

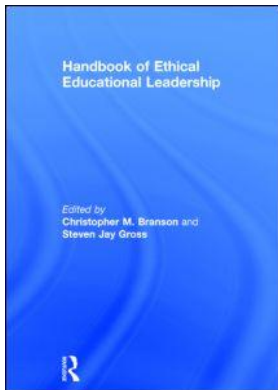
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## **Handbook of Ethical Educational Leadership**

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### **Sociopolitical Awareness**

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# 5

## SOCIOPOLITICAL AWARENESS

STEVEN JAY GROSS

Currently, our international sociopolitical context can be described as turbulent, resulting in a hypercharged landscape that challenges earlier assumptions and foundational ideas on the very purposes of education. It is also a realm filled with paradoxes and potential ethical dilemmas stretching our traditional educational philosophies almost to the breaking point.

For this chapter I have included three facets that I believe help to describe our context. They are: security, the economy, and technology. Terrorism and our national responses to it raise questions possibly pitting security against freedom. But the seeds of our current situation were planted long ago and we need to understand their long-term evolution. Our economic order is shifting rapidly as we witness malaise in heretofore wealthy continents such as Europe and North America and the rise of new continents such as Asia and parts of South America. Globalism and neoliberalism raise questions about the continuation of middle-class affluence, as privatization in the form of vouchers and charter schools seems to create a world of consumers rather than citizens. Information technology offers the promise of constant access to ideas and new communities that may democratize society but also allow for new dangers such as cyberbullying.

I will consider each of these areas in turn and conclude each section by analyzing each through the lens of turbulence theory (see Chapter 17 of this text). This will include a “turbulence gauge” (Gross, 2004; Shapiro & Gross, 2008, 2013), which estimates the level of turbulence along the continuum of light, moderate, severe, and extreme (Gross, 1998) and applies the turbulence to each situation. Below each turbulence gauge will be a synopsis that briefly explains the turbulence level in terms of underlying drivers, namely positionality, stability, and cascading forces (Shapiro & Gross, 2008, 2013). The chapter will conclude with a general statement about the level of turbulence when these areas are combined with overarching ethical challenges facing educators in our era.

## THREE FACETS TO OUR CONTEXT: SECURITY, ECONOMICS, AND TECHNOLOGY

### *Security*

Like all other elements considered in this chapter, it is impossible to completely tease out security and consider it separately. Poverty and security are clearly linked. Technology, as well, has its own security aspects, such as prevention of cyberattacks at the state level and of cyberbullying at the personal level—hence the argument for combining all of these factors in the conclusion of this chapter. Yet, if we define the basics of security in traditional terms, meaning the state of physical safety in one's person and one's home community, there are aspects of the current state of the world that deserve special consideration by those who want to educate ethically and teach ethical leadership to the rising generation of educational leaders around our world. Perhaps it is the influence of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy that has caused me to place security first for consideration and to spend so much time on it. If there is no sense of basic security, it seems impossible, or at least improbable, for there to be much in the way of self-actualized behavior, to use Maslow's phrasing.

Because I believe that our current security rests on the fractured foundation of the past, I will take some time to reflect on the earlier decades. It is fair to assert that state-to-state security issues that have formed the foundation of our perspective on our safety were the result of agreements and institutions growing out of World Wars I and II. Victors in both cases sought to create stability by creating international organizations such as the League of Nations, an ultimate failure, and the United Nations, which still exists, albeit sporadic in impact. The impulse toward internationalizing government was understandable, given the cascading collapse of the system of interlinked treaties among the European powers that plunged that continent and North America into a devastating war (Meyer, 2006). Yet, failure to gain American support for the League, as well as its own structural limits, meant the demise of Woodrow Wilson's vision that the First World War was a war to end all wars.

Other aspects of the 1919 Versailles Treaty that pressured postwar Germany through reparations did little to secure a long-lasting peace. Also at this time, the decisions by what were called the Great Powers in dealing with colonized people in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia set the stage for security crises that haunt us to this day. It is easy to see the deficiencies of the work of politicians after nearly a century. It would do us well to remember that these people were traumatized by the experience of over 4 years of devastating trench warfare that caused the loss of millions of lives. As if that were not enough, the Russian Revolution created the first lasting state built upon Marxist-Leninist philosophies, thereby changing the course of national and international security considerations until the end of the Soviet Union in December 1991.

Reaction to all of this unrest was the giddy decade of the 1920s in Europe and America, rising support for revolution in places like China, and a growing press for independence from colonial rule in India. Withdrawal from international ties into a false security typified America's initial reflex after the war, perhaps best captured by President Warren Harding's call for a return to what he referred to as *normalcy*.

While isolationism was challenged by efforts to demilitarize the world through treaties, the impact of these attempts was small. Security was fractured and fragile at best.

All of these patterns represented ethical challenges to educators. What really mattered: the national interest, regional alliances, or grand international organizations? Choices here would define who was meant by “we.” If narrow nationalism was to trump internationalism, as it did in the post-WWI security environment, “we” would be defined in an exclusionary fashion, and “our” national well-being would be defined in contrast to our neighbors. This became the tragic unfolding reality in the 1930s across Europe and in Japan. Schools were hardly immune to the influence of armed nationalism. In fact, more often than not, insecurity, heightened by the Depression, made the schools and a distorted, unethical education of the young paramount to extremist regimes’ strategy of amassing ever-greater power within and beyond their national boundaries. This was clearly the case in Hitler’s Germany.

