**Sustainability and Leadership**

**Slide One**

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**We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today.**

**We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now.**

**In this conundrum of life and history, there is such a thing as being too late**.

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Good morning, Everyone. I want to thank RoseMary Papa for including me in helping to set the stage for our time together today. As members of the Leaders without borders community, we are committed to providing all children with an education that will prepare them for the future, one that holds many uncertainties.

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While I don’t want to spend too much time dwelling on the dismal state of the world, we need to consider the context of our efforts and recognize the challenges before us. According to UNESCO, there are almost 200 million children under the age of 5 in developing regions of the world who are underweight for their age, 161 million children who do not attend primary school and it is estimated that there are 758 million people who are illiterate. The gaps in educational attainment between rich and poor, within and between countries, are staggering. In many poor countries, poor children face nearly insurmountable obstacles under current conditions. They lack books at home; have no opportunity for pre-primary school; and enter facilities without electricity, water, hygiene, qualified teachers, and textbooks.

Nearly 13% of the world’s population are living on less than a $1.90 per day in 2012. The Global population tripled between 1950 and 2015, and is expected to grow by another billion to 8.5 billion by 2030. We are in the midst of the 6th mass extinction of species which is much more severe than originally perceived by scientists who are now calling for immediate action. The impact of climate change is being felt around the globe, especially by the most marginalized populations. It turns out that human beings are very skilled in practices and lifestyles that are destroying the earth at an astonishing speed.

Given this reality, many of us here today believe that it is essential that K-16 education focus its efforts tightly around sustainable education. *Sustainability* is an ancient concept that involves a concern for the long-term availability of those things most important for the preservation of life. The ideas that underlie sustainability are nearly universal in the human experience and can be found in Chinese philosophy as early as 400 B.C.E. Today, the term sustainability often refers to the idea of *meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs* Thus, sustainability involves a focus on the interconnectedness of social systems, economic systems, and environmental systems. We are particularly interested in the areas where these systems overlap and in the places where all three intersect.

SLIDE HERE Three Circles

We are not adequately making sure that people who live in the present are able to meet their needs. At the same time, we are rapidly destroying the systems upon which future generations must rely to meet their needs. Challenges such overreliance on nonrenewable fossil fuels, institutionalized gender and economic inequities, loss of biodiversity, and the demise of indigenous cultures and languages all are examples of processes that threaten the ability of future generations to meet their various needs.

This conception of sustainability underlies the idea of ***sustainable development*** and is the foundation of the new sustainable development goals that were ratified by the United Nations just over a year ago. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy equity, peace, and prosperity.

SLIDE HERE SDG’s

These 17 Goals build on the successes of the Millennium Development Goals, while including new areas such as climate change, peace and justice, economic equity, and sustainable consumption, among other priorities. As educators, it is Goal #4 that speaks to our work. Goal #4 is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. It’s a critically important task, this focus on learning ― one that grows more important each day as our global society becomes increasingly complex and interconnected. We know that no single aspect of life has more world-changing potential than education.

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This understanding takes on new significance given the findings of the United Nations Global Education Monitoring Report, released last November, which shows that it is **only** through achieving Goal #4 that the other 16 goals will be achieved and given the current rate of education transformation and access, we will be a half century too late.

According to data in the report, most education systems are not keeping up with market demand. In 2015, slightly less than two-thirds of total global employment was in medium-skilled occupations. By 2020, the world could have 40 million too few workers with post secondary ducation relative to demand and up to 95 million too many at lower education levels. While SDG 4 calls for universal completion of upper secondary education by 2030, the current completion rate in low-income countries is a meagre 14%*.* The report also suggests that if workers from advantaged and more disadvantaged social background had the same education, disparity in working poverty could be reduced by 39%. While the report presents evidence of important work yet to be done in achieving SDG #4 and its sub-goals, some progress has been made. For example, as a result of constitutional changes in India in 2003, 300 million students get some environmental education training. In the UK, schools who embraced a whole school approach to sustainable education showed improvements in school culture, students’ health and learning and a reduction of the schools’ ecological footprint. Work with the indigenous populations, such as those in Alaska, has revealed that they have much to teach us about climate change adaptations and resilience and disaster early warning systems. And finally, using education to improve social development in northern Burkina Faso, where students are given daily lunches and take home rations, female enrollment increased by 5-6% after the first year. We know that every year of education a girl receives in a developing country reduces the number of children she will have by 1. In countries with exploding population and high poverty, such as Nigeria, this is significant.

While we have a better understanding of the critical role of quality, global quality education, for it to be transformative in support of the new sustainable development agenda, education ‘as usual’ will not suffice.

