

The Formation of Educational Entrepreneurs through Doctoral Programs in Mexico and California

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Abstract: Centralization and control of education can stifle initiative, prevent problem solving, and result in low student achievement. Nonetheless, many countries maintain centralized control of education and grant little autonomy to school directors to help them face the daily challenges of administrative problems or the more profound issue of parents who have little voice in their own education or the education of their children. School directors need autonomy to become educational entrepreneurs who take initiative and involve local constituencies. Woods and Woods' (2009) define four types of entrepreneurialism. Business entrepreneurialism is intended to achieve a competitive advantage. Social entrepreneurialism reduces deprivation and social exclusion. Public entrepreneurialism promotes a democratic vision for the good of the community. Cultural entrepreneurialism establishes meaning in the school. The paper examined two doctoral programs in educational leadership programs that intend to promote entrepreneurship. The program orientation, pedagogy, and outcomes associated with a doctoral program in California and a doctoral program in Mexico aimed to develop educational entrepreneurs. The founding of these two programs is described along with an analysis of a course in each program that attempts to develop the entrepreneurial skills of leadership. In their courses, students conducted oral history projects and analyses of leadership that were connected to a real school context. They were able to practice entrepreneurial skills and develop field projects to fulfill the requirements of research and school improvement. This conceptualization of the practice of leadership goes beyond the academic skills of information gathering and research. It includes entrepreneurial skills to help leaders advocate for all stakeholders. Experiences that have the potential to develop entrepreneurship can take students to new areas and ask them to step back and think in different ways.

Keywords: Entrepreneur, educational leadership, international, doctoral program

The term entrepreneur is usually associated with business as a person who envisions a new enterprise and takes the risks to make it happen. Lately the term has been used in education to describe a principal who is able to garner resources for a school or a superintendent who creates partnerships with the community. The meaning has gone beyond the financial sense and can describe a practitioner who will exert leadership to advocate for

those who are marginalized and have little voice in their own education or the education of their children.

A necessary condition of entrepreneurship is autonomy that allows flexibility to meet local conditions. This importance of context can be traced to the ideas of John Dewey. He advocated the kind of local control that would make it possible for a school director to take initiative to address school problems. He not only expressed these ideas in relation to education in the US, but also in China, Japan, Mexico, Russia, and Turkey. Turan (2000) reported Dewey's recommendations for education in Turkey in 1926:

Dewey warned about the danger of centralization and the removal of local control in education. He pointed out that centralized systems can "prevent local communities taking the responsibilities which they should take; and produce too uniform a system of education, not flexibly adapted to the varying needs of different localities"... (Turan, 2000, p.551; Dewey, 1926).

Despite these recommendations, the centralization of control of education continues to be common in both developed and developing nations. Yet school directors face conditions that require them to act as entrepreneurs. Author (2002) reported that school leaders in Mexico were called upon to do much more than occupy a position. They had to become entrepreneurs to garner resources necessary for their schools. One new director arrived at her school site in a rural area only to discover that there was no building. Her first task was to organize parents to build the school. Another director had to construct a fence around the playground to protect children from highway traffic. In an urban school near an airport, the school director worked with parents to raise funds and construct a cover over the play area to allow adequate shade for the physical education program. Another director went on a protest march with parents to draw attention to the school's need for better bathroom facilities (Author, 2008).

The actions of these Mexican school directors can be understood in terms of Woods and Woods' (2009) four types of entrepreneurialism. Business entrepreneurialism is intended to achieve a competitive advantage. Social entrepreneurialism reduces deprivation and social exclusion. Public entrepreneurialism promotes a democratic vision for the good of the community. Cultural entrepreneurialism establishes meaning in the school. We will explore further each type of entrepreneurialism.

Business Entrepreneurialism

Business entrepreneurialism refers to overcoming lack resources. The shortage of funding reported above is not only a problem in Mexico; California faces its worst financial crisis in history with budget shortfalls in the billions of dollars. An elementary principal in Southern California makes it a practice to ask parents to supply Kleenex and writing paper for students. She culls through the parent emergency notification cards to find work addresses of businesses that meet be partners with school. She recruits Hollywood production firms to use her school as a staging area. The money she collects goes into a gift account that cannot be accessed by anyone outside of the school. She has also learned to spend fast whatever public funds she receives lest they be swept away when needed by the district.