Yet in some democracies, the cascade toward fascism, militarism, Nazism, and totalitarianism abroad was combated, in part, by moves to democratize educational leadership. In particular, the American democratic school administration movement dedicated itself to shared governance at the school level and democratic debate among educators (Koopman, Miel, & Misner, 1943). Programs sponsored by the US federal government, such as the Civilian Conservation Corps, helped millions of young men escape poverty, move into the countryside, and further their education (Uys, 1999). Similar, though more limited, programs were developed by Eleanor Roosevelt for women (Cook, 1999). These examples stood in stark contrast to youth programs in Germany that emphasized preparation for war and a blind allegiance to authority such as the Hitler Youth. Clearly the insecurity of the Depression era produced widely different outcomes for school-age youth.

The fissures of the post-WWI world seem obvious to us today and did so to thoughtful political leaders of that time. Wilson himself warned that a second world war was likely in two decades if international agreements could not be enforced. Had his political skills of persuasion within his own country been the equal of his prophetic remarks, America might have entered the League of Nations, thereby possibly altering the course of events. That was not to be. Again, world security collapsed and an even greater horror descended, fueled by fascist militarism in Japan and Italy and a Nazi ideology of world conquest and race hatred. Advances in industrialism only made for ever-greater destruction, on the battlefield and among civilian populations. Chief among these, though hardly an isolate, was the Holocaust.

Franklin Roosevelt, learning from the mistakes of the previous generation, led the call for an international institution to guard against the possibility of a third world war by championing the United Nations even before the allied victories over Germany and Japan. His widow, Eleanor Roosevelt, led in the creation of the UN’s Declaration of Human Rights, an inspirational yet still aspirational document (Glendon, 2002). Through the United Nations’ efforts and by virtue of the diminished powers of France and the UK, the colonial empires eventually saw the wisdom of independence for their dominions. Sometimes, as was the case in India, this was done with relative peace. At other times, violence and regional war broke out. The wars in Vietnam and other Southeast Asian nations are clear examples.

Perhaps the master narrative of the era was the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union. Both nations, and their allies, had nuclear weapons at first numbering in the hundreds but soon numbering in the thousands. Weapons delivered by conventional aircraft soon were eclipsed by those attached to the tips of intercontinental ballistic missiles. The first of these, a 1957 rocket the Russians called Sputnik set off alarm bells in the US, with direct federal intervention into education, in the name of national security. Educators at the time were pressed to explain how an apparent education gap could have been ignored, thereby jeopardizing the nation and the entire West to this obvious threat from the East. In retrospect, this rhetoric seems loaded and out of touch with the facts, but in the nervous, anti-Communist 1950s, it held sway. Security threats from halfway around the world were laid at the feet of the education establishment. This pattern has persisted in the US and several other countries.

The precarious balance between the two superpowers was kept through the doctrine of mutually assured destruction, with its apt acronym MAD. Simply put, neither side dared to attack the other unless it wished to have its own nation destroyed. But the two nations lived in a complex world wherein other countries developed their own arsenals, as was the case of the UK and France. China soon joined the group, as did India and Pakistan later in the 20th century.

The ethical challenge of raising a generation whose lives could be wiped out at the push of a button far away was on the minds of many educators. Yet the moral challenge of the day could also be as brutal as wondering whether it was ethical to shoot someone who wanted to enter your own family's fallout shelter after a nuclear attack. Schools taught children to "duck and cover" in the event of war, meaning that they should crouch under their desks until all was well. The security and ethical educational leadership of half a century ago sounds surreal today but many of our generation's senior school leadership were raised in just such an environment.

Of course, the world never did fall off the nuclear cliff during the Cold War, despite the shockingly close call of the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 and the heated rhetoric of the Reagan years. Proxy wars became common, such as Vietnam. These also pushed the boundaries of conventional ethical reasoning for school leaders. For instance, was it appropriate for schools to sponsor antiwar demonstrations or even tolerate them? What constituted free speech for young people who wanted to make their opinions heard in the public school? Was the school an island of sane neutrality in a society split over international events or was this an amoral and unrealistic position for educators to take? If this was true for K–12 educational leaders, it was doubly the case for university presidents and their staffs. Unrest on campuses was neither rare nor only an American phenomenon. Witness the unrest in France in 1968 (Kurlansky, 2005).

The Cold War ended with the demise of the Soviet Union in 1992, and a New World Order was declared. But the legacy of previous wars was not to be ignored in the equation of post–Cold War international relationships. The US supported anti-Soviet forces in Afghanistan known as Mujahedeen. The idea was to become allies with anyone interested in opposing Soviet dominance. Looking back on this strategy, it seems almost impossible to believe that the very people who the US expected to

remain comrades-in-arms would come to raise existential questions and security threats in the early 21st century. Once favored regimes, such as Saddam Hussein's Iraq, became sworn enemies as well. Just as some leaders in the West predicted a new era of peace, the world's security equation became far more complex, and risk, rather than calm, became the watchword for the future.

Educating the young in an era of fractured peace was challenging enough. Just as in the post-WWI world, considerations of who was part of "us" raised critical ethical questions. The 1990s Rwandan genocide, itself an outgrowth of Belgian colonial practice pitting Tutsi and Hutu against one another, typified the horror that people could visit upon one another. In its aftermath, guilt in the West over not acting forcefully enough to confront mass murders made many wonder, *Are we not all culpable?* What is the state of our own morality and ethical reasoning if we do not act to prevent crimes like this? Educators rightly ask, *How are we helping young people to see that insecurity at this level is everyone's business?*

If the Rwandan genocide, and the violence and "ethnic cleansing" atrocities in the former Yugoslavia, constituted security crises with clear challenges for the ethical education of school leaders and students, the events of September 11, 2001, escalated the issues to a qualitatively different plateau. In US cities such as New York and Washington, D.C., educators had to respond to the terror attacks themselves. Cases of heroic leadership by educators who faced extreme turbulence and yet acted in the best interest of their students have since emerged, showing that ethical behavior and education for school leaders can literally save lives (Shapiro, 2007).

