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Qualitative Study of Current and Prospective Student Perceptions of a University Website

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Building a sustainable system that goes beyond myopic interests and short-term policies is an arduous task for any school leader. In the U.S., our education system has been criticized for being too shallow in curriculum and unsustainable in the long run. In fact, a 2007 report by UNICEF concerning children's well-being in 22 countries ranked the U.K. and the U.S. at the bottom of the industrialized nations in the survey. Hargreaves (2007) laments that these two countries, in their single-minded pursuit of economic competitiveness and development at all costs, are destroying the planet, while "eating their young."

To add to this, most of the seemingly fashionable educational reform strategies have threatened to treat teachers and other human resources as expendable waste, in the same way multinational companies and politicians have hindered the sustainability of our natural resources. Most of the damage to educational sustainability in the U.S. comes from imposed short-term targets, endless and meaningless testing, and the pursuit of quick political ends at the cost of true learning for all students.

In Teaching in the Knowledge Society, Hargreaves (2003) argues that teaching and learning in schools need to be reconfigured to prepare youth to participate in transforming the country into an innovative knowledge economy and also gain opportunities for employment at the highest levels of these economies, providing high-quality skills and earning high wages. He adds that many countries aspire to be knowledge societies. Knowledge societies, in this age of electronic, satellite, and digital technologies, address how information and ideas are formed, used, circulated, and absorbed at great speed in "knowledge-based communities," which he defines as networks of individuals working hard to produce and circulate new information/knowledge.

In knowledge societies, prosperity, wealth, and economic development are dependent on the people's capacity to "out-invent" and outwit competitors, understand the desires and demands of the consumer markets, and change their jobs or acquire new skills as required through the economic fluctuations and downturns. A distinct feature of these knowledge societies is that the above-listed capacities do not just belong to individuals, but also to organizations, which then share, create, and apply the new knowledge continuously and consistently in cultures of mutual learning and endless innovation.

Hargreaves states that, for sustainability, knowledge society organizations develop the individuals' capacities, by providing them with better opportunities for lifelong training and retraining, by breaking the barriers to learning and communication, by getting individuals to work in diverse and flexible teams, by using problems and mistakes as learning opportunities rather than occasions for blame, by including everyone in the organizational vision and mission, and by developing "social capital" through networking and relationship-building, which provides people with support and opportunities for further learning.

According to Hargreaves, the knowledge society is a learning society, and its economic success and culture of continuous innovation are dependent on the capacity of its constituents to keep learning throughout their working lives. This is why schools that purport to prepare students for the knowledge economy have to break with the concepts of the past.

Hargreaves suggests that the present model of one teacher per class, with its emphasis on basic literacy and numeracy, needs to be replaced with a wider, more cognitively challenging and innovative curriculum. He adds that there is a need for teachers to work together rather than teaching alone in classrooms; for professional learning to be continuous and not episodic; for teachers' judgments to be guided by objective as well as subjective evidence, by experience as well as intuition; and, finally, for the teaching profession to be more predisposed to taking risks and accepting change instead of just sticking to proven procedures and comfortable routines.

In summary, Hargreaves states that the demands of knowledge economy schooling require that schools put aside the outdated industrial and agrarian educational models, and also abandon their reinvention in narrowly focused, highly intensified, and over-tested standardized reforms that bring about restrictions in the curriculum, undermine professional morale, inhibit creative learning, and reduce the supply lines of leadership recruitment.

In Sustainable Leadership, Hargreaves and Fink (2006) discuss the development of the concept of sustainability in the environmental movement, its definition in the Brundtland Commission Report of 1987, and the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2015). They argue against what they refer to as "quick-fix Anglo-Saxon" educational reform strategies, which impose short-term achievement targets, set a "hurried" curriculum to be taught to young age groups, promote the culture of "teaching to the test," and encourage quick-fix turnaround strategies for use by teachers in poorly performing schools.

The Current Sociopolitical Context

This sociopolitical context refers to contemporary ideologies, regulations, policies, conditions, laws, practices, traditions, and events that define America's education. Nieto (2007) states that these ideologies, practices, laws, and policies are responsible for the current structural inequality in the education sector. She argues that societal ideologies, assumptions, and expectations, which are often taken for granted, and which relate to people's identities, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, social class, language, and various other differences-together with other material and concrete conditions in the society-work toward creating barriers to educational progress.
Nieto is of the opinion that, consciously or unconsciously, these social assumptions and ideologies define what the society collectively believes about certain people. These perceptions may often determine who gets access to education, housing, health care, and employment, among other material needs. This sociopolitical context is also used to determine whose language is considered "standard" and which lifestyle is "normal."

In the U.S., many young students have been marginalized by their schooling experiences. However, this situation is not unique to the U.S., and many societies around the world are facing the same situation due to globalization and other factors such as immigration and war, which are making urban areas increasingly cosmopolitan. We therefore find that, independent of location, the sociopolitical context affects every society due to the connection between democracy and public schools. Nieto notes that it is mostly through public schools that children get the opportunity for a better life than the one their families have.