The statewide budget reductions are having other effects on schools throughout the state. An urban middle school in southern California was making progress to move out of Program Improvement (PI) status. A dynamic principal and a young staff were making steady gains in student achievement in mathematics and language arts. This year's budget reductions resulted in layoff notices to 15 of 36 teachers. Maintaining progress with new teachers from other schools will require entrepreneurial skills to attract and keep teachers. Rice (2010) reviewed principal effectiveness studies and concluded that the quality of leadership can determine teacher satisfaction as well as their decisions about where to work and whether to stay.

Ouchi (2003) studied urban school districts in the US and Canada to determine which ones were successful and why. He found a correlation between the degree of autonomy granted to principals and the achievement of students. The range of budget control for schools was dramatic from 6.1% in New York to 91.7% in Edmonton. His first key to success for the principal was to be an entrepreneur.

Social Entrepreneurialism

Business entrepreneurialism is a familiar category but social entrepreneurialism goes beyond the everyday uses of the term. It refers reduction of depravation. An entrepreneur can be someone who takes risks to experiment and establish new ways of doing things to address issues of social justice.

Dillard (1995) argued that concern, care, and advocacy are necessary to improve the conditions of the urban poor. They are grounded in personal history of the leader. Leadership is transformational work that moves beyond what Sergiovanni (2000) called the *systemsworld* and toward the *lifeworld*.

Public Entrepreneurialism

Public entrepreneurialism is the promotion of a democratic vision for the school. Webber and Scott (2008) described entrepreneurial aspects of boundary-breaking leadership such as innovative leadership that can create short and long-term opportunities for learning that make a difference for school communities. This includes the creation of financial resources but it is not limited to them. The primary purpose is educational. They described high quality and sustainable initiatives on the part of both the instructor and students. Besides innovative behavior, the other entrepreneurial dimensions include networking, a time-space communication framework, local-global perspective, the conception of educational organizations as knowledge centers, and an integration of face-to-face and Internet learning.

At this point principals may wonder if they qualify as entrepreneurs. After all, many good administrators are also conservative managers who protect the interest of their school and its parents, teachers, and students. However, boundary breaking entrepreneurship does not necessarily mean taking big risks. Gladwell (2010) offered a caution when he reported a study of successful entrepreneurs by Michel Villette and Catherine Vuillermot (2010). They found that successful business entrepreneurs tended to minimize risk and find advantageous situations where they were highly likely to succeed. The authors even used the term *predator* to describe the entrepreneurial behavior of taking advantage of weak prey. The term predator is a bit extreme, particularly for schools, but the language of the hunt describes the clever determination of the entrepreneur who seeks resources.

In the field of educational leadership, Pozner (2000) argued for both action and recognition of complexity:

Leadership...does not maintain the status quo, resignation, or high levels of complacency. On the contrary, it is the dimension of strategic educational management that assumes that undertaking changes requires collective identification of problems and planning, recognition of conflicts, (and) an evaluation of context and values to realize socially useful results (p.18).

This combination of action and reflection is meant to develop leaders who will promote a vision focused on teaching and learning and encourage innovation through teamwork.

Cultural Entrepreneurialism

Cultural entrepreneurialism has to do with the establishment of meaning. A local-global perspective implies both attention to diversity and the personal context of the leader. Riehl (2000) reviewed literature that described leaders who fostered new meanings about diversity, promoted inclusive school cultures, and built relationships between schools and communities. She understood organizations as social constructions with multiple constituencies that must understand and embrace any change that is going to take hold. Meaning making is the central dynamic of a social organization. The principal can engage people in democratic discourse to affect their conceptions. The discourse is open, respectful, and carried out through dialogue. The experience can be transformational, but it is often elusive. Many schools strive to become a Professional Learning Community (PLC) but many achieve it in name only.

An educational entrepreneur, then, is a practitioner who takes action to advocate for those who are marginalized, recognizes complexity, and takes intelligent risks. Is there any way that educational leadership programs can develop entrepreneurs who will obtain financial resources for their schools and take risks to become social entrepreneurs who will advocate for those most in need in their schools?