But the terrorist attacks of that day, and the 2005 bombings in the London underground, transcend the physical; they shattered the psychological sense of security of people around the world and raised ethical questions for educational leaders that we have yet to answer. Previous national security challenges, such as those described above, represent the contest between nation-states. But today's security issues compound this challenge by adding asymmetrical combatants. Conflict between the US and Iran, for instance, has one definition, but what does that mean in the midst of a war on terror itself? All of this comes amidst political conflicts at home. As we strive to create a secure world for our children in and out of school, what boundaries are we willing or not willing to cross? For instance, the US Patriot Act has been criticized by some for giving governmental authorities too much power over citizens, thereby diminishing individual freedom in the pursuit of security. Drone aircraft are now used where piloted planes and ground forces once pursued foreign terrorists. But this raises the question of making violence too antiseptic, and thus too readily employed. This problem is heightened in the case of drones being used to kill US citizens suspected of working with terrorist groups outside of the US. These questions raise clear ethical dilemmas that should cause reflection for educators and those in our public and independent school systems as well as at the tertiary levels.

It seems impossible to divide current challenges to security from the rise of religious fundamentalism. On the one hand, a broadened acceptance of various faiths and traditions seems obligatory in a democratic society. On the other hand, when do the dictates of a given tradition stretch openness beyond its limits? Who is to mediate

these dilemmas? Threats to journalists in Europe, such as those leveled at a Danish cartoonist for derogatory depictions of the Prophet Mohammad, raise this issue again, as do cases of threats to Muslim women in countries such as Sweden (Norberg & Tornsen, in press). Just as in earlier eras described above, a central question seems to be, how do we define exactly who “we” are? How bounded is that definition and what processes can educators at all levels put into place to facilitate a reasoned dialogue leading to improved understanding?

There is also the continuing question of state-to-state security threats in the form of nuclear proliferation. Iran and North Korea are key examples, and yet these too reflect a more complex picture that raises ethical dilemmas, since both are players in regional arenas where challenges to stability have dire consequences. Iran’s case raises the whole Middle East security question that has been front page news for decades. North Korea’s nuclear ambitions bring with them potential conflict with South Korea, Japan, the US, and possibly even China, since experts predict that any large-scale conflict between the two Koreas will result in massive emigration from North Korea into China. It is understandable for any nation to guard against any further nuclear weapons in the hands of any regime, and especially in the keeping of regimes with unsavory reputations. However, it is hard to lay claim to a monopoly of the moral high ground when so many advanced nations themselves have nuclear arsenals as bedrocks of their national defense plans.

Finally, we need to consider security at the school building itself. The 2012 murder of 20 schoolchildren and 6 adults at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut is only a recent example of the tragedy of gun assaults on our most vulnerable citizens. While most mass shootings have occurred in the US, other nations have experienced the same shattering of security. That same year, children were shot to death in France. In 2011, 68 children were killed in Norway and 12 children lost their lives in Brazil at the hands of a gunman. Germany, Finland, Canada, and Argentina also suffered losses of life in schools over the past decade. Statistically, schools are safe places and children are protected. However, the fact that it is predictable that children and teachers will likely be the targets of deranged killers is not only alarming, it represents a challenge to educational ethicists. In countries such as the US, citizens have a right to gun ownership. However, that right is not boundless. Citizens may not possess machine guns, for instance. How can we help guide discussions that protect citizen rights while simultaneously protecting the children and adults in our schools?

Since a central mission of schools is to raise the next generation of responsible citizens, it is critical for educators to consider how they will help students in their charge to reason through this issue carefully and flexibly. Moreover, it is just as important for educators, and those they work with, to consider how they will act as citizens in helping their societies to deal with such consequential problems. Simply leaving security concerns, such as those illustrated above, to national or international leaders seems to be the equivalent of quitting the field. Sadly, once relevant secondary courses, such as Problems of Democracy, previously common in countries such as the United States, are no longer widely taught due to high-stakes testing in other subject areas. Our field must develop new avenues in which to engage students.

**Table 5.1** Security turbulence gauge and synopsis

Level of Turbulence	General Definition	Applied to This Situation
Extreme	Structural damage to the current order	General outbreak of global war.
Severe	Sense of crisis	<b>Threats of war. Regional outbreaks of war. Violence at all levels. Serious impact on personal lives throughout the world.</b>
Moderate	Widespread awareness of serious issues	<b>Tensions exist but are largely controlled at local, regional, and international levels.</b>
Light	Little or no disruption	Few tensions exist. Violence is low, as is crime in general. Safety seems assured throughout the world.

**Synopsis: We are cycling back and forth between moderate and severe turbulence in the area of security.**

There is a fractured perspective of what we mean by “we” and “us” when we consider security issues. International relations are destabilized with the fading of the post-WWII world order and without its replacement in place. Series of cascading problems keep tensions high but still manageable for now. This is threatened by nuclear proliferation, cyber and physical terrorism, and general insecurity due to poverty in the developing world.

### **Ethical questions facing educators in the security facet (Table 5.1):**

- How much power should we give to governments in order to achieve security?
- How can we reach a balance between personal rights and the shared values that impact our security?
- How can educators best promote ethical discussions of national security issues?

Below is my estimate of how turbulent our current state of security is when measured in the turbulence gauge.

### **Economics**

Just as our physical security is complex and rests on historical evolution and trends, all with important consequences to the way we learn about and teach ethical leadership, so too is our global economic condition. At the time of this writing, the world is still not out of the severe turbulence caused by the Great Recession of 2008. Unlike cyclical recessions, that economic nosedive created the most dangerous and widespread financial losses since the Great Depression of the 1930s. But the effects of the Great Recession have not been evenly distributed around the world.