According to Nieto, public schools have the capacity to fuel democracy. In the common discourse,

however, because of privatization and other market-driven schemes, this important connection between public schooling and democracy seems to have been lost. The sociopolitical context, at the school level, influences policies and practices, such as the curriculum, pedagogy, parent outreach, discipline, and hiring of staff, among others. In matters of curriculum, the sociopolitical context guides the knowledge that is required to teach through the perspective that is advocated for. The sociopolitical context in this case determines who benefits and who loses in the curriculum.

At an individual level, teachers, school leaders, and other educators are largely influenced by the ideologies and beliefs in society and, consciously or unconsciously, act on them whether they believe them or not. Racism and other biases manifest themselves through school policies and also through teachers' and school administrators' practices and decisions. For example, decisions about which students are gifted and which require special education are often affected by teachers' biases (Harry & Klingner, 2006; Oakes, 2005). Teachers' relationships with their students are also affected by the sociopolitical context, since their perspectives and expectations are occasionally influenced by prevailing societal attitudes about people from particular backgrounds (Valenzuela, 1999; Flores-Gonzalez, 2002).

The context includes changing demographics in the population since as we had earlier seen shifts in population are redefining national identities. In the U.S., particularly, 30% of the nation's residents are African Americans, Asian/Pacific Islanders, Latinos, and American Indians (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000a). However, what is more dramatic than the current population statistics are the future projections by the Census Bureau, which estimate that, by 2050, people of color will be over 50% of the total population of the U.S. and, for the first time, European Americans will be the "minority" (U.S. Census Bureau 2000b). Currently, there are over 450 languages spoken in the U.S., and nearly a fifth of the total U.S. population speaks a language other than English at home, which makes the country a truly multilingual nation, in practice if not in philosophy (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004).

On the other hand, statistics show that the profile of teachers has changed very little compared with the population profile. Though statistics may differ slightly, almost all sources show that 85-90% of U.S. teachers are European American, monolingual English speakers, who mostly have had little experience with students of color and those whose native language is not English (National Collaborative on Diversity in the Teaching Force 2004; National Center for Education Statistics 2005).

Nieto finds, concomitant with the growth in diversity, a growing "achievement gap" between European American students and students of color. Statistics gathered in 2006 by Quality Counts 10, the tenth annual report on the results of standardized education in the U.S., show that, though student achievement has generally improved, the achievement gap between African American and Hispanic students compared to European American students is still very large. The gap is the equivalent of two grade levels or more, which is close to what it was in 1992 (Olsen 2006). However, Nieto states that the attention to the achievement gap focuses on students, rather than the institutionalized policies, practices, and structured inequality in education that affect their learning.

In many countries, there has been a growing culture of standardization and bureaucratization that forms part of the sociopolitical context. In the U.S., standardization has been mainly influenced by federal legislation with rigid accountability structures, most recently the No Child Left Behind Act. This is despite glaring evidence that testing rather than increasing student learning is leading to higher dropout rates and less engagement with schooling (Nichols & Berliner, 2007).

Additionally, these hyperactive accountability structures are joined by the issue of segregation according to race, ethnicity, and social class, which is now worse than at any time since the 1954 decision in Brown v. Board of Education. Nieto (2007) states that, at present, the most segregated of all students are the low-income Latinos, though poor children of all backgrounds, and particularly poor children of color, are the most marginalized through this segregation (Orfield & Lee, 2005).

Nieto suggests that the most significant aspect of the sociopolitical context is probably the long-standing and growing structural and social inequality, which invariably results in poverty, inadequate housing, poor access to health care, and unemployment. She states that, though teachers can make a significant difference in terms of life-chances and opportunities for their students, it is apparent that they alone cannot take on the entire responsibility for student achievement due to the existence of inequality and structural barriers created by racism and other biases, such as lack of resources in poor schools, poor infrastructure, and unfair and bureaucratic policies.

In the U.S., educators such as Jean Anyon and economists such as Richard Rothstein, among many others, are of the opinion that it is mainly the macroeconomic policies-i.e., policies that regulate such issues as the minimum wage, availability of jobs, tax rates, medical care, and affordable housing-that are primarily responsible for causing school failure. In addition, they argue that educational policies cannot by themselves transcend these policies. Anyon (2005) writes:

"As a nation, we have been counting on education to solve the problems of unemployment, joblessness, and poverty for many years. But education did not cause these problems, and education cannot solve them. An economic system that chases profits and casts people aside (especially people of color) is culpable" (p. 3).

Rothstein (2004), who was at the Economic Policy Institute in Washington, D.C., states that if education reform is pursued without any additional investments in health care, housing, early childhood education, after-school and summer programs, or any other social and economic support, then the achievement gap can never be closed. He warns of the consequences of sustaining a society increasingly being characterized by very few "haves" and many "have-nots." He states that:

"If as a society we choose to preserve big social class differences, we must necessarily also accept substantial gaps between the achievement of lower-class and middle class children. Closing those gaps requires not only better schools, although those are certainly needed, but also reform in the social and economic institutions that prepare children to learn in different ways. It will not be cheap" (p. 149).