This paper will look at two educational leadership programs that intend to promote this type of entrepreneurship. We will consider the program orientation, pedagogy, and outcomes associated with a doctoral program in California and a doctoral program in Mexico that are working to develop educational entrepreneurs. We will describe the founding of these two programs and then examine a course in each program that attempts to develop the entrepreneurial skills of leadership.

According to the program descriptions, the doctoral programs at California State University Long Beach (CSULB) and the Universidad del Valle Mexico Hermosillo (UVM) focus on the development of entrepreneurial skills and attitudes and the ability to advocate for all stakeholders. The intent is for leaders to utilize the knowledge and tools necessary to create and sustain vibrant educational environments. They plan and conduct research and evaluation studies to improve educational

lives of others and make recommendations to improve future educational practices. These goals are carried out in a variety of courses. We will examine one course from each program that is organized with similar content: Organizational Culture and Community Engagement at California State University Long Beach (CSULB) and *Dirección y Liderazgo en la Educación* at *La Universidad del Valle de México (UVM)*.

California State University Long Beach (CSULB)

The California State University system launched its first independent doctoral programs in education following Senate Bill 724 in 2007. There has been a long running debate between a research oriented doctorate versus a doctorate grounded in practice. The Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate has advocated a redesign of the research doctorate (PhD) and has suggested the professional practice doctorate (P.P.D.) as a replacement of the Ed.D.

The intent of the P.P.D. is to create a type of training unique to the needs of the educational practitioner. Shulman (2005) referred to signature pedagogies that, “form habits of the mind, habits of the heart, and habits of the hand...they prefigure the cultures of professional work and provide the early socialization into the practices and values of a field” (p.59). Olson and Clark (2009) proposed leader-scholar communities as a signature pedagogy that would “bridge the gap between what is learned at the university and what is practiced in schools” (p.216).

One of the courses at CSULB is Organizational Culture and Community Engagement. The graduate students are also teachers or administrators in the public schools. In the CSULB course students examined their leadership in their own school context. Students learned about each other and networked in several ways. They gave tours of their schools either on-site or virtually. Comments about the everyday running of the school and examination of documents and facilities revealed aspects of the culture.

The major project of the course was an oral history that was intended to give voice to a constituency in the public school (*See*: Angrosino, 2008; Yow, 2005). One student who was also a teacher in a charter school interviewed the founder of the school to understand his motivation and vision. A supervisor of principals wanted to know how support for new principals changed over time. She conducted interviews with principals who started their careers in different eras.

A student I will call Jennifer was a principal in an urban school that was making steady progress toward improved behavior and student achievement. She described the changes that were transforming the school:

Student behavior was the first priority for change. The campus was plagued by several fights each day and many active gangs...students wore baggy white Ts and oversized blue Dickies, popular among the gangs in the neighborhood. After two months, feeling at the edge of survival, the semester ended. Behavior standards were developed by the staff and introduced when students came back from winter break, January 2006. Teachers cite the beginning of behavior standards and consequences for misbehavior as one of the key positive changes in the culture at Washington. Changes also included adding after school detentions (ASD) and on campus suspension (OCS) for students who were not following the expected standards of behavior. Students who fought on campus were now cited by the police. Students were given clear expectations for behavior, rewards for maintaining behavior, and consistent consequences. Over the next three years the leadership team worked to change the structure and culture of the school to be more inclusive of teachers and other staff members. The new leadership team sought to empower teachers and make the school culture more teacher-centered than administrator-centered. This was accomplished by creating a site-based decision making team (SDM) with teacher department heads and by having teachers run the grade level meetings, with administration to observe and help when needed. The new leadership team made up of the principal, three assistant principals, one counselor, facilitator, two curriculum coaches, and school secretary. Weekly meetings with an open agenda enabled everyone to have a voice and issues to be resolved quickly or discussed and tabled for the next week. Many of the previous administrators and counselors were not in favor of putting teachers in leadership roles, and they chose to transfer from Washington. ... (Later the school test scores increased)... The staff was ecstatic, feeling that the work on behavior and instruction was finally paying off. The good scores validated the hard work of the staff. They felt they had turned the corner on improvement and could continue the program and sustain the gains. (Still later)...the staff got confirmation that tests scores had increased again.

