

Sustainable Schooling for a Global Age

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The very survival of the human community depends on how we think today about progress and success. All major problems of our times, such as climate change, migration, water, etc., are not separate issues, but rather connected to the way we live, work and respond to changing conditions. *Sustainability* has emerged over recent decades as a promising mindset and way of living where the human community continues its forward development. Finland's plans for the future are grounded in the assumption that the sustainability of education co-exists with the health and vitality of its national agency, business, and government systems (Halinen, 2017). Hence, in pursuit of "the good life", all Finns are challenged with building the future of society and promoting sustainability through knowledge and skills, and by supporting initiatives towards equity and equality in all parts of national life. Living and working has become so complex that it can only be understood systemically; everything is interconnected (Capra, 2014, 2016).

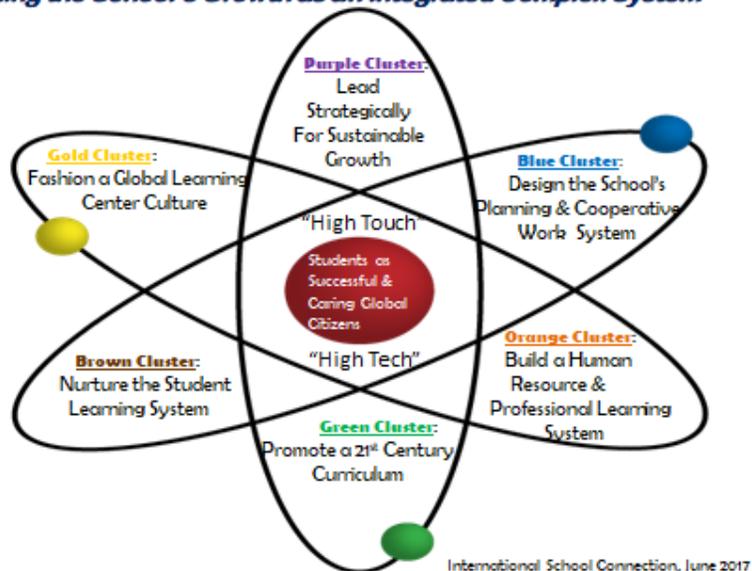
Schooling in the 21st century is necessarily linked to the problems and opportunities we face today, and to each community and nation's future and its role in the global community. Sustainability for the future, then, is the challenge for every family, agency, business, and community, requiring all systems to become more integrated and interdependent than ever. Pursuing the values in "Sustainability" as a concept, will require us to adopt *systems thinking* as a way of life, where everything is seen as interrelated and interdependent (Snyder & Anderson, 1986).

Based on a previous 17 year history, the International School Connection (ISC) has created a new model for school development that integrates its former focus on the school as a Global Learning Center into one that is a more holistic approach to sustainable school development. The new ISC Model of Sustainable Schooling below is grounded in *systems thinking* using the image of an atom, in which six clusters thrive interdependently, and move around the nucleus bound by natural forces that are dependent upon its environment (Snyder, et. al., 2008). *Sustainability is defined here as the growth of a living system as it responds to changing conditions.* Creating sustainable conditions for learning requires a departure from isolation in any form, which assumes a fundamental shift toward *systems thinking*. Achieving sustainable forms of schooling requires *systems thinking* on the part of leaders and professional educators (Snyder & Anderson, 1986). This is not some sort of magic, but rather the way healthy families naturally live, as well as how forests, oceans, and communities thrive. By building *systems thinking* into the school's growth process, energy emerges from within to promote momentum for responding to continuously changing context of work.

During the first 17 year era of the ISC, Corbett Prep explored many features of becoming a Global Learning Center, while its Headmaster, Joyce Swarzman, served on the international ISC Board of Directors. Now, with many years of providing state-of-the-art instructional programs, which include global learning, maturity has given the school's educators a greater understanding and commitment to preparing all students for success in a global era of living and working. During the fall 2016 many former ISC international leaders spontaneously began to visit Corbett Prep, a K-8 Private School in Tampa FL, to learn about its continuous development journey as a school, for its success was spreading to international communities. Eventually conversations clustered around the idea of a new era for the ISC that would build upon what has been learned and also on what now exists at *the Flagship School of the New ISC: Corbett Preparatory School at IDS*. The core leadership team for this new era (Joyce Swarzman, John Fitzgerald, Elaine Sullivan and Karolyn Snyder) is committed to working with school leaders and teachers around the world to provide them with a knowledge base, diagnostic and dialogue tools, practices, and processes that are both systemic and sustainable over time. In addition, a global network will be generated that connects schools with each other to foster an understanding of and commitment to addressing global conditions, challenges and opportunities.