Defining Sustainable Leadership

The study by Hargreaves and Fink (2006) draws on research into 30 years of educational leadership in eight U.S. high schools and the available literature on environmental and corporate sustainability. From their study, we find the definition of sustainable leadership:

"Sustainable educational leadership and improvement preserves and develops deep learning for all that spreads and lasts, in ways that do no harm to and indeed create a positive benefit for others around us, now and in the future."

The two researchers give an example of a school district that employs a heroic principal to turn around

an underperforming school, then sees all his work unravel within several months of his subsequent promotion. Another example of unsustainable leadership is where a charismatic leader decides to accept to become the principal of a nearby school and consequently takes all his teacher-leader disciples with him, thus undoing his work. Similarly, a principal of a "magnet" school increases her institution's reputation by attracting the top students around the school area, consequently taking away the best talent from the nearby neighborhood schools, and causing the overall performance of the area to plummet. Teachers in high schools observe four principals passing through their school in a span of five years and decide that they can easily wait out all other principals and then change their agenda in the future after they have left. Another example is where a school district attempts to water down a highly unionized school by assigning to it a succession of increasingly authoritarian principals, only for the union's resistance to change to become even more deep-seated.

The researchers state that the above examples of unsustainable leadership and improvement efforts are actually not hypothetical, and were found in a study on educational change funded by the Spencer Foundation over a period of 30 years in eight U.S. and Canadian high schools, as observed by over 200 teachers and school administrators who worked there in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2004). The study has been used by researchers to show that one of the key elements that influence change or continuity in the long term is leadership, its sustainability, and succession. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) state that most of the processes and practices of school leadership in their study show or create temporary and localized "flurries" of change, with little lasting or widespread improvement in the long run.

However, there were several exceptions to this norm. Hargreaves and Fink found that, from the first day of appointment, some school leaders thought hard about the issue of succession, especially regarding how to identify and groom their successors. An example is given of one founding leader of an innovative school who was careful not to "poach" the best teachers from neighboring institutions, thus avoiding the injustice or jealousy that comes from doing so. In other schools, some courageous leaders responded to standardized testing by improving learning for all – in the belief that eventually better scores would follow – rather than becoming obsessed with results, thereby stifling the learning process. These two leaders did more than manage change or implement reform: they pursued and modeled sustainable leadership.

The Seven Principles of Sustainable Leadership

The main responsibility that all education leaders have is creating a learning system that engages students intellectually, emotionally, and socially. Sustainable leadership therefore goes beyond the temporary gains in achievement scores to create long-lasting, meaningful improvements in learning processes (Glickman, 2002; Stoll, Fink, & Earl, 2002). Hagreaves and Fink (2006) give two examples.

The first is Talisman Park High School's principal, who reacted to a new mandate to issue a tenth-grade literacy test that students were required to pass in order to graduate by attempting to shield his experienced staff from the time-consuming test-related activities that are entailed in such policies. The principal decided that the most expedient way to achieve good results was for them to concentrate on boosting the achievement of those students who were more likely to fall below the passing grade. Though the main strategy was to raise the school's scores, the other students who needed help with literacy were generally ignored.

A second principal was in charge of the neighboring, more ethnically diverse Wayvern High School. This principal reacted to the same mandated test by concentrating on the improvement of literacy for all students in the long run. Teachers in this school worked together to evaluate and improve their literacy practices and, with the help of parents and other school stakeholders, focused for one month on improving the literacy learning of all students. While the first-year results were not dramatic, by the second year, the school improved and scored above the district means. By the third year, the school was the district's number-two performer and was well ahead of the privileged Talisman Park High School, whose principal had opted for a quick fix.

Keeping the above example in mind, let us look at the particular principles that define sustainable leadership:

1. Sustainable Leadership Lasts

One of the major characteristics of sustainable leadership is that it involves planning and preparing for succession – not just as an afterthought, but from the first day of the school leader's appointment. In the Hargreaves and Fink (2006) study, there were some rare glimpses of thoughtful and effective succession management and sustainable leadership. A certain school sampled built on its ebullient and optimistic principal's success in forming a democratically developed plan for school improvement by grooming his assistant principal to replace him when he retired.

However, the study showed that leadership succession is rarely successful. This is mainly because charismatic leaders are often followed by less-dynamic successors, who find it difficult to maintain the momentum of school improvement. Additionally, the study shows that leaders who turn around underperforming schools are usually transferred or promoted prematurely even before their improvements have had a chance to stick.

In the 30 or so years that Stewart Heights High School was under observation, we saw what is known as "revolving-door principalship" (MacMillan, 2000; Hargreaves et al., 2003), which is mostly found in today's reform-driven climate. In the early 1990s, Stewart Heights was drifting in terms of performance. It had an aging staff nostalgic about its former days as a "village school," who had never accepted the challenges that come with increasing urbanization and cultural diversity. The school's principal actually confessed that he did not have a particular objective for the school, but just wanted to buffer his teachers from the so-called "outside forces," so they could concentrate on classroom instruction. When the principal finally retired, the district appointed the dynamic, experienced, and abrasive Bill Matthews as his replacement.