At the time of this writing the European Union has gone back into recession, and in several of its member nations unemployment has hit record levels. In April 2013, the European average unemployment reached 12%. Here too, the impact of hard times is not felt evenly. Germans have been asked to help out other member nations, most notably Greece, causing the German government to require austerity measures in Greece in return for infusions of financial aid. Spain and Italy are facing similar problems, with Spanish unemployment reaching 26.3% in February 2013 (European Commission Eurostat, 2013).

European financial insecurity has caused many to wonder what price is too great for staying in the European Union, even as that body has been awarded the Nobel



Peace Prize for its work in bringing stability to a continent so devastated by conflict. Just as strategic security issues in the first part of this chapter brought us back to the question of how we define “we,” economic security issues have the same effect. Germany, under Chancellor Angela Merkel, proposes austerity for member states it helps to bail out of debt. To some, these changes are referred to as “reforms,” but to others these restrictions in social welfare benefits represent a dismantling of the social compact in Europe that helped to create decades of post-World War II stability and security. Breaking that covenant, in their view, represents an erosion of the foundation undergirding educational achievement. Therefore, the debate has profound implications for schools and those who care about ethical conduct in educational policy.

“We” may all be Europeans in a European Union, but that does not mean that those asked to give financial support always feel that their aid is well deserved, and those who receive this aid do not always feel that the strings attached are reasonable. The relationship between potential disunion and a reversion to traditional nationalistic conflicts in Europe is something leaders in many capitals, and their citizens, are reflecting upon. Clearly, these questions bring with them ethical problems that educational leaders need to take up.

In the United States, an agonizingly slow recovery has been under way, bringing with it a return to tepid economic growth, an uptick in the housing market, and some movement toward regaining millions of lost jobs. Yet, with this modest progress has come a protracted battle between the executive and legislative branches of government, shocking levels of income inequality not seen since the 1920s, and a downward trend of jobs from those that once could support a family to those that are poorly paid, non-unionized, and often lacking in benefits.

Just as the wealthy European nations are divided from those in greatest need, the wealthy in the US are divided from those with less economic clout. The Occupy Wall Street movement of 2011 used the rallying cry “We are the 99%!” for good reason. Over the past 30 years, income inequality and, with it, political inequality have soared in the US, so that now CEOs in America’s largest companies make over 380 times what the average workers in the same companies make (Mishel & Sabadish, 2012). In 1980, the ratio was 42:1. Put another way, CEO salaries grew a startling 726% in annual compensation from 1978 to 2011, while the annual compensation rise for workers was 5.7% for the same period. Moreover, the existence of a shocking childhood poverty rate of 23% in the US is of particular concern to educators whose focus is on ethics and moral reasoning (Gould & Wething, 2012).

But there are also winners in the current global economy. Australia’s economy has done remarkably well, as has that of Canada. Likewise, Brazil has become an economic power transcending its regional position. Perhaps the biggest story of all is that of China. In 2013, the new Chinese leadership called for a 7.5% increase in economic growth. This is normal, or even modest, by recent Chinese standards but would be shockingly high in Europe or in North America. As the world’s second largest economy and soon to be its largest, China is perhaps on its way to being the world’s second superpower.

But ethical challenges exist for China in the form of vast income inequality and corruption. Lack of food safety (*The Economist*, 2011) and the safety of school buildings (Yardley, 2008) have resulted in tragic loss of life. The blame, in both cases,

seems to be on well-connected business people selling their customers shoddy products to make greater profits. There is no doubt that China is a powerful nation, but if it is to live up to the greatness of its culture and its astoundingly important history, change leading to openness is in order. One promising sign is the recent proposal for a food and drug administration to ensure purity and safety.

China has risen from poverty to uneven but dynamic prosperity. India is moving along the same lines. Both cases offer important opportunities for those who seek to educate ethical leaders, since both cultures have their own profound ethical traditions. For instance, how will those in the West learn about, and then learn to integrate, perspectives such as Confucianism and Taoism into their own ways of looking at the world? Ethical leadership may be a universal goal but it is not likely expressed best uniformly. The economic development of these two nations does more than represent internal ethical dilemmas. East truly does meet West, and that gives us a chance to reconsider just what is meant by “we” once more.

What do the historical shifts in the distribution of wealth mean for us as educators? This is not simply a problem for the United States. In countries such as Israel, the widening gap between haves and have-nots raises questions about basic fairness. Social democracies, such as those in the Nordic nations, have created solidly middle-class societies where poverty is rare. In the US, calls for such a society echo as ancient memories from distant leaders, such as Franklin Roosevelt and his ideal of a Second Bill of Rights, while the present budget fights seem aimed at diminished support for old age pensions and medical care funded by the government.

Once, states in the US offered high-quality tertiary education at almost no cost to students, many of whom were the first in their families to attend universities. In return, these people became doctors, lawyers, accountants, teachers, and business professionals. Generations of wealth were built upon their endeavors. But the current climate discourages such investments, and states have pulled away from their earlier levels of support.

The result is crushing levels of student debt that cannot be alleviated, even through bankruptcy. Even state universities are scenes of students bearing crushing levels of debt payable soon after graduation. For instance, at Temple University, where I teach, bachelor degree students graduate with an average of \$30,000 of debt. Contrast this to the early 1970s, when I attended the same university as an undergraduate, when tuition was nearly free.

Students who borrow heavily in the US also take on a burden that even our own bankruptcy laws do not cover. Simply put, the debt incurred by college students cannot be put aside by the protection of any law at this time. Combined with high levels of unemployment, this burden itself represents a serious ethical challenge for educational leaders to explore. Since education is an international field, it is possible for nations suffering under these conditions to be aided by the work of colleagues from nations with more humane priorities. It is helpful to know of other societies that educate at the university level with quality and without massive debt burdens. Sweden and Australia represent two such cases. It is also useful to see nations such as these that have not turned education from a community responsibility into a mere consumer privilege.

