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Interdisciplinary Leadership in the Americas: Vision, Risk, and Change

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There is a growing consensus among educators that the design and structure of education must change fundamentally if the United States is to compete successfully in a global community. The new structure should allow innovation and futuristic thinking in a collaborative setting, as well as prepare leaders to meet the international challenges of tomorrow. This article examines a new approach using collaborative arrangements at the international level among an interdisciplinary group of professionals from education, law enforcement and the military in Central America. These international collaborative arrangements promote vision, risk, and change. They seek to sharpen the focus on instructional leadership and represent an opportunity for universities and other institutions to initiate significant change during the next century of dynamic and complex interaction.

Introduction

For more than 350 years, the hallmark of education in America has been local and state control (Campbell, Cunningham, Nystrand, & Usdan, 1990). In the past few years, however, the number of nation-wide initiatives to improve education has increased dramatically. The most recent initiative, the Goals 2000: Educate America Act (1994), reflects a growing national consensus that the structure of American education must change fundamentally if the United States is to compete successfully in a global community.

Americans, at all levels, have had great faith in the power of education to improve the quality of life. We look to education as an escape route from poverty, an antidote to intolerance born of ignorance, a primary source of national prosperity, and the foundation of democracy. Scientific and technological advances have intensified in the past decade, and for the first time in human history, created a truly global community. Modern telecommunications have linked all the corners of the planet as never before. Like the technology that helped create the emerging worldwide marketplace, the global community is in a dynamic period of change. Business communications, capital and financial services, research, and educational programs increasingly move across national borders. The pace of this change will accelerate and the urgent need for highly educated men and women who possess international competence, perspective, human values, and political courage will increase (New England Board of Higher Education, 1991).

Today, business, political, and educational institutions worldwide struggle to keep abreast of the dynamics of social and educational change. Examples of recent responses internationally include: the beginning of unification in Europe, the burgeoning maquiladora factories along the U.S.-Mexican border, and the vital markets of the Pacific Rim (SECUFI-NAFTA Office at the Mexican Embassy, 1998).

It is clear that educational leaders will need international collaborative experience in order to better understand the arena that students will enter as young adults and be prepared to assist them in that area. In his book Lexus and the Olive Tree Friedman (1999) states, "Today's era of globalization is a dynamic ongoing process: globalization involves the inexorable integration of markets, nation-states and technologies to a degree never witnessed before--in a way that is enabling individuals, corporations and nation-states to reach around the world farther, faster, deeper than ever before" (p. 7).

The existing educational model, however, is antiquated. Noll (1995) stated, "historically, institutionalized education has been characteristically rigid. As a 'testing ground' of ideas, it has often lacked an orientation encouraging innovation and futuristic thinking" (p. 1). The heightened interest and concern over educational reform to meet higher standards for student learning, improve curriculum and instruction, educate a more diverse student population and confront citizens who are losing confidence in public instruction pose a difficult series of questions for educational institutions. Principal among these is: How do we best educate our next generation of leaders?

This article examines an educational approach which universities can utilize to develop broad-based interdisciplinary initiatives on an international level for preparing educational leaders for the future. It will describe an innovative collaborative program which is already being presented successfully in Central America.

Educational Reform and the Preparation of Leaders

Consensus among educators supports the development of programs that train future administrators to work in collaborative and interdisciplinary settings. The National Institute on Educational Governance, Finance, Policymaking, and Management (1999) defined an increasingly essential dimension of leadership as the ability to communicate and collaborate with people inside and outside school. The Institute indicates:

> The 'top-down' model of a principal who makes decisions and charges others with carrying them out does not reflect the real distribution of power or the true source of motivation in today's schools and communities. Leadership is a sharing process involving leaders, teachers, students, parents, and community members. Today's leaders must be able to articulate a vision of where their educational system is going and a plan for getting there. Effective leaders spur change by taking risks themselves and by encouraging people to challenge their 'mental models' about how things work and what is feasible. (P. 6-7)

Many new educational administrators are not prepared or successful when it comes to these leadership responsibilities. Morden (1999) states that today, the role of a leader is to express a vision, get buy-in, and implement it. That calls for open, caring relations with employees, and face to-face communication. The role of a leader also includes the need to fulfill representational and championing roles. These include unconventional thinking, innovation, and risk taking" (p. 195).