Matthews was of the opinion that, no matter what, students came first. He communicated his expectations clearly, and was relentless in his determination to serve his students and the community. By the end of the third year, with Matthews at the helm, and after the school had made several curriculum changes, planned for school improvement, restructured the process of student guidance, and created a more welcoming environment, there was a dramatic increase in student and parent satisfaction.

Then, abruptly, Matthews was promoted to a district leadership role and, with shortages in leadership surfacing across the district, his assistants were also transferred.
In the ensuing chaos, the district appointed first-time principal Jim West to the school. While West

might have preferred to feel his way carefully, he and his ill-prepared assistants had to focus on implementing a newly mandated reform agenda. Within few months, everything that Matthews had accomplished in school improvement had been undone. The traditional power blocs, such as the group of department heads who had dominated opinion before Matthews' arrival, reasserted their former authority, since West needed their support to ensure that there was compliance with the mandated reforms. West displayed indecisiveness, which led some of the teachers to regard him and his assistants as ineffectual. As Hargreaves and Fink reiterated, "nice people can't cope." In just three years, West was transferred. The school had had four principals in six years, and the staff became cynical.

As seen above, sustainable leadership requires that leaders pay serious attention to the issue of leadership succession. This can be achieved through grooming successors for them to continue with reforms, keeping successful leaders in schools much longer, especially if they are making great strides in promoting learning, resisting the urge to search for "irreplaceable charismatic heroes" to become the saviors of schools, requiring that all district and school improvement plans include succession plans, and slowing down the rate of principal turnover to avoid teachers becoming cynical about having to "wait out" all their leaders (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

2. Sustainable Leadership Spreads

A suitable way for leaders to leave a lasting legacy in their schools is to ensure that they share and help develop their vision with other school actors. Leadership succession in this sense therefore means more than grooming one's successor. It actually means distributing leadership throughout the school through its professional community so that others can carry the torch of school improvement after the current principal is gone (Spillane, Halverson, & Drummond, 2001).

One example is the founding principal of Durant, an alternative U.S. high school, who believed that the original vision of bringing about independent learning in real-life settings in the school would only survive if teachers, parents, and students shared in that vision. He emphasized dialogue and shared decision-making among school stakeholders, and the staff came to believe that they were all part of the administration. Even after the principal had retired, all the teachers and members of the school community continued their resistance of the standardizing district and state policies, holding on dearly to their founding vision by seeking waivers for their distinctive education program.

In contrast, Durant's neighbor, Sheldon High School, was at the time experiencing the full impact of "white flight" to the suburbs and magnet school competitors in the early 1980s. As a result, Sheldon experienced a major shift in its racial balance and intake of students with special needs. Most of the majority European American teaching staff felt frustrated in the face of these changes, and also shut out of crucial school decisions.

As a way of venting their frustrations and leadership impulses, the teachers turned to their union, which grew more assertive. The district in turn responded by appointing several autocratic leaders, who were selected in the hope that they could stand up to the union. The resulting standoff caused the school to become completely unable to respond effectively to its student population. The teachers argued that there was a lack of disciplinary support from the principal's office, and consequently refused to change their own traditional practices.

These two case studies serve to show that sustainable leadership cannot just be the responsibility of one person. The school is a highly complex institution, and no one leader can control everything without assistance (Fullan, 2001). In summary, sustainable leadership is and must be a shared responsibility.

3. Sustainable Leadership Is Socially Just

Another aspect of sustainable leadership is that it aims to benefit all students and schools, and not just a few at the expense of the rest. Sustainable leadership is conscious of the fact that the so-called magnet, lighthouse, and charter schools and their leaders can have an impact on surrounding schools. It is also sensitive privileged communities "poaching" from the local leadership pool. Sustainable leadership therefore recognizes and takes full responsibility for the fact that schools in one way or another affect each other in interlinked webs of mutual influence (Baker & Foote, in press). In this aspect, and in cognizance of the above facts, sustainability is tied to social justice.

Hargreaves and Fink (2006) give an example of Blue Mountain High School, which went to great lengths to ensure that they did not raid all the best teachers, students, and leaders from nearby schools. The schools' leaders, in consultation with the school district and the other high school principals, operated on a quota system, which ensured that they would not draw disproportionately from any one school or age group of teachers in the district. Through this behavior of showing care to other schools, the principal exercised social justice and also avoided inviting envy and resentment from neighboring schools.

In sharp contrast, the one magnet school in the study, Barrett High School, grew at the expense of neighboring schools. The school was founded in the late 1980s to stem the tide of "white flight" out of the city by pursuing higher standards and selective intake of "appropriate" students and teachers from the other schools in the district.

While U.S. News described the school as among the top 150 high schools in the U.S., some of its high-achieving students were actually drawn from a neighboring school. Eventually, the school was plagued by low attendance, high rates of violence, and a creativity-sapping curriculum that robbed teachers of their social mission and professional discretion. In the words of the two researchers, "by concentrating excellence in some specialized pockets, the district created a system of high standards for authentic learning and flexible teaching for the privileged magnet schools and their teachers but introduced 'soulless' standardization in the other schools."