A school leadership training program that was created a decade ago and offered in the Pasco County School District in Florida, will become available digitally in the New ISC for school leaders: Leadership for Sustainable School Development (LSSD). Two modules of training will be offered in each of the following areas: 1) systemic and sustainable school development, 2) gathering information for setting goals, 3) organizing a dynamic work system, 4) designing a vibrant learning system, and 5) leadership accountability. The LSSD design supports the new ISC Sustainable Schooling Model below, and offers knowledge bases, skills, processes, and more to enable school leaders to strengthen their capacity to lead strategically and with passion toward a sustainable future for the school's professionals and students.

Sustainable Schooling for a Global Age: *Leading the School's Growth as an Integrated Complex System*



The new *ISC Model of Sustainable Schooling* that is featured in this paper includes six clusters of work that function interdependently and pass continuously through the core for energy: *Preparing students as successful and caring global citizens during the schooling years.* All other work systems of the school function to support teachers as they nurture and develop the capacity of all students for sustainable living. The six interdependent clusters of school work in this model include: 1) Strategic Leadership, 2) Cooperative Planning and Work Systems, 3) Human Resource and Professional Learning Systems, 4) 21st Century Curriculum, 5) Student Learning Systems, and 6) Global Learning Culture.

Purple Cluster: Strategic Leadership

The essential leadership challenge is to continuously identify changes and opportunities in the school's external and internal environments, and to understand their impact for the school's development. Recognizing existing practices that are responsive to needs is also a vital leadership function. To move ahead strategically, strong leaders tend to identify leverage points in the school's culture that have promise for a productive response to maintaining that which works, and finding responses with promise for areas of change in knowledge about learning and about emerging conditions for the school. Leaders who promote healthy and vibrant work cultures for addressing the new challenges do so with intention, purpose, passion and energy that is vital for the school's forward journey. Major strategic leadership challenges include: 1) a leader's own vision for the school's development, 2) a strategy for school community members to gather information for living strategically, 3) designing and facilitating a healthy cooperative work system, 4) promoting a high performing organizational energy system, and 5) leading the school's continuous development process toward a school vision that is shaped over time with the school community (Snyder, et. al., 2008). The actual work of the other five clusters in the Sustainable Schooling Model involves many staff members

playing leadership roles for the growing complexity of school life that evolves over the years. Understanding the changing conditions of the school, and facilitating the continuous dance of improvement is the strategic leadership opportunity and challenge.

Blue Cluster: Cooperative Planning and Work System

To promote a robust school and learning community work culture, school leaders, professional educators, staff, and parent volunteers pursue a focused direction for the school's development. A vision is identified and reviewed each year about the school's future and its mission and commitment to students and the community. Typically, a new set of development goals is confirmed each year to provide the pathway forward. Information becomes the life blood of the organization as it is gathered by different teams to examine changes, shifts, new knowledge, and opportunities, forming the bedrock for making decisions about new school goals. After goals are set, each work team identifies improvement targets that connect with school priorities, as well as for its own team needs. As work unfolds, progress is continuously assessed by each work team, due to the rapidly changing environment of schools. Working together within and across programs and services becomes a new norm for responding quickly and appropriately to changing conditions (Snyder & Anderson, 1986). The integration of work teams is now the norm for Corbett Prep, where everyone strives to be exceptional for the common good.

