeing in higher education offers captivating chapters with evidence-based, easily implementable strategies. As many chapters describe strategies/interventions currently taking place in Canadian universities, this book offers excellently contextualized information and opportunities for wellness in Canadian higher education settings.

This easy-to-read book manages to convey a plethora of wellbeing-specific recommendations without feeling like a self-help book. Instead, the authors do a fabulous job of indicating that there are personal, interpersonal, and organizational factors that contribute to wellbeing in this setting – all of which can be addressed and fostered (albeit sometimes requiring higher education institutions to allocate funds to this important work). They describe and provide examples of how wellness can be fostered in higher education institutions through nine mutually

interdependent dimensions of wellbeing: cultural, emotional, environmental, financial, intellectual, physical, social, spiritual and vocational.

Although many chapters resonated with me, I felt that the “ABCs of faculty wellbeing” chapter provided a truly excellent overview of belonging and its relationship to agency via connection, with important attention to systemic racism and intersectionality. The author, Dana Mitra, writes “institutions must emphasize *belonging* structures that do not require assimilation into a dominant paradigm” (p. 142).

## SOME CONSTRUCTIVE SUGGESTIONS

As is common with many higher education books, content experts have written each chapter. However, the way they are written differs significantly, with some being more evidence-based and some being more expert opinion-based. Additionally, some of the chapters seem like articles – they present the methods and methodology and results of individual studies – something unusual in this type of book. Given the book’s length, 378 pages, summarization of evidence as opposed to detailed presentation of specific studies might have been beneficial.

Additionally, some chapters are quite repetitive in content (and perhaps could have been amalgamated). Wellbeing is defined countless times throughout the book. Although wellbeing can be quite contextual, I think this merits more attention in the introduction (identifying a common overarching definition for wellbeing but noting that each chapter may present different definitions that best suit the particular community being discussed). There seem to be many times when re-defining this concept was not necessary.

As a physiotherapist, I would be remiss if I didn’t note that physical activity, and the plethora of associated wellness benefits it offers (socially, psychologically and physically) would have been an excellent topic for a chapter in this book.

Finally, having grown exponentially from an ontologically based transformative leadership course this year at the University of Ottawa, I feel that a section on contemplative ped-

agogies in this book is also merited. Although knowledge and recommendations are important to understand, transitioning learners from *knowing*, to *being and acting* in an authentic, integrity-filled manner is crucial to personal and interpersonal wellness. The Māori leadership chapter by authors Adreanne Ormond and Martyn Reynolds does touch on their ecologically aware ontological approach to leadership and is an excellent chapter to read. Additionally, a 2025 book entitled *The Bloomsbury Handbook of ethics of care in transformative leadership in higher education* delves further into contemplative pedagogies. Canadian professor Thomas Falkenberg authored the third chapter of that book, noting that we often move through the world in an automatic way, engaging in the world without always consciously reflecting on our routines. Transformatively (and ontologically), he discusses contemplation and how it is correlated with wellbeing, including how it can be used to identify and reduce implicit racial bias and can improve our quality of life amidst the many global crises we face. Therefore, I feel that this Bloomsbury handbook is another excellent source of information for higher education wellbeing enthusiasts.

## OVERALL EVALUATION

Overall, this book was captivating, easy to read and informative. It provided a platform for important information and recommendations from a wide array of experts to be shared in the field of wellness within higher education settings, through their discussions of evidence-based data and through their use of storytelling. It concludes with a final chapter by the editors, which wonderfully summarizes the book and associated recommendations.

## REFERENCE

Drinkwater, M. A., & Waghid, Y. (Eds.) (2025). *The Bloomsbury handbook of ethics of care in transformative leadership in higher education* (Electronic edition). Bloomsbury Academic.