We can therefore conclude that sustainable leadership is not just about maintaining improvement in one's own school, but school leaders who truly care about sustainability should accept responsibility for the schools and students and be aware that their actions have an effect on the wider environment.

4. Sustainable Leadership Is Resourceful

The systems of sustainable leadership provide certain intrinsic rewards while at the same time offering extrinsic incentives that attract, motivate, and retain the best and brightest in the leadership pool. These systems provide time and opportunity for school leaders to network, support, and learn from one another, while at the same time coaching and mentoring their successors. Sustainable leadership is therefore described as "thrifty without being cheap." It carefully utilizes its resources to develop the talents of its educators instead of lavishing rewards on selected proven leaders. The systems of

sustainable leadership take care of leaders while encouraging them to take care of themselves.

However, in the study, demands for reform, resource depletion, and the resulting rush to retire in all schools sampled led to rapid turnover of principals and serious reductions in assistant principals and middle-level leaders such as department heads. Additionally, school districts significantly reduced support from consultants and assistant superintendents, among other officials, leaving principals overwhelmed and alone. The culture of supervision and support of school leaders have mostly been replaced by "depersonalized demands" of test-based accountability.

As a consequence, teachers and administrators feel burned out by excessive demands and reduced resources, and may lack the physical energy or emotional capacity to build professional learning communities (Byrne, 1994). School leaders' emotional health is a scarce but crucial resource. Therefore, education reformers and policymakers may find that they push for short-term gains by mortgaging the entire future of school leadership.

Hargreaves and Fink give the example of Principal Charmaine Watson, who helped build a collaborative learning community at Talisman Park High School, but was suddenly transferred after only three years. She grieved that there was still work to be done. While she took the same inspirational drive and commitment to her next school, she found that in the new context of reduced resources and unrealistic implementation timelines, the system could no longer support collaboration and she was reduced to modeling optimism (Blackmore, 1996). Finally, the emotional strain took its toll and, after several stressful months, she retired early.

Under these reforms, principals in the study escaped to district administration and early retirement, or, in some cases, were even hospitalized under the pressure. In certain situations, they narrowed their role from leadership to management in order to cope. Eventually, leadership is only sustainable when it sustains the leaders themselves.

5. Sustainable Leadership Promotes Diversity

Leaders who promote sustainability cultivate and recreate environments that stimulate continuous improvement on a broad level. They enable people to adapt and prosper in increasingly complex environments by learning from each other's diverse practices (Capra, 1997). Most innovative schools create and promote this diversity. In the study, we find three such schools that have unfortunately regressed under the standardization reform agenda.

An instance of this situation led Durant Alternative School to standardize its teaching and student assessments away from school-developed history courses that previously engaged students of diverse backgrounds. Rather than build on shared school improvement, principals in these innovative schools found themselves having to force through implementation of mandated policies. These once-loved leaders may have attempted to encourage debate on these questionable change agendas, but many teachers still felt that they had sold their schools and souls to the districts and states.

Hargreaves and Fink (2006) state that standardization is the "enemy" of sustainability. Sustainable leadership cultivates and acknowledges many kinds of excellence in teaching, learning, and leading, while providing networks for sharing of these diverse kinds of excellence in cross-fertilizing the processes of school improvement (Louis & Kruse, 1995; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). In conclusion,

sustainable leadership does not in any way impose standardized templates on entire communities.

6. Sustainable Leadership Is Activism

Standardization has increased the problems that traditional schools had. In the Hargreaves and Fink (2006) study, it turned the sampled schools into less-motivated versions of their former selves. Moreover, formerly innovative schools have lost their edge. However, Durant High School has proven resilient not because of its strength or innovativeness as a learning community, but due to its leaders' activism (Oakes, Quartz, & Lipton, 2000). The school engages assertively with its wider environment in a pattern of mutual influence. Over the years, Durant High School's brave new principal has actively utilized his personal and professional networks to forge strategic alliances with the immediate community in a dedicated campaign to ensure that the school's mission is preserved. The principal has written articles for both local and state newspapers, appeared on various radio and TV programs, and joined students and parents who symbolically protested in straitjackets outside the district offices. He has also organized several conferences discussing the adverse effects of high-stakes testing and has worked with his allies throughout the state to push for some sort of group variance from state tests. As a result of his efforts, his school got a temporary exclusion from state policy. Through these occurrences, we see that, in an unhelpful environment, sustainable leadership must include some sort of activism.

7. Systems Must Support Sustainable Leadership

From the examples given above, which were extracted from the study, most inspiring school leaders did more than manage change – they actively pursued and modeled a form of sustainable leadership. The long and short of developing sustainability is the commitment to and protection of deep learning in schools by attempting to ensure that school improvements last over time, especially after the charismatic leaders have left, by distributing leadership and responsibility, by taking into account the impact of their leadership on schools and communities in their neighborhood, by persisting with their vision and avoiding stress and burnout, by promoting and bringing about diverse approaches to school reform instead of standardized prescriptions for teaching and learning, and by activism.