Orange Cluster: Human Resources and Professional Learning Systems

The energy of a school is reflected in its flexibility, creativity, and learning capacity that reside in communities of practice (Capra, 2014, p318). New knowledge increases flexibility and responsiveness to demands, for it empowers workers at all levels to function with confidence and skill. A sustainable school is built over time on two basic principles: 1) by employing people who strengthen the school's work culture, and 2) by developing its professional staff continuously with new knowledge, values and skills for sustaining the school's development journey. Eventually the whole school transforms into a learning community, where everyone is engaged in development activity, forming a network of relationships. In the most highly developed schools, professional learning is continuous and occurs in workshops, study groups, conferences, coaching, on-the-job learning, and eventually the staff begins training professionals in other schools. Cooperative work systems generate the energy for a school's growth and responsiveness. It is this professional energy system that generates sustainable conditions for growth over time. A high performance culture emerges because of its continuous attention to professional learning, which at Corbett Prep is called an Olympic Mentality.

At Corbett Prep, teachers use knowledge and skills continuously from the M.O.R.E Approach (*Multiple Options for Results in Education*, Joyce Swarzman) www.corbettprep.com. Excitement and involvement in all aspects of student life in school is promoted with strategies from cooperative learning, high-level critical thinking, multiple intelligences, integrated curriculum, brain-based research, international perspectives, with an emphasis on character and community service. Seven features of professional life in the M.O.R.E. model include: 1) a

child-centered vision, 2) appreciating the uniqueness of the learner, 3) motivational strategies to increase time-on-task, 4) creating dignity and respect, 5) teacher presence, making connections, 6) learning community organization, and 7) curriculum development. Schools in Spain and in China have now been trained in the M.O.R.E. Approach. Many international visits and exchanges occur each year with Corbett Prep and among M.O.R.E. schools. *The M.O.R.E. training programs will be offered in the new ISC to educators for their primary instructional leadership challenges.*

Green Cluster: 21st Century Curriculum

Developing the human capacity to succeed in a digital and global age of living requires more than the isolated academic curriculum from the past. Not only is an academic curriculum required with rapidly changing knowledge bases and skills, but so are the arts, humanities and physical skills, as well as social and emotional capacities. Education for sustainable living exists where multiple knowledge bases inform the complex challenges of our time (Capra, 2016).

Many countries have taken steps towards more interdisciplinary studies and integrated curriculum. For instance, Finland has included in the national core curriculum for basic education (grades 1-9) the idea of multidisciplinary learning modules, which are offered now once a year. The main purpose is to create opportunities for students to be active learners, study phenomena and problems of the real world, and to understand the relationships and interdependencies between the phenomena. Multidisciplinary learning modules help students to link knowledge and skills of different disciplines, and in interaction with others, to structure them as meaningful entities. Students learn to apply their knowledge. Working within these modules produces experiences of inspiring project work, communal knowledge building and creative problem solving.

Corbett Prep offers a complex approach to curriculum, where the academics are offered for both content understanding and addressing major challenges, along with the arts and physical education plus social/emotional learning. The academic curriculum is based on concepts and knowledge bases for depth of understanding, and on an integrated curriculum for breadth of understanding to address complex challenges and problems. Students need a good balance of these two approaches to academic curriculum. Corbett Prep's curriculum (www.corbettprep.com) includes strong programs in music, drama, the arts, physical education and sports, which are in abundance for all students. In recent years a Community School of the Arts, and a Community School for Sports has been added, which includes students from the school's larger community. A more recent curriculum is being piloted for Yale University's Center for Emotional Intelligence where students learn daily how to recognize and adjust their own responses to social and emotional challenges, and also develop skills for responding to those same challenges in others (www.corbettprep.com).

Brown Cluster: Student Learning System

To foster successful academic, artistic, physical, and social-emotional growth, the learning community organization plays a vital role. In this context, teachers and other adult

specialists work together cooperatively, while students learn together in teams, at times alone, and often in multi-aged groups. Teachers create a vision and goals for growth in the learning community, as well as guidelines for living and working together. An additional pattern found in the best schools today is students working in groups on projects and preparing portfolios of their work, which often results in making presentations at local, national, and even international venues and competitions (Snyder, et al, 2008). Living within a learning community provides a healthy context for everyone to develop sustainable life skills. Student leaders naturally emerge and are prepared for leadership roles in their learning community and school. Within this context for learning and living, energy emerges for everyone to “raise the bar” continuously.