Cooper (1997) stated that a major concern of educational reform programs is leadership's lack of preparation to meet the challenges of tomorrow in a collaborative educational setting. Weimer (1997) further highlighted the need for the implementation of collaborative group arrangements which should be a major goal of curriculum designers in educational administration. Haller, Brent, & McNamara (1997), in a similar study, questioned the preservice training in educational administration. They provided ample evidence that graduate training in school administration has little or no effect on developing effective educational leaders and the training received is irrelevant to the goals sought. They reaffirm, "the current interest in substantially changing graduate training in educational administration is well founded" (p. 227). In addition, Wells (1998) found in a study of educational reform initiatives in California that educational leaders lacked the ability to promote model innovative practices and fell short in the development of broad and comprehensive programs. She stated that, in many cases, these educational reform initiatives infused destructive competition rather than positive collaborative initiatives.

Rodríguez (1998) emphasizes the need for leaders "with the ability to assess a situation, set goals, elicit cooperation from others, and achieve results" (p. 66). We need bottom-up educational reform to enhance creative and innovative approaches to meet international challenges (Goals 2000: Educate America Act, 1994). Future leaders and administrators should be taught to cope with life in a dynamic and complex environment, to offer sound and innovative solutions to problems, and to possess an international outlook. Some of these visionary educational initiatives include improving teaching strategies and techniques through simultaneous top-down and bottom-up education reform to spur creative and innovative approaches to help all students achieve internationally competitive standards. Hill, Fitzgerald, Haack, and Clayton (1998) stated that individuals "must become passionate constructors of their own knowledge

and creators of their own communities. Building community is recognizing the value of each individual voice and letting go of the instructor's privileged position" (p. 46). Strategies must be developed by teachers, the administration, and the community-at-large to support the revitalization of schools by fundamentally changing the entire system of education through comprehensive, coherent, and coordinated improvement in order to increase student learning (Manno, Finn, Bierlein, & Vanourek, 1998).

Lambert (1995) has indicated that we need universities to "provide innovative programs and curriculum that will prepare educational leaders who have the courage, knowledge and skills it will take to lead tomorrow's schools" (p. 6). Furthermore, Lambert (1998) addresses the need for building leadership capacity in schools. She stated that we shouldn't look only to a principal with formal authority to lead the way, but recognize that leadership lies within the entire school. She also talks in terms of a school that "must build its own leadership capacity if it is to stay afloat, assume responsibility for reform, and maintain a momentum of self-renewal" (p. 3).

A New Approach in
Collaborative International Leadership

The design of innovative educational paradigms at the international level with an interdisciplinary group of professionals from education, law enforcement and the military is a new approach which is being embraced by a variety of professionals and is recognized for its ability to prepare the leaders of tomorrow and energize the leaders of today. This educational approach was pilot-tested with outstanding results using graduate students in educational leadership courses. Rodríguez (1998) stated, "After several semesters of successfully teaching students to design visionary educational paradigms it became evident that this educational system could be applied to other settings within the Americas" (p. 69). This innovative and dynamic international educational program, which emphasizes broad-based leadership and collective responsibility, is entitled "Collaborative Educational Programs for the Americas" (CEPA). The program is the first of its kind at the international level and can serve as a model for universities in the new millennium. Rodríguez states that the CEPA program places particular emphasis on establishing collaborative arrangements among educators, the military and law enforce-

ment in Central America. This region was chosen because of its strategic location and its unique setting for universities committed to a world view. Visionary leaders from CEPA, various universities in Central America, law enforcement and the military are already working together to establish this new educational infrastructure. These leaders have a profound understanding of the significance of education for the social and political conditions of the global community. They believe that humanistic values and ethics are learned, and a university at its best represents a place where moral and ethical concerns can be fully integrated within the intellectual fabric of a demanding international curriculum.