Yet even the Nordic nations, with their emphasis on cooperation and social cohesion, are not immune from the pressures of global competition that typifies today's economy. A clear case is that of what I will call the Finnish effect. This refers to Finland's recent series of successes in international tests such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). While this drew attention worldwide, it was particularly striking to Finland's neighbors, such as Sweden. Questions such as, How did the Finns do so well? were soon followed by, What are we doing wrong?

Unlike the US, where either distance or willful distortions caused the wrong lessons to be learned (such as ignoring the fact that Finland has a strong social welfare system and a traditional respect for teachers, both lacking in the US), Finland's neighbors understand local conditions and are left to ponder the problem of competition versus cooperation in the region. This raises the question of how to help educational leaders frame such overarching ethical issues for themselves and for the students in their schools. The course of globalism may be set, but at least we can ask for perspective from our field.

A critical aspect of globalism is the agenda of neoliberalism found in North America, Australia, New Zealand, and western Europe. Starting in the 1960s and 1970s, economists like Nobel Prize winner Milton Friedman proposed that markets not only created wealth, they also created freedom. Following this analysis, governments and their tax-and-spend policies became the enemies of wealth creation and personal freedom. Political conservatives from Margaret Thatcher to Ronald Reagan embraced this philosophy, thus becoming sort of antichrists to traditional Keynesian models, such as the New Deal in the US and the welfare state in the UK (Harvey, 2005). In his first inaugural address, Reagan famously quipped, "In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem."

Education writ large felt the impact of neoliberalism almost at once with a drive to privatize public schools in the form of vouchers. The 1983 *A Nation at Risk* report (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) framed the problem with the haunting image of a "rising tide of mediocrity" coming from our schools if immediate steps were not taken. Parental choice in school selection became a rallying cry, along with calls for greater accountability for school performance. This has only increased in recent years, to the point where, in the past decade, most advanced economies have increased high-stakes testing among their publicly funded schools.

At the same time, increased privatization, in the forms of vouchers and, especially, charter schools in poor urban areas, has taken off. It is notable that private academies, and many charter schools, have dispensed with teacher unions, thereby lowering operating costs and further concentrating managerial power. While rhetorical arguments prophecy a renaissance of educational achievement if schools are turned over to market forces in the form of charters and private academies, the systematic study of their impact has been much less certain. In the US, studies have shown that charter schools are sometimes more effective than comparable public schools, and sometimes less effective, but most are hardly distinguishable from their public counterparts. One thing that they do almost predictably is to further segregate populations of students (Miron, Urschel, Mathis, & Tornquist, 2010). This should give us cause to wonder why these models proliferate and whose interests are served by their

growth? The community of educational ethicists is well positioned to pursue such foundational questions.

In Sweden, privatization has taken the form of public funding of private schools held by for-profit corporations that often take their earnings overseas. This places privately controlled schools in much the same position as any corporation, thereby raising the ethical question: If the corporately managed school has primary fiduciary responsibilities to its shareholders, how can it simultaneously hold the interests of students above other concerns? What happens when these two interests are in conflict?

The prospects for this kind of ethical education dilemma seem greater, given the push to privatize by large foundations such as those run by Bill and Melinda Gates, the Walton family (founders of Walmart), and Eli Broad. Each of these offers millions of scarce dollars to schools, districts, and governing bodies that are willing to embrace neoliberalism and its market-forces strategies. Unlike earlier support for education from the foundation world, this group emphasizes what the literature calls venture philanthropy. It is a form of investment that sees district leaders as managers with a portfolio of schools, each managed in turn by staff responsible for predetermined results. Just like their counterparts in the corporate world, these holdings need to show gains (in this case, increased test scores) or they can be dispensed with. This means that staff and the principal can be dismissed or that whole schools can be terminated and reopened in some other form. Just like stock portfolios, district holdings can, in this way, be churned for maximum return on investment (Saltman, 2010).

Clearly, this kind of thinking represents the experience of the business tycoons in question. The Gates, Walton, and Broad fortunes were the result of business acumen and an intense drive for profit and market share. However, to what extent can schools, and the children they serve, be treated as objects in a business enterprise? Sandel (2012) warns us of the marketplace's inability to make moral judgments. Once again, those educators concerned with ethical decision making need to consider this quandary and suggest reasoned responses, even if these responses challenge neoliberal privatization and the power structure that supports it.

Next, our economic order has a monstrous side that we must recognize and deal with as teachers of ethical leadership. Human trafficking, in all of its forms, is simply a hideous form of slavery. Whether as prostitution, forced child labor, or the kidnapping of workers held as serfs, it is real, yet we sometimes act as though it does not exist. Those of us living in wealthy countries have an added responsibility to face this ugly reality, since our comfortable lives are in such stark contrast to those victimized by this facet of our global economy. The collapse of a clothing factory in Bangladesh in 2013, killing over 1,000 workers who made clothing for export, is just one current example. We rightly decry the growing gap between the rich and poor internally, yet the gap between the richest and poorest nations is far more appalling and deserves more than passing attention.

Before closing this section, I suggest that we reconsider how we define wealth itself and that we reflect upon the implications of that definition. Currently, it seems that we remain stuck with a definition that excludes nearly everyone, since only the top small percentage of our population considers itself to be wealthy. The other 95% or more remain outside of the privileged circle, or rather, are further down the pyramid. This has its own consequences in terms of our spirit of community.