Sustainable education is considered by many to be an overarching concept that broadens and incorporates the best intentions of environmental education, place-based learning, community-based education and other progressive education reform initiatives. It aligns with the new expectations for learning for the 21st century that requires higher order and deeper thinking. Students educated in sustainability develop critical thinking and systems thinking skills, problem-solving skills, see themselves as ‘solutionaries’, have the ability to work with divers groups, and possess a global mindset of equity. – all skills required of today’s workforce and to deal with future uncertainties.

Experts all over the globe agree that the attainment of sustainability literacy must increase significantly if we are to ensure economic prosperity and social stability in individual countries and in the worldwide community.

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So what does this mean for school leaders? (CLICK) To advance the goal of sustainable education, there are a number of urgent issues with regard to policies and practices (CLICK) for effective school leadership around the globe. Contributions needed in this area include the need to produce and disseminate guidelines and tools for needs assessment and policy formulation to develop effective school leadership using experience, best practice, and evidence-based research from countries who have established successful leadership development programs.

There is emerging consensus concerning the role effective school leadership can play in positively influencing school performance and students’ learning outcomes, particularly when principals are skilled and supported to act as instructional leaders. In many countries, instructional leadership and leadership for learning (CLICK) have yet to be translated into policy frameworks or the day to day practice of school principals and to move away from the traditional managerial and administrative role expected of school principals.

With deep inequities within most of our societies, developing empathy (CLICK) in ourselves and our students that leads to caring for others is a key challenge for sustainability education. Creating schools that cultivate empathy, care and trust enables them to become places where creativity, responsible risk taking and innovation thrive. Students need to understand why they need to care about other people around the globe and our shared destiny.

Facilitating student well-being (CLICK) is central to green school leadership. Leaders attend to the physical well-being of their students through healthy and safe building conditions; through high-quality, nutritious food; through abundant availability of clean drinking water; through daily outdoor play; and through time in nature. School leaders have opportunities to intentionally create the conditions in which we cultivate more and more behavior flowing from an understanding of our deep interdependence with planet Earth. They do this through modeling mindful attention to reduce the school’s ecological footprint and teaching students to understand the science of sustainability and how to work for positive change.

The places we live (CL(CK) provide relevant, meaningful, and powerful opportunities for engaged learning. The local community and environment is a starting point for cross-curricular instruction. Creating authentic learning through the use of learner-centered pedagogies is critical as students will choose to learn and engage with content that is meaningful to them. By emphasizing hands-on, real-world learning experiences, this approach to education increases academic achievement, helps students develop strong ties to their community, enhances students’ appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens.

So developing citizenship (CLICK) for sustainability requires the very same practices that we know support individual well-being and engagement in learning. Green school leaders that ground their practice in ecological and democratic principles cultivate the conditions in which students’ develop a connection to their communities and develop an appreciation for their ability to make a positive local impact.

These are the types of schools that students and teachers jump out of bed to attend; they would choose to show up each day, even if they were not required.

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School leaders who are future-focused cultivate powerful visions for whole school sustainability. These leaders, in concert with their teachers, students, parents, and community stakeholders, commit to developing the learning capacity of all their members as means to serve local and global needs in the 21st century.

School leaders, in particular in the U.S, will need to convince community members, both inside and outside schools that this is not another fad or fancy, accepted in name only or once accepted is reduced to superficial activities. Introducing a couple of green activities here and there, a few sustainable practices and the use of some new pedagogies does little to change the essential character of schools. Sustainability has to be in the school’s DNA. It requires the development of whole-school policies and practices to foster environmental concern and responsiveness, but also the promotion of social justice, multiculturalism, holistic health, citizenship, and democracy across the school community. Living them, not merely going through the motions, is what makes sustainable practices in these schools a normal part of things. Whole-school sustainability policies are announced publicly and introduced openly, at the same time practices find their way more subtlety into daily routines. The direction of effort is horizontal as well as vertical. It is not an easy or fast process but things of value rarely are.

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I am frequently reminded that our best hope for the future is in the preparation of critically conscious, anti-oppressive, sustainability literate teachers and leaders. I firmly believe that the job of ***teacher is*** ***the*** most important job on the planet right now and I’m guessing that many of you share that belief with me.There is a sense of urgency in our efforts to advance SDG 4. If we don’t succeed, it will seriously hamper progress towards each and every sustainable goal. An equitable and quality education for all is an imperative because it is not enough to attend school: rather, all children must be able to fully benefit from the experience that results in quality learning outcomes. Individually and collectively, we must continue to strive to ensure that today’s students emerge with the skills, knowledge, and global mindset they need to thrive in the 21st century and to create a flourishing future. The time is now …as there truly is such a thing as being too late.