A characteristic of Corbett Prep that is noticeable to every visitor and parent is its positive environment, combined with adherence to the principles of “dignity and respect”. This orientation impacts the learning community and student performance, generating a positive student self-image and the personal power to succeed and master learning and living. A respect for each child’s contributions becomes the overall *thanks* that permeates the school and becomes a way of life for all who work and learn together. This is the magic that emerges with an orientation to nurturing development, as well as to clarity of purpose. Negative behaviors and attitudes are addressed by building accountability within each student for his or her own behavior. Leading and teaching in a culture of celebration generates the glue for daily living, and becomes a joyful theme throughout the school.

Gold Cluster: Global Learning Culture

Given the requirements for successful living and working today, learning about global conditions, and people who live in other cultures and time zones, is a relatively new opportunity that the digital environment makes possible (Snyder, Acker-Hocevar, Snyder, 2008). Technology is now a part of the human exchange system in schools, where the dynamics are different from face-to-face communication, and require learning and review over time. We observe teachers identifying global trends and challenges, and searching for connections with people and schools in other parts of the world. Kristen Snyder wrote about the *digital culture* that emerged from her research on international school partnerships in the ISC (2005, 2007). She observed that four features of school life promote a *digital culture* in schools, which become the bedrock for global learning: the interaction and interdependence of digital communication systems, organizational support systems, knowledge development, and technology. In the act of communication through technology, social dynamics and individual emotions are impacted, highlighting new areas of school life to examine and enrich.

Eventually students come to participate in a wide range of international learning opportunities, such as partnerships with schools where they share a common language, school visits in other countries, hosting students and teachers from abroad, and forming partnerships with local businesses that are global in order to begin developing an understanding of international work. Teachers also find ways to become stronger global citizens through school partnerships, seminars, and summits, forming personal international friendships, and even teaching professionals in other countries various new programs of learning, as is the case at

Corbett Prep. Over time, this school has attracted for its staff professionals from all parts of the globe who provide a daily context for learning about other cultures and ways of viewing the world today.

To foster a school's movement towards global learning, the ISC developed with its global community a set of ten benchmarks for becoming *a global learning center (GLC)* (John Fitzgerald, Elaine Sullivan, Joyce Swarzman, and Karolyn Snyder (Snyder, et. al, 2008). The Benchmarks are divided into two groups: 1) Learning about the global environment, and 2) Preparing for success in the global environment. The GLC benchmarks can function as a guide for school leaders and teachers as they prepare students for successful living in this global age. We have also developed a system for schools to become certified as a *Global Learning Center School*. Leaders in many schools are now inventing novel ways to connect their students routinely with people and events around the world. *A training program for becoming a Global Learning Center School will be offered as a service in the new ISC.*

Summary

The good news is that professional educators can develop capacities to think and live systemically over time in order to sustain their school's development in this complex digital and global age. Systems thinking can transform the culture of work, and generate naturally the energy required for excellence from everyone. The six-clusters in the ISC Sustainable Schooling Model function as a way of thinking about and leading a school into a sustainable future. ISC training programs in L.S.S.D. (School Development), M.O.R.E (Instructional Leadership), and G.L.C. (Global Learning) can enhance the capacity of school leaders and their teachers to become systems thinkers that build sustainable schools and learning communities. The ISC is beginning to build a global network of cooperating schools, which promises to enhance a greater understanding of the human community and its rich resources for sustainable development and living.

Time is an important variable in a school's growth, for learning how to think about the integration and interdependence of everything requires persistence as outdated practices and mindsets are shed. In time new cultures of work emerge as the school learns from continuous feedback on all its systems. Finland has worked for 40 years to develop its basic education system, having taken small but important steps towards integrative teaching and learning while the basic academic curriculum continues to provide the foundation for all students. Multidisciplinary learning modules offer excellent opportunities for project-based and exploratory learning, and for collaboration. Corbett Prep has been evolving for over 20 years to become the global beacon it is today, modeling all six of the Sustainable Schooling clusters in the ISC Model. A high performing culture of work is now the norm at Corbett Prep, for many school professionals are assuming new leadership responsibilities for the school's increasingly complex system of learning programs. Schools everywhere can become over time

beacons of hope and promise for students, given leadership that understands systems thinking, and is committed to nurturing a sustainable way of life for teachers and their students.

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