But more than that, our consumer society encourages excess to the point where wealth seems really to be the condition wherein one can spend to the point of spectacular waste and seem to get away with it. Owning multiple mansions, private jets, numerous yachts, and so on is not a crime, of course. But in a world where children starve, one wonders when is enough, enough? More than that, the waste involved in energy consumption and pollution caused by this kind of spending is considerable. Ironically, the small percentage of people in the position to spend this freely seem to be rich in things, yet poor in time—odd, when considering the fact that time is the one resource that cannot be replenished. Since our field of ethical decision making requires us to think in large, societal terms, it seems appropriate for us to reflect on newer, more constructive ways to redefine wealth. Perhaps this means having both the material and time resources to pursue one's goals with like-minded associates. No matter the form our suggestions might take, a serious reflection on alternative ways to think about wealth that are less destructive to our planet and our souls is in order.

### Ethical questions facing educators in the economic facet (Table 5.2):

- How shall we advocate for our most needy schoolchildren and their families in a time of budget cutting?
- What kind of economic security do we envision for our youth and how might we advocate for that vision?
- How broadly can we define “we”?

**Table 5.2** Economic turbulence gauge and synopsis

Level of Turbulence	General Definition	Applied to This Situation
Extreme	Structural damage to the current order	Depression, including massive unemployment and suffering. Economic and social collapse.
Severe	Sense of crisis	<b>Regional breakdowns. Record unemployment, national animosity, exploitation of people in affected nations.</b>
Moderate	Widespread awareness of serious issues	<b>Newly thriving national economies. Uneven recovery from downturns. Continued high unemployment. Growing income distribution gap. Mistrust of markets along with growing reliance on them rather than governments.</b>
Light	Little or no disruption	General prosperity. Wealth/poverty gap diminishing. National and international economies at healthy levels of competition, including reasonable pressures to innovate. Power balance between public and private interests. New definitions of wealth considered.

#### **Synopsis: Our economic situation is cycling between moderate and severe levels.**

The concept of “we” and “us” is defined in polarizing ways so that we envision rich versus poor nationally and internationally in a kind of seesaw metaphor. For one to be up, the other must be down. This is destabilizing, since we seem to disagree on a balance between equity of opportunity and equity of results. Stabilizing international agreements that formed the basis of the post-WWII economic order such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (coming from the 1944 Bretton Woods Conference) seem to be breaking down. Debts of sovereign nations are an issue, but austerity measures seem to lead to new recessions. Regional agreements such as the Euro Zone have internal cascading potential, thereby threatening more widespread cascading of tensions.

## Technology

Little more typifies our era, or serves as a better emblem of our fixations, than information technology. Unlike earlier sections of this chapter, nearly every observation I can make applies nearly evenly in advanced economies and, increasingly, to nearly everyone with access to electricity around the world. To illustrate the point, a 2013 UN study found that 6 billion of the Earth's 7 billion people have access to mobile phones, while only 4.5 billion have access to working toilets (Wang, 2013). Currently, about one third of the world has Internet access. In the US, about 95% of teens (ages 12–17) use the Internet, and 80% of those use social media (Madden et al., 2013).

Constant change in technology is the rule. In the past 30 years, we have seen the development and proliferation of personal computers, the Internet, smart phones, and social media. Memory was once measured in the byte, then the megabyte and kilobyte. When multigigabyte hard drives came out, people were astounded at the immensity of memory, but those days seem long ago in a world where computer memory held in one device is rapidly replaced by access to cloud computing. Most know the meaning of a nanosecond, and many feel that their lives are divisible by such brief flashes of time. And it may be best to describe the cascading revolution of technologies in terms of nanoseconds, since that captures the speed with which change seems to have enveloped global life. Email, once considered the height of efficiency, is now looked upon despairingly by the young as a relic fit only for the aged among us. Facebook, itself once a darling of youth culture, may become too overwhelmed by extended families and commercials to be hip, so it can be replaced by faster vehicles such as Twitter. Even here, text can be replaced by images that friends can edit and enhance, such as Instagram. Devices such as smart phones now connect to Global Positioning Systems linked to databases that steer customers to shopping centers of possible interest while steering them away from traffic jams. Companies like Google experiment with wearable technology—in their case, modified high-tech eyeglasses. But all such novelty in the technology world is transient. By the time this chapter gets into the hands of readers, these references are likely to seem passé.

Whole industries reel with the impact of such rapid change. Consider the extreme turbulence facing the publishing world. E-readers are cheap and of high quality. Many who used to support traditional bookstores have abandoned them for e-books or for traditional texts purchased at a discount by e-commerce firms such as Amazon, itself maker of the Kindle e-reader. Newspapers barely hang on in many of their traditional strongholds and are wiped out elsewhere. The few at the top, such as the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* in the US, seem to have found a way to transition into the new e-universe, but they are the exceptions. Journalism is challenged by these new circumstances, and cuts in budgets have yielded reductions in critical areas such as investigative reporting. On the one hand, free applications such as Zite can organize the daily news contoured to a person's priorities. On the other hand, even these services can easily lose out to one's preferred blogs.

Self-published books, self-recorded music, and self-produced websites are cheaper and of better quality than ever, resulting in almost unlimited potential exposure. But the key word in that sentence is *potential*. Who actually goes to these homegrown sites or downloads these recordings? In a world where nearly everyone can produce

near professional-grade material, even the good gets lost in the deluge of media stimuli. Recording contracts were once the gold standard for a musical artist. Now that world is turned upside down, and it is concerts that sell music recordings, not the other way around. Looked at one way, technology has democratized the world of mass communication and publication, delivering it into the hands of billions around the globe. Looked at another way, it is only a mirage, since real exposure, and its accompanying rewards, belongs to a small elite at the top of the cultural pyramid.

