

Educational Leadership for a More Sustainable World

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reviewed by [Marsha Modeste](#) — October 24, 2016

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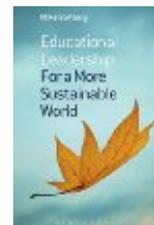
Title: Educational Leadership for a More Sustainable World

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In *Educational Leadership for a More Sustainable World*, author Mike Bottery uses Rittel and Webber's (1973) framework of tame and wicked problems across the book's three sections. This situates and contextualizes current complex and seemingly intractable issues in education by connecting them to equally *wicked* issues in economics and the environment. Each of the three sections is comprised of three to four chapters.

In the first section, "Describing and Identifying the Problems," Bottery defines key terms used throughout the book and provides new formulations for the questions that should guide scholarly research in educational leadership. The multifaceted uses and interpretations of sustainability as a concept are described in the first two chapters. Bottery's purpose is to connect the problems of leadership in the social, economic, and environmental sectors to related issues of sustainability for both the functional role of leaders and broader context where they work. Chapters Three and Four introduce the concepts of tame, wicked, and humble leadership to frame the leadership opportunity available to all through individual decision making. Due to the fact that not all choices are the same, Bottery advances the need for humility in leadership and balances the concept of efficiency with sufficiency, given that problems fall along a continuum of complexity.

Chapter Two explores different aspects of sustainability. One is where the act of sustaining involves maintaining a current state of affairs. The other is oriented toward change and recognizes that the current state of affairs will not be sufficient in the long term. In this way, Bottery situates his focus on educational leadership, both the pipeline of school leaders and the changing nature of their work, within the broader forces related to sustainability impacting public education. By examining education, the economy, and the environment, the author's discussion highlights shared threats to sustainability across these sectors along with related symptoms of crises and responses. For example, in educational leadership, the functional role of the school principal has expanded to include greater responsibilities associated with instructional leadership along with managerial components. This expanded role is coupled with increased expectations of accountability measured through school-wide indicators of performance such as student achievement on high-stakes standardized tests and measures of teacher quality. Expanded expectations for school leaders coincide with broader neoliberal movements of transparency, efficient management, and performance through data gathering, testing, and market-model narratives of efficiency. This occurs while simultaneously resulting in school principals' reporting increasing stress, changing levels of satisfaction, and a shifting sense of efficacy in their work. As the education sector faces a potential shortage of school leaders due in part to the changing nature of the job, Bottery calls for a refocusing of the central questions related to sustainability across these three sectors. He specifically calls for a move away from short to long term visions of well-being for each sector and proposes a redefinition of well-being as "how well such 'resources' are nurtured" (p. 31) rather than consumed. His call to move away from resource consumption to thinking about how well resources are used requires a focus on sufficiency along with more complex and nonlinear understandings of sustainability.

In the second section, "Global Drivers of Unsustainability," Bottery illustrates how problems in education are

connected to faulty logic and problematic assumptions in other disciplines. He further describes how *wicked* or complex problems in specific sectors are interrelated in their complexity and thus their possible solutions. In this section, each chapter is devoted to a different sector, contributing to global unsustainability in some way. In Chapter Five, Bottery problematizes conventional narratives of how market economies function through consumption and economic growth. He describes the implications of this growth for education and the public sector. This chapter highlights the role that resource consumption plays in the current model for economic growth. The remaining chapters in this section focus on the threat to environmental sustainability through the consumption of nonrenewable energy, particularly fossil fuels. Chapter Seven focuses on the ways in which scientists and policy making communities have approached the global issue of climate change. The section closes with an examination of changing demographics and possible implications for an ethic of equity in leadership.

Humans are central to advancing economic growth through the consumption of goods and services, which in turn are developed through the use of resources. Bottery underscores the role of consumption by describing it as not simply necessary for advancing economic growth, but instead serving to produce it (p. 77). He concludes that economic theorists have underestimated how complex human beings are. People do not predictably make decisions about their own spending and consumption based strictly on self-interest. As humans, we draw on a range of information and influences, including culture and group affiliation, to make decisions about our behavior and consumption. Markets may, in fact, be functioning in a way that encourages human beings to behave in a self-interested manner (p. 83). Bottery points out that the problem with this occurs when humans' personal consumption behaviors are applied to resources such as the environment, healthcare, and education. He illustrates this by describing a continuum of educational leadership informed by neoliberal policies and mandates resulting in different conceptions of the functional role of the school leader and the purpose of education. Bottery identifies consumerism as a common threat to economic, social, and environmental sustainability. He also theorizes that economic sustainability is dependent on social and environmental sustainability.

The third section, "Towards a Leadership for Sustainability," describes the conditions, practices, and dispositions that reflect a response to complex problems. First, Bottery believes that to achieve change within an organization, all of its members across any hierarchy of positions need to shift their thinking, values, and practices (p. 158). This is reminiscent of the mission and vision statements that schools and districts often use to guide their goals and work. Given that humans are involved in identifying complex problems and solutions, humility is required both to frame the problems and identify how to proceed. Humility facilitates openness and multiple viewpoints for solutions to be heard and explored. Bottery defines this as the "epistemology of humility" and "ethic of humility" (p. 159). Complex problems are not static and often function as moving targets that vary in force and type over time. To address these complex issues, Bottery calls for multiple approaches to problem solving recognizing that "clumsy solutions" and "messy leadership" are part of what helps people "prepare themselves for greater responsibility" (p. 172). The work of this section is mainly to reframe and expand upon current conceptions of leadership, accountability, students, well-being, and change.

Overall *Educational Leadership for a More Sustainable World* contributes to the fields of educational leadership and education policy through its application of concepts of sustainability in other sectors to complex issues in public education. Given its orientation as an applied field, scholars of education often borrow, modify, and apply theoretical and conceptual frameworks from various disciplines in the social sciences to examine a given phenomenon under analysis in education. However, this book moves beyond this traditional use of theoretical frameworks in education research to critique broader neoliberal narratives that impact public education, global economic policy, and the use of energy in wealthy and developing nations, thereby connecting interrelated problems and solutions.

Reference

Rittel, H. W. J., & Webber, M. M. (1973). Dilemmas in a general theory of planning. *Policy Sciences*, 4(2), 155–

