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A Wake-Up Call

A REVIEW OF **SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP** BY ANDY HARGREAVES AND DEAN FINK

JOSSEY-BASS, 2006: ISBN 0-7879-6838-2

Sustainable Leadership provides a sophisticated but accessible framework for educational administrators to use in thinking about their role and learning from their experience. Working from a comprehensive conceptual foundation inspired by the environmental movement, Andy Hargreaves and Dean Fink make illuminating connections to school culture that do for education what Fritjof Capra has done for business. With relatively few lapses into the artificially imposed tidiness that is unfortunately common in the popular literature on educational leadership, their book presents a cohesive examination of factors that determine whether educational leadership "preserves and develops deep learning for all that spreads and lasts, in ways that do no harm and indeed create positive benefits for others around us, now and in the future" (p. 17). Such sustainability, they contend, is the first and final challenge of leadership.

ANDY HARGREAVES
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SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP



The book includes numerous Canadian illustrations that enhance its relevance and appeal. It also commits a lot of attention to a passionate critique of the No Child Left Behind policy of the Bush administration in the United States, but even these foreign excursions merit our attention. While the critique is not directly relevant to the experience of most Canadian educators, it does provide an important cautionary tale about ideologically grounded approaches that lead, at best, to temporary benefits for some while hurting others. Those who do not learn from others' history are doomed to live it themselves?

The seven principles that scaffold the book are depth, length, breadth, justice, diversity, resourcefulness and conservation. The authors contend, and convincingly argue, that sustainable leadership (1) matters, (2) lasts, (3) spreads, (4) does no harm and actively improves the surrounding environment, (5) promotes cohesive diversity, (6) develops and does not deplete material and human resources, and (7) honours and learns from the best of the past to create an even better future. They then describe five action principles for sustainable leadership: activism, vigilance, patience, transparency and design.

The value added by this book is not so much discrete insights as the unifying metaphor of sustainability, which reframes leadership from mechanistic to organic assumptions and strategies. However, there are also many compelling individual sections that readers will want to highlight and share with colleagues. Examples include the discussions of slow knowing, succession management, distributed leadership, just leadership, networked learning, emotional labour and creative recombination.

If there is a shortcoming to *Sustainable Leadership* it may be that it appears to not fully appreciate the complexity of its own message, or at least the difficulty many will have in truly hearing and heeding it. The book contains an abundance of cogent argument and clarifying analysis that is easily absorbed because it just sounds right, but the underlying concept of sustainability is much more challenging than it first

appears. The reading is easy because the book is so logical and so well written, but living the lessons of sustainability involves adopting a worldview that is fundamentally different from the scientific paradigm that has dominated public discourse during the formative years and professional lives of the book's most influential readers. Fully subscribing to and enacting the lessons of this book in ways that matter, last and spread, requires a tectonic shift in thinking.

This is not a book whose full benefit is liable to be felt by an individual who reads it alone. It calls for the sort of sustained attention and honest introspection best achieved by groups whose cohesion, safety and support enable deep learning and the reformation of assumptions and patterns of behaviour that are ingrained below the conscious level. The final chapter hints at, but does not fully disclose, the magnitude of this challenge and, unfortunately, provides no advice on how to meet it.

Sustainable Leadership is a convincing and compelling call for educators, politicians and parents to take the long view and to appreciate the complexity and the potential of the overlapping and interdependent human ecologies of classrooms, schools, communities and school systems. It provides a wake-up call and a vision of alternative possibilities, but moving from vision to action will take more than the stimulation and pleasure that reading it provides. In a world where we still drive our gas guzzlers to the grocery store for hot house tomatoes grown in water laced with chemical fertilizers despite what we all know about the folly of our ways, it may take more than intellectual awakening to "leave behind the over-confident age of endless waste and enter a more sustainable era of hopeful renewal" (p. 273) – but this book is a very good place to start. ■

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