Given the place that information technology has in the society in general, it is no wonder that schools have been a place where IT possibilities have been trumpeted and where its impact may be seen. A brief reflection on our history shows that this is nothing new. Schools in the early 20th century were sold technology as well, and with great vigor. Typewriters turned the product of young writers into something resembling texts prepared by publishers. Photographic images were projected onto screens as early as the 1840s, through the use of “magic lanterns,” and by the dawn of the last century, these too could be found in schools. Adding to the original multimedia of its day was the use of phonographs, which brought not only orchestral music to schools for the first time, but also the speeches of leading politicians of the era. In the US presidential election of 1912, for instance, candidates Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and Woodrow Wilson made waxed cylinder recordings of speeches that were distributed widely around the country.

All of these were promoted as the latest marvels, destined to revolutionize the learning experience for the world’s young people. Subsequent decades brought similar claims for using motion pictures, radio, and television in the classroom. While these “marvels” may not have had the world-changing impact by which they were promoted, more humble technologies such as the mimeograph and its replacement, the more malleable photocopier, certainly did become rooted into the classrooms, albeit to both positive and negative results. Prosaic technologies such as these augmented the drill-centered instructional world of the 1950s and 1960s and became part of the fabric of early school memories for those now in the latter years of their career. But they are also important precursors to the tools and the rhetoric facing today’s educators.

Fast forward to our era. The school day may seem to start around 8 and end at 3, but that is only a superficial shell that hides the morphed reality. We are told that we need to switch to a frame where learning can take place anytime and anywhere. The teacher is no longer held as the central source of information but the person who makes connections and facilitates learning in a flexible way, matching student investigations with sources of information and ways to share new ideas. Groups of students might work in teams, both in their own classes and with others around the world, in a global enterprise of rich discovery connected to authentic problem solving.

These are possible visions of the future, and this type of learning may exist in spots today. The trouble is, it is all too rare. In these glorified images of the possible, one can hear echoes of the same kind of promise from years past. *The photograph will liberate students from their parochial circumstance and elevate them to the world of international culture. The radio will melt away the miles separating people and will lead to universal peace and understanding. Through television, people will experience*

*great theater and learning will be there for all.* Slender shards of reality exist in each of these visions.

However, educators need to ask, what is the likely outcome of the current technology, given what we know about the promises of the past?

Without becoming defensive, and risking the label of Luddite, educators need to reason as a community and ponder the deep ethical challenges ahead. Please note that the image of creative teams of students engaged in hands-on exploration and problem solving with the aid of the latest technology may be possible, but what chance does this highly evolved pedagogy have when it meets up with a high-stakes testing system that micro-manages instruction by punishing any activity that is not on the test? There are, of course, exceptions to this pattern, such as the school district in Danville, Kentucky, where project-based learning is central. Its story, featured on national television in the US (PBS News Hour, 2013), demonstrated two things: that creativity is possible and that leaders with the wisdom and courage to pursue this avenue are rare. Short of this kind of use for technology in the classroom, critics will continue to assert that schools are being used as unprotected markets for enterprising technology companies that can mesmerize educators with the latest media light show.

But the dual-edged sword of technology extends much further. Consider the seemingly ubiquitous access to social media and Internet-based learning familiar to most of us living in advanced economies. Are these the tools of an educational renaissance where authentic learning really does exist for anyone, anywhere, anytime, like the rhetoric would have us believe? Or is this merely a slick sales pitch for us to accept a second-class student citizenship wherein no one ever sees a teacher, much less gets to be mentored in any meaningful fashion? My own students thank me for offering a course online so that they will not have to travel to class every week, or even monthly, as students in hybrid courses do. I don't blame them because the pressure of their lives dictates harsh choices, wherein there is no time to commute to campus and join a real community. Their appreciation seems less related to the quality of the course than it is to the frenetic quality of their lives.

The attraction of our new technology world also stems from economic pressures. For instance, current budgetary conditions lead to encouraging faculty to teach online because it is more profitable for the institution, thereby accelerating the growth of this kind of education. While these realities make technology attractive to some, critics consider virtual education a poor substitute for authentic schools.

At the university level, we are witnessing the advent of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), where thousands of students participate in credit-bearing classes organized by companies such as Coursera, and edX. Higher education partners in this emerging enterprise include Harvard, Princeton, Stanford, and the University of Pennsylvania. MOOCs have gained favor with state legislators as well. In May 30, 2013, the California Senate unanimously passed legislation requiring state colleges to accept MOOC courses for students in that system who need them to fulfill graduation requirements (Meyer, 2013). This too is related to the economics of education, since California has experienced serious financial challenges in recent years, preventing full funding of its state institutions of higher education. So those colleges and universities could not offer required courses in sufficient numbers to satisfy demand,



thereby leaving students waiting for needed courses. Instead of raising revenue to support their own institutions, this quasi-private alternative was found, fitting into the growing trend of market forces and neoliberal responses to education funding problems. Questions were also raised about professorial intellectual property rights, which are being threatened by MOOCs, because universities can claim ownership of these courses and alter them after they are taught (Schmidt, 2013). Finally, the MOOCs have the potential to follow the pattern established by technology's impact on the recording and publishing industries described above: A few at the top of the pyramid could become rich, while those at its base labor along as mere assistants. The damage this could do to our traditional academic community has yet to be imagined.

Current and future technology presents clear school-based ethical dilemmas that need consideration. For instance, e-readers will soon be able to track what pages a student reads in a given assignment and what ideas that student highlights. Faculty at all levels will be able to track these and respond, possibly with sanctions for skipping over sections of reading. On the one hand, conscientious teachers may be concerned about the quality of student study habits. On the other hand, this raises privacy questions heretofore beyond our experience.

Another area of direct concern to educators is cyberbullying. While everyone is concerned with the traumatic impact of cyberbullying, it does not seem to be diminishing, and its victims suffer almost relentless attacks from anonymous foes hiding behind their computer screens and mobile devices. Some have been caught and punished, but the danger still exists, raising another challenge for educators: How can we heighten awareness among students to prevent this kind of attack on their fellows? In physical bullying situations, we encourage students not to stand by and watch the event but to intervene. How can this be accomplished successfully in the online world? Echoing the question posed throughout this chapter, we must ask for an expanded definition of who "we" are. If the cyberbullying victim is seen as part of "us," then we, perhaps, have a greater prospect of seeing supportive responses that may save a young victim's life. How might those teaching ethical reasoning enhance that child's chances?