While most school leaders want to achieve goals that matter and inspire others to assist them to accomplish those goals so as to leave a lasting legacy, they are often not responsible for their school's failure, since most of the blame rests with the systems in which they lead. This is why the study suggests that sustainable leadership cannot be left to individuals, irrespective of talent or dedication. Therefore, for us to institute change that matters, spreads, and lasts, we must ensure that the systems in which leaders work must make sustainability a priority.

Past, Present, and Future of Sustainable Leadership

Sustainable leadership builds on the past in a bid to create a better future for schools. This is against most educational change theories, which do not find a place for the past, since the "arrow of change" is thought to move only in a forward direction. Past problems are generally either ignored or overcome in a rush to get to the future (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2004; Goodson, 2001).

Hargreaves (2007) finds that, for those leaders attracted or addicted to change, the past is seen as a repository of regressive and irrational resistance for those whom they consider as favoring the status

quo or emotionally incapable of letting go of old habits and beliefs. These leaders consider the past to be a dark era of weak or poor leadership practices that leave negative legacies, models of schooling, or "uninformed" professional judgment in classroom instruction that gets in the way of modernization (Fullan, 2003).

Hargreaves (2007) is of the opinion that reform based only on the present or future becomes the antithesis of sustainability. Sustainable development has the characteristic of respecting, protecting, preserving, and renewing all the valuable elements of the past and learning from those elements to build a better future. One way of getting in touch with the past is to see teacher resistance and nostalgia among members of the profession not as obstacles to change, but as sources of wisdom (Moore, Goodson, & Hargreaves, 2006). Change theory must strive to build proposals that are built upon past legacies instead of trying to ignore or obliterate them. While contemplating changes, sustainable leadership calls on leaders to look to the past for precedents that might be reinvented, refined, or used as evidence of policies that have succeeded or failed before.

However, the above proposal does not mean that leaders live in the past, but value and learn from it. Abrahamson (2004) calls for an end to what he terms "creative destruction," where leaders see the need to obliterate the past in order to create a future that usually leads to endless back-and-forth movements, increased employee burnout, and the unnecessary waste of expertise and memory that had been accumulated over time. He proposes a creative recombination of the best parts of the past in a craftsman-like manner that is resourceful and renewing.

Through sustainable leadership, leaders should find new structures, technology, and people by finding, redeploying, reusing, and recombining mismatched parts that have been lying around in the school's organizational "basement" (Abrahamson, 2004). Sustainable leadership and improvement is concerned with both the future and the past. It refuses to treat people's knowledge, careers, and experience as disposable waste rather than as valuable and renewable resources. In conclusion, sustainable leadership does not blindly endorse the past, but respects and learns from it.

Four Forms of Forgetting That Affect Sustainable Leadership

The main challenge to educational reform is not to retreat to the past but to build an intelligent relationship that acknowledges its existence, understands its meaning, and learns from it. However, in certain instances, an organization may choose to forget elements of the past. De Holan and Phillips (2004) found that there are four kinds of "organizational forgetting." They categorized these kinds of forgetting based on whether they were intentional or unintentional or whether they applied to long established or recently acquired knowledge. De Holan and Phillips summarized the options for organizational forgetting and their outcomes as follows:

"Some companies forget what they need to know, incurring huge costs in replacing the lost knowledge. Other organizations fail to forget the things that they should and they remain trapped by the past, relying on uncompetitive technologies, dysfunctional corporate cultures, or untenable assumptions about their markets. Successful companies are able to move quickly and adapt to rapidly changing environments by being skilled not only at learning, but also at forgetting." (De Holan & Philips, 2004b)

Dissipation

Dissipation occurs when new knowledge is brought into the organization, but there is no goodwill or ability to make it stick in people's memory to enable the organization to become or remain effective. Dissipation is easily prevented by passing on the new knowledge and sharing it with others. Most charismatic leaders find this a difficult task.

In two of the four innovative schools sampled in the Spencer Foundation, charismatic leadership was employed in their founding periods. However, these charismatic leaders failed to deal well with the psychological turmoil that accompanies succession. This characteristic can be seen in most leaders who refuse to face succession or the ultimate mortality that these succession events anticipate.

Hargreaves (2007) gives two examples of dissipation. The first occurred where the founding principal in one of Canada's most innovative high schools in the 1970s left "shoes that were too big to be filled." She was a calm and guiding leader who helped rebuild the once fractious and fragmented school, only to have all her efforts undone when she was transferred to another school before she could groom a successor. In the second example, the son of a policeman, who brought about an energetic and interactive staffroom culture, was succeeded by a former guidance counselor whose laid-back approach neither blended with nor built on the work of his predecessor. In both cases, new knowledge was never passed on to successors and consequently dissipation occurred.