Partnerships with an interdisciplinary group of professionals are especially important in Central American countries recovering from years of civil war. Rodríguez (1998) stated:

> The police and military in this region have played a significant, but often oppressive, role. These entities are now attempting to redefine their roles in newly formed democracies and to reintegrate into society with a more positive image. They have expressed a desire for professional development and retraining. The police are interested in collaborative initiatives with education in areas such as community policing. The military especially recognize the need to redefine its mission and has implemented collaborative research related to critical social issues in an era of peace and democracy. (p. 65)

Other major areas of concern--youth violence and the decay and deplorable conditions of schools--also mandate collective attention and responsibility from educators, law enforcement, and the military (Baker, 1995; McLaren, 1989; Schwarz, 1995; Uribe, 1995). Highlighting this concern, Dominguez (1998) stated "the concepts of social integration and respect for human rights are still utopias in this republic" (p. 29). Hence, CEPA focuses on the establishment of collaborative partnerships to deal with the challenges of educational and social reform.

CEPA Processes and Partnerships

The CEPA program addresses critical educa-

tional and social issues through the use of seminars, workshops, and conferences in which small interdisciplinary groups of professionals design paradigms in a free-flow exchange of ideas. There are no lectures. By working in small groups where everyone contributes, each individual is empowered and recognized. A number of CEPA conferences have already been held and Rodríguez (1998) describes an event at the first conference in El Salvador which left a vivid impression on everyone present. The CEPA program worked to bring former adversaries together. The participants were surprised when a high-ranking military officer in the group expressed visionary humanitarian and educational ideas. He presented his paradigm promoting civic education and, through a lively discussion, both military and civilian participants realized that they shared the same vision of how to deal with critical social issues for El Salvador. The participants found they had something in common with the officer and the CEPA program gave them a forum.

The educational paradigm pulls together the ideas and thoughts of participants--educators, students, parents, governmental agencies, and public and private institutions--to outline a vision and find solutions to critical social issues and challenges such as drug abuse, violence, poverty, social stability, and human rights. It gives direction and the ability to project into the future to improve education which leads to, as Padilla (1995) so diplomatically stated, "the strengthening of democratic authorities and institutions and empowering of civil society" (p. 94).

It was envisioned that CEPA would be engaged in collaborative research, outreach and service in the Americas. To develop a broad-based program, CEPA was to be multifaceted and selective in the scope of its academic activities. Within two major educational themes--civic education and educational leadership--are five academic components: (a) educational leadership/restructuring; (b) teaching and technology; (c) collaborative arrangements with schools K-12; (d) collaborative arrangements with non-profit organizations; and/or (e) area studies. Academic activities in educational leadership include the design of innovative educational paradigms in a collaborative arrangement for educational strategic planning. Civic education projects include: democratic theory and practice, the philosophy and goals of education, the development of learner oriented teaching methodologies, the importance to a democracy of citizen behavior and social responsibility, and the relationships of public in-terest groups, educational institutions, and voluntary associations to one another and to society. Area studies include scholarly approaches to current affairs, society, and culture of the United States and Central American countries.

CEPA's Major Achievements

Many positive CEPA initiatives have been accomplished during the last four years, including: (a) unification of an interdisciplinary group of professionals from education, law enforcement, and the military in Central America, (b) assistance in educational reform initiatives in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala, and (c) assistance to the El Salvadoran Ministry of Defense in the development of their library.

The library in El Salvador gives the El Salvadoran community a unique opportunity with telecommunications and an interactive television system that serves the entire region. The library will be on the cutting edge in using new technologies for business communications, human resources, research, and educational programs which increasingly move across national borders.

In Honduras the CEPA model was used to work with the educational reform initiative, entitled "Escuela Morazanica". CEPA, in coordination with the Honduran Ministry of Education, was able to take a national project which had been undeveloped for over two years and implement it (Z. R. de León Gómez, personal communication, June 17, 1996).