Regardless of how any of us feel about technology in our lives, there is no doubt that it has been, and will continue to play, a critical role. Opening up new avenues of information more broadly than earlier generations could even imagine is one of its qualities, while opening up the risk of financial exploitation and the destruction of privacy is clearly another. There seems to be little more important than educating those leading schools and universities in sound ethical reasoning if we are to benefit from the former while hoping to diminish the impact of the latter.

### **Ethical questions facing educators in the technology facet (Table 5.3):**

- How can we move our systems toward valuing students more than corporate profits?
- How do we encourage technologies that do not exploit fellow educators (the MOOC and online challenge)?
- What can we do to help our young *use* technology rather than being *used by* technology (including cyberbullying, hyperconsumerism, hurried lives)?

**Table 5.3** Technology turbulence gauge and synopsis

Level of Turbulence	General Definition	Applied to This Situation
Extreme	Structural damage to the current order	<b>Industries undone by tectonic changes. Rates of change seem to accelerate. Leadership and power positions transitory at best. Constant claims of novelty, but are they real?</b>
Severe	Sense of crisis	<b>“Borders” redefined in many dimensions. Space and place redefined. Massive wealth transfers. New imperative for change in traditional institutions.</b>
Moderate	Widespread awareness of serious issues	New ways of working through technology emerging. Early adopters foreshadow potential of coming changes. Rising but arithmetic demand for change in processes.
Light	Little or no disruption	Small, incremental changes leading to sequential adjustments in the current way of doing things. Intergenerational continuity is common.

**Synopsis: We seem to be cycling between severe and extreme turbulence in technology, with the edge given to extreme levels.**

There is nearly ubiquitous access to transformative technology in the form of smart phones, but not in other areas of technology. As in other areas reviewed in this chapter, definitions of “we” and “us” vary widely, leading to differing positions in technology use and availability. National governments able and willing to use technology against citizens, always the case but this opportunity is enhanced with ever-greater levels of technology available. Privacy issues abound as well as questions of who gets to benefit from technology. Substance of technological changes is at issue. Destruction of the old order, in publishing, for example, are numerous. Stability is a thing of the past. Cascading, accelerating change is the norm.

## CONCLUSION: THE LARGER CONTEXT

In this chapter I have reviewed turbulent sociopolitical conditions in three pivotal areas: security, economy, and technology. Levels of turbulence applied to each of these were estimated and all three showed elevated turbulence ranging from moderate/severe, in the cases of security and economy, to severe/extreme for technology.

While analyzing these separately is helpful in identifying specific drivers that create increases in turbulence, we know that all three interact in the real world. For instance, the connection between security and technology can be seen in revelations of US governmental reviews of mobile telephone calls and Internet traffic for millions of citizens, raising the question of where we draw the line between security and privacy rights. Likewise, the connection between technology and the economy can be seen in the drive to use distance learning and online courses to lower administrative costs in higher education. This raises the possibility of a two-tiered system wherein the privileged receive concentrated help from faculty while most students may become relegated to the virtual campus. Finally, the connection among all three is evident in the electric grid that keeps our economy, our security apparatus, and our technology going. On the one hand, this dynamic system defines our world, but its very centrality creates a new and potentially catastrophic vulnerability—witness the current outcry over future cyberattacks.

Combining all three areas into one turbulence gauge would look like Table 5.4.

**Table 5.4** Turbulence gauge for the combined elements of security, economy, and technology with synopsis

Level of Turbulence	General Definition	Applied to This Situation
Extreme	Structural damage to the current order	Technology is ubiquitous, thus accelerating seismic changes in security and the economy that, in turn, propel dynamic shifts in technology, thus setting off the cycle of radical change again.
Severe	Sense of crisis	<b>Technology expands to include more people around the world, thus shifting the balance of power in security and economy, resulting in the destruction of older institutions. Yet sufficient stability exists for elements of the current order to sustain themselves.</b>
Moderate	Widespread awareness of serious issues	Technology evolves dynamically but in an orderly way. Adjustments to the economy and security are made ongoing with occasional disruptions that cause temporary crises followed by reversion to previous norms.
Light	Little or no disruption	Security, technology, and economy blend harmoniously and predictably. They develop slowly, their dynamics are understood, and changes are measured and appear to be controlled.

**Synopsis:**

If, as suggested above, we expand our definition of “we” to be more inclusive, then the position to consider is not simply our personal one, nor that of those in our immediate context, but a more universal perspective. This broader view changes how we estimate the combined forces away from the small minority of privileged groups. Security dislocations are evident around the world, at times eroding stability and cascading into greater conflict. As of this writing, the civil war in Syria has the world pondering this very possibility. Similarly, the economic crisis of 2008 has cast a shadow of varying intensity around the world and is still threatening many. The stability of governmental intervention seems to have prevented the kind of wild cascading seen in the 1930s. Finally, the sweeping turbulence in technology change impacts nearly everyone with a mobile device while it erodes whole institutions, thereby destabilizing them and causing a cascade of unpredictable change.

The impact of technology, and its likely influence on security and the economy, is driving the combined turbulence toward severe and even extreme levels, in my opinion. Whether this represents a dismal forecast or opens up a creative opportunity depends upon our ability to respond to the inherent ethical challenges of this dynamic sociopolitical context with creative, flexible, and deeply considered democratic ethical wisdom. While we do stand on a precarious stage, we ought not to forget this critical opportunity.

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