De Holan and Phillips suggest that it is not only through mentoring or succession that new knowledge is passed; it can also be transmitted when leaders strive to explicitly connect it to people's existing knowledge. In one of the schools in the study, there was an ability to adapt innovations such as computer technology by relating them to the school's long-standing experience and technically creative past.

Degradation

This kind of forgetting occurs when well-established knowledge is lost accidentally (De Holan & Philips, 2004). Knowledge degradation among professionals commonly occurs when there is a high turnover of critical personnel who are unable or unwilling to create collective knowledge that would enable a successful collective action without the professionals' presence or immediate supervision. Frequent leadership succession in periods of less than five years across most of the study schools caused the erasure of organizational memory, or the incapacity of incoming leaders to understand and draw reasonable inferences from it.

High turnover in teaching staff also brings about similar difficulties, mostly in innovative schools, where distinctive goals, practices, and structures keep being reviewed or renewed every time new teachers come and existing ones leave. The sudden downsizing or elimination of "waste" in middle-level management can also cause degradation, since management losses and budget cuts in the school districts, as evident in the Spencer study, reduce the capacity of middle-level managers to support the principals in their running of schools.

Suspension

While most of the organizational forgetting is usually accidental, some of it is quite deliberate and is part of a willful strategy to bring about change and improvement. This is reflective of the earlier statement by De Holan and Phillips (2004b) that organizations need to be skilled not only at learning,

but also at forgetting. Collins and Porras found that one of the factors that leads to long-standing success in business is the capacity of companies to engage in diverse experimentation, know when to keep successful innovations, and know when to "forget" the rest. This is what Peter Drucker calls "organized abandonment" (Drucker, 2001).

According to Drucker, the purpose of this abandonment is to free up resources that are no longer producing results. A good change leader puts everything on trial on a regular basis to check on its viability. Organized abandonment is therefore important in getting rid of practices that reduce effectiveness or impede the introduction of superior ones. However, Drucker argues that abandonment cannot be successful if it is just a vague intention. This is because it is hard to let go of things spontaneously. To effectively practice organized abandonment, there is a need to have regular meetings where tough and focused decisions are made on what to leave behind and free up space for innovation ahead.

There is need for organized abandonment in the educational policy in the U.S. This can be achieved by cutting back on the curriculum, giving exemptions to schools that succeed in using other designs, reducing the load of external accountability, minimizing the impact of external testing on students and their teachers, transferring many of the administrative tasks that burden teachers to other personnel, and improving infrastructure in schools that serve poor communities to make them better suited for student learning (Teachernet, 2005).

While it is easy and desirable to abandon tasks and practices that one never wanted in the first place, research has found that it is harder to let go of those practices that they found comfortable. The Spencer study gives the example of certain Canadian schools, where several mandated policies, such as the demand for meetings in the work-to-rule action and the policy of "destreaming" or "detracking," were removed. Most teachers were delighted, as they felt that the policies had been forcing them into difficult and unfamiliar practices. However, none of the schools and teachers found it easy to abandon practices that they liked and found comfortable. Hargreaves (2007) suggests that, to achieve this, a much more organized, systematic, and focused process is required to make organizational abandonment feasible, deliberate, and desirable.

Purging

It is a good trait to forget, or at least unlearn, some of our poor practices, bad habits, and outdated ways of doing things that do not meet the needs of changing cultures and times, through systematic organizational purging. However, unlearning practices we feel are effective and exchanging them for new ones where our initial competence is low can be uncomfortable. The temptation to cling to the past is normal and understandable.

Eventually, all change brings about loss. When what is lost is comfort and competence, that loss will understandably be mourned, and probably resisted (Marris, 1974). However, Hargreaves finds that some purging of organizational memory is unproductive, especially where the old and experienced are deliberately devalued. According to him, when purging involves teaching literacy, assessment processes and attitudes, communication procedures with parents, or approaches to school administration, there are two core issues that must be considered. First, we have to ask whether the areas for unlearning have been diagnosed correctly, and whether this unlearning is educationally desirable or just politically expedient. Second, we need to find out whether the process of knowledge

conversion is managed in a supportive or a traumatic manner.

There is a need for schools to forget the right things in the right manner. Where the above two core issues are not addressed, school leaders will likely find themselves facing the formidable obstacle of teacher nostalgia, where teachers retreat to the past due to their present feelings of embitterment and exclusion.

Hargreaves gives an example of a group of teachers in one of the Canadian schools, which was the embodiment of bitterness and nostalgia. The members of this "kaffeeklatsch" of older teachers (many of them department heads) regularly met before school in a staffroom corner, where they recalled how the students in the school had changed from being mostly European American students, who had fewer problems and a lot of money. These students apparently came from comfortable homes, were ready and able to learn, and identified with the school's family culture. In sharp contrast, the teachers felt that current students, being more diverse and less affluent, had far too many problems to deal with than earlier generations.

These new students came from single-parent homes, which had problems finding food, clothes, and basic amenities. More students in the school required ESL support, and did not consider the school the social hub of their lives. Other teachers lamented that there were increasing discipline problems, poor work habits, and low concentration levels. Others felt that students' attitudes toward authority had been negatively affected by the lack of parental guidance. An English teacher who had 33 years of teaching experience could not imagine today's students learning the classics such as Shakespeare. A coaching colleague was unhappy that, for the first time in the school's history, they didn't have a senior football team, since there weren't enough students with an athletic background interested in football.