Another goal which CEPA attained was the development of an international conference on public security within the Americas. The Central American Institute of Graduate Studies for Law Enforcement, the El Salvadoran National Academy of Law Enforcement, and Central American universities, in coordination with CEPA, hosted a three-day conference with major academic themes directed at educational leadership and civic education which allowed an interdisciplinary group of professionals to conduct research on major security, educational and human rights issues, and professional training. Six graduate students in educational administration from California State University, Dominguez Hills attended the conference along with 80 Latin American professors, political officials and law enforcement officers to work together to resolve issues of violence and to develop new game plans for developing safe schools for higher student achievement. As one U.S. graduate student stated, "those

who participated in the conference have helped the rebuilding process by sharing ideals and giving a vision of peace to Central America. It's not just us giving to them, we're learning also" (p. 3).

Latin America gained a resource which will influence the course of national development and security and provide ongoing support and collaboration. The educational themes included (a) the politics of public security, (b) projections on security in Central America, (c) current research and strategic studies on public security, (d) youth violence and preventive measures, and (e) the development of new educational paradigms, concepts, and visions for law enforcement leadership within the region. The goals and objectives of this event included assuming professional and institutional responsibility and an internal evaluation of law enforcement leadership, publication of the conference results in international journals and the initiation of exchange programs in Central America and the United States, and the design and development of master's and doctoral degree programs in national security and human rights (Granadino, Hernández, Hurtado de Velasco, Ramirius, & Rodríguez, 1999). The newly established government in El Salvador indicated that this conference, the first of its kind, also assisted in the integration of educational programs throughout Central America (Sistema de Integración Centroaméricana SICA) and perpetuated the Peace Accords (J. G. González and G. C. Ganchev, personal communication, January 15, 1999).

A consortium was established among universities in Central America where Memorandums of-Understanding (MOU) were signed between CEPA and a group of Central American university leaders. The intent of the MOU is to promote international educational cooperation and friendship by facilitating educational and intercultural activities and projects among faculty, staff and students of two or more educational institutions. The document highlights that the work will be done in the spirit of international goodwill and friendship. Co-project directors were assigned for shared responsibilities. Each Central American country determined how the CEPA infrastructure could be used to meet their needs. For example, the MOU signed in El Salvador involved the University of El Salvador and a number of private universities, the Military Education and Doctrine Command (Comando de Doctrina e Educación Militar), and the National Academy of Public Security (Academia Nacional de Seguridad Pública). The institutions named and the Academia Nacional de

Seguridad Pública, in coordination with CEPA, are re-formulating the National Academy's certificate program and initiating a Master's Degree program in Public Security. Educators, working collectively with the police, military, and other professionals, can meet educational and public safety needs to promote a greater sense of community. El Salvador's goal is to rebuild its institutions and to improve educational opportunities for its youth. Hence, educators, law enforcement and the military are working together for the betterment of the community, making the streets and school campuses safe places, free of drugs and violence (Uribe, 1995).

CEPA's Lasting Impact

The interdisciplinary partnerships developed through CEPA are proving to be successful and effective in the training of educational leaders responsible for institutionalizing professional development programs. The CEPA model capitalizes on the opportunities for collaboration which exist all over the Americas. The interdisciplinary partnerships described above will develop curricula that will be permanently incorporated in new programs and will continue to advance research through conferences, publications, and workshops on aspects of democracy (theory, civic culture, rule of law, and civic education) and international leadership.

The next phase will be to develop collaborative arrangements and partnerships between universities in the United States and Central America. Contributing expertise and an excellent setting for collaboration, universities in the United States will benefit significantly from the diverse experience of professors from Central America and the internationalizing effects of the partnership. The universities in Central America will gain a resource which can influence the course of national development and provide ongoing support and collaboration. Furthermore, these partnerships are an innovative approach to the study of international educational leadership, as well as a process for redesigning educational institutions for the new millennium.

CEPA responds to the nation-wide call to develop international collaborative arrangements that promote a democratic culture, in which different voices and opinions struggle together to create justice and equality. For example, the United States Information Agency (USIA) is providing funds to support educational partnerships with the general goal of strength-

ening civil society through projects on the rule of law and civic education. To support U.S. resolve in promoting human rights and democratic leaders, universities are encouraged to develop educational and cultural exchanges in countries where the people have not enjoyed freedom and democracy (College and University Affiliations Program, 1998).