

BOOK REVIEWS

Solution-Focused Strategies for K-12 Leaders: Improving School Climate, Teacher Confidence, and Student Wellness, Edited by Marcella D. Stark and Linda Metcalf

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The arrival of a new solution-focused book set in the field of education is a celebratory event. Even more so, when the book blends its solution-focused stance with leadership philosophy and practices. *Solution-Focused Strategies for K-12 Leaders* prepares school principals, administrators and education professionals to build and sustain a school climate where educators and students co-construct solutions.

Solution-Focused Strategies for K-12 Leaders: Improving School Climate, Teacher Confidence, and Student Wellness, edited by Marcella D. Stark and Linda Metcalf

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*See yourself as a solution-focused educator
who views difficulties and obstacles as potential opportunities
to notice strengths to harness for growth and self-enhancement.*
(Stark & Metcalf, 2025: 218)

The arrival of a new solution-focused book in the field of education is a celebratory event — even more so when the book blends its SF stance with leadership philosophy and practices. *Solution-Focused Strategies for K-12 Leaders* prepares school principals, administrators and education professionals to build and sustain a school climate where educators and students co-construct solutions.

This ten-chapter collaborative endeavor of 13 authors from four countries brings together their many years of experience in school administration, leading/counselling, social care, mental health, prevention of educational risk, teaching, teacher supervision and student affairs. Importantly, across the diversity of specialisms and settings, the authors are all solution-focused

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practitioners. Their vast expertise has guided them to identify and delve into areas of school leaders' administrative and educational work which administrators often struggle with and seek to change.

The book is immensely practical and accessible. Noticeable from the start is the simplicity of language. The authors speak, loud and clear, the language — jargon if you wish — of school communities, so much so that I initially raised my brows at the word “strategies” being so prominent in the book's title the titles of two chapters. In my understanding, the solution-focused approach does not typically offer blueprints or one “right” way towards what is wanted. But as I progressed through the book, doubts were quickly displaced. “Strategies” is a customary word in school administrator-speak, where rules, regulations and guidelines must be followed; using it, in the title of a book for school leaders, is yet another way to bring it close to its readers.

The book's elegant structure is a further ingredient of its conceptual clarity and intelligibility. Every chapter has the same distinct and instantly-recognisable components. For example, the core text of each chapter is organised in quite brief sections, informatively subtitled. Further, every chapter has a section called *Sentence Stems* (bringing the possibility of reproduction as handouts), carefully worded and suggesting a variety of ways to begin and sustain solution-focused conversations with teachers, students and/or parents. Every chapter has case scenarios which demonstrate how the SF approach works in real schools and with real people. And chapters end with useful *Chapter Tips for Administrators*, making explicit their key points. These anchor solution-focused tools and principles in a manner which is encouraging and easy to remember.

The chapters

Following the first chapter on the ethos and tools of the solution-focused approach in schools by Marcella Stark, three chapters address school leaders' interactions in three specific settings: school meetings, conflict with parents and teacher supervision. *Facilitating Solution-Focused meetings*, authored by Linda Metcalf, invites school administrators to imagine not having to be the decision-makers anymore, instead being solution-focused leaders who bringing everyone involved to the table. At the core of the chapter *Solution-Focused Strategies for Managing Conflict with Parents* (by Stark and Metcalf) is the idea of seeing parents “as resources to tap into for improving your school”. In *Solution-Focused Teacher Supervision*, Marcella Stark brings up the value of three key ideas: adopting a curious/not knowing mind, working collaboratively, and working with strengths.

Turning to student issues, a chapter on trauma-informed practices (Denise Krause and Samantha Koury) demonstrates the importance of prioritising understanding and resilience, exploring the intersection of SF language and trauma-informed practices.

Three further chapters tackle school administrators work with students. In *Lessening Frequent Flyer Student Returns*, Linda Metcalf proposes a solution-focused way to communicate with students who misbehave. It is about

involving teachers and reconnecting with the students, so that they themselves work out what they need to do instead, avoiding bans and other disciplinary measures.

Research with school principals gave rise to the *Working with Students in Crisis* chapter by Carol Buchholz Holland. She bases her work on mental health issues and the need to address emergency situations, singled out as a serious challenge for administrators. Taking a solution-focused “not knowing” stance when first encountering a student with behavioral problems helps de-escalate tense situations. Using the solution-focused approach also involves capitalising on the existing strengths and insights of the school community.

In *Successful Students with Autism and Intellectual Disabilities*, Sharon Casey and Jennifer LeHuquet indicate ways to help students with cognitive and developmental disabilities succeed. The adoption of a solution-focused ethos by the overall school community allows both staff and parents to shift their attention to moments when things are working better. Avoiding dangerous oversimplifications, the authors present tools for identifying behaviours that are within the student’s control and encourage them to take ownership of their own learning.

Tara Gretton and Edwin Choy co-author a chapter with examples of SF programmes in Bath, UK and Singapore, and advocate the importance of involving students and parents. Their focus is on the power and collective impact of growing a collaborative community approach that involves all stakeholders.

The last chapter is *Exemplar* (Xiao Ding, Jeeyeon Hong, Cynthia Franklin, Linda Webb). Its opening says everything about the numerous roles school administrators often find themselves in, echoing the soliloquy from Shakespeare’s Hamlet: *To be, or not to be, that is the question*. At the chapter’s core are practical guidelines for administrators to steer their school toward a solution-focused community, experiencing for themselves comprehensive transformations towards educational leadership.

I hope school leaders across various educational and social contexts explore this book carefully and discover what is most appropriate for their schools. I dream of meeting more and more school leaders who develop an affinity for the SF ethos and are keen to experiment and advance. This book provides an outstanding starting point to that process.

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