This nostalgia was mostly prompted by teachers' concerns that government reforms were moving too fast (Moore, Goodson, & Hargreaves, 2006). There was also a feeling among teachers that they were being used as scapegoats for the failures in the public system. Other reported opinions were that parents were anxious that their children would not measure up and therefore didn't want to be involved, that education reforms were underfunded, teachers lacked control over students, reforms didn't help students, the entire reform process was too "mechanical," and that there were too many unanswered questions in education reform.

Hargreaves states that all nostalgia is a recollection of the past that becomes infected by an embittered experience of an unpleasant present. The nostalgia that teachers have for professional autonomy and lost missions is characterized by a backdrop of contemporary reform calls against narrowed school vision, standardization of education, and lost autonomy. There is also nostalgia for European American students, who wanted to learn in what Hargreaves refers to as a "more professionally intimate" environment, which sharply contrasts with the contemporary classroom characterized by growing racial diversity, increasing numbers of poor students, and a wide range of students with special educational needs.

Hargreaves is of the opinion that the reason large-scale educational reform often fails is because it dismisses nostalgia or derogation of teachers' professional pasts. While the dismissal of nostalgia may appeal to public opinion and prejudice, it alienates the profession and dismisses the missions it holds dear. Anti-nostalgia is ethically contentious and strategically problematic since it amplifies the widespread resistance to change, and worsens entrenched and embittered nostalgia among older

teachers who feel that change blocks their efficiency. As a reaction, the experienced teachers seek refuge from the present by romancing the past.

The emphasis of reform should be for the experienced teachers to improve their practices. Purging and other acts of forced forgetting have the impact of throwing educators back into the false memory of defensive nostalgia, which leads to the wasting of the teachers' wisdom as professional elders and makes them demoralized and disgruntled.

Renewing the Past

Overconfident reformers are always prone to dismiss the past, forgetting that the targets of reform are always inclined to romanticize it. While present-day change addicts are trapped in what Hagreaves (2007) calls a "narcotic bubble" that insulates them from romanticism of the past, the challenge that confronts most leaders is creating a more successful and sustainable future. Leaders therefore need to acknowledge the past, and preserve it and learn from it where possible. However, while we should engage with the past, we should not retreat to it. In addition, it is prudent to remember the past but avoid distorting it through nostalgia or anti-nostalgia.

The past remains a subject for intelligent and not blind endorsement. It should be understood and connected to change in the future through "coherent life narratives." It should serve as a motivator and not a museum. In the words of the great English romantic poet William Wordsworth, "let us learn from the past, to profit the present, and from the present to live better in the future." Sustainable leadership therefore needs both a rear-view mirror and a windshield. Without the mirror, it is possible that things will keep overtaking us. While the past can be a point of pride and something to be honored, it can be a painful one marked by conflict, grievances, and mistreatment, which in this case means that it has to be healed to avoid repeating mistakes. This affliction of repetitive change has been the downfall of many leaders and their policies.

Through sustainable leadership, societies can pass knowledge from one generation to another by effectively managing succession and by distributing this responsibility widely. Hargreaves states that the past is part of our future. Prosperity for all seems to be a proper goal, but we must ensure that it is not achieved at too great a cost. Instead, sustainability and survival must be our main priorities. Standardization policies and target-driven competitiveness can do nothing to bring about sustainability in the long run. This knowledge and information society should be structured in such a way that it can coexist with a strong and supportive welfare state. In Hargreaves' (2007) words, "the lion can lie down with the lamb." Should prosperity and security also co-exist side by side? Hargreaves gives a fitting summary:

"The last two decades have been dominated by 'Anglo-Saxon' strategies of soulless standardization, measurement-driven improvement and forceful intervention that have incurred only widespread poverty and inequity as well as other social waste. It is time for other more sustainable sensibilities to take their place and the climate is certainly ready for it."

Summary

Leaders develop sustainability through their approach, commitment to, and protection of deep learning in their schools. It is also determined by how they sustain themselves and those around them to promote and support deep learning, how they are able to sustain themselves in this endeavor in a way

that ensures they persist with their vision and avoid burnout, how they ensure that the improvements they bring last over time, especially after their departure, how considerate they are of the impact their leadership has on schools around them, how they encourage and perpetuate diversity rather than standardized teaching and learning in their schools, and, finally, how they engage with their environments through activism.

It is a common trait that most school leaders want to do things that matter, inspire others to join them in their vision, and leave a lasting legacy. As earlier stated, in most cases, it is not leaders who let their schools down, but the systems through which they lead. Sustainable leadership therefore calls for a collective effort from all leaders and stakeholders in the school. Additionally, if change is to mature, spread, or last, sustainable leadership must be a fundamental priority of the education systems in which school leaders work.

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Sustainable Leadership: Creating Foundations for Lasting Change,