This principal demonstrated social entrepreneurial behavior through her advocacy and commitment to a marginalized part of the larger community. She showed public entrepreneurial behavior through the establishment of firm and consistent rules for discipline. She showed respect for teachers and created a democratic environment to gain their active participation. Together these activities helped to define a new culture for the school (cultural entrepreneurialism). She was also effective in gaining resources for the school, but not so effective that she could prevent the effects of massive state-wide budget reductions.

La Universidad del Valle de México (UVM)

In August of 2005, the *Universidad del Valle de México* initiated a Doctorate in Planning and Educational Leadership with three areas of emphasis: teaching, planning and leadership. The goal was to form professionals capable of directing processes of innovation in educational institutions throughout the region and to contribute to the development of administration through research. The model of instruction was based a hybrid of on-line as well as in-class activities.

One of the courses at UVM was *Dirección y Liderazgo en la Educación*. Students began with an examination of their own leadership. Then they completed the Leadership Practices Inventory (Kouzes & Posner, 2002) and compared their results to those in other countries (Slater, 2002).

They wrote both a biography of a leader whom they admired and an autobiography tracing their own leadership development. They used Gardner's (1995) concept of story, embodiment, audience, and institutionalization. They determined if the leader was inclusive or exclusive and whether the leadership was direct or indirect. Students tended to choose bigger than life characters such as Gandhi, Benito Juarez, Martin Luther King, Jose Vasconcelos, Abraham Lincoln, or Mother Teresa who embody characteristics of leadership such as commitment to justice and an ennobling vision. Invariably, these selections elicited thoughts about values and about what was most important in leadership. They began to compare themselves with their admired leader.

Students continued to struggle with leadership issues in their autobiographies. In the following excerpt, a student I will call Enrique was frank about the challenges that he faced as a school director.

I faced the onslaughts that emerged from the union and official leadership... finally they managed to agree to significant advances in labor, social, and academic aspects for the benefit of the educational system... I am proud of these accomplishments. I established academic guidelines that created an opening, in an educational system burdened by centralized politics, but with teachers committed to doing well. Educational institutions are composed of people who signify the potential to change each other in positive ways. If we are not eager to better ourselves, then we are destined for mediocrity. This has been my vision as part of team of work. Experiences that remind us that the experiences of our students, parents and co-workers are similar to what we have experienced. The past accompanies us to direct the present and visualize the future. Through innovation we can obtain new educational perspectives. Leadership addresses the tasks of management. Nevertheless, if we are not channeled toward common goals, we

become easy prey to the diatribe that generates conflict far from the common good. Some would use force to achieve their desires when persuasion fails. My experience upon becoming a school director has been to create conditions to bring about adequate and sufficient education and sustain an institutional vision that involves everyone in taking part in the framing of educational goals.

This school director was particularly strong in developing public and cultural entrepreneurship. He involved faculty in the work of the school to create a common vision. He protected his school from outside forces that would derail the attention to students.

Conclusion

These courses have the potential to help students recognize diversity and develop entrepreneurial skills. Jennifer and Enrique may have had these skills before they took the courses, but they were able to reflect on their progress and the kind of steps they were taking to advance the mission of their schools. Other students could follow their work, offer critiques, and consider the extent to which they wanted or would be able to emulate their entrepreneurial approach.

The oral history projects and the leadership analysis were connected to a real school context. In the rest of the doctoral program, these students could practice entrepreneurial skills and develop field projects that would fulfill the requirements of research and school improvement.

This conceptualization of the practice of leadership goes beyond the academic skills of information gathering and research. It includes entrepreneurial skills to help leaders advocate for all stakeholders. Experiences that have the potential to develop entrepreneurship can take students to new areas and ask them to step back and think in different ways.

Robertson and Webber (2002) advocated for this type of approach when they developed the boundary-breaking leadership model based on their international experience with electronic discussions, travel-study exchange programs for educators, and a leadership institute. Participants were able to move beyond self, develop a sense of agency, and gain greater perspective. The type of leadership could be promoted through professional networks, cross-role dialogue, and international experiences to see local-global connections. The design would include the use of technology, involvement of participants in planning, and development of a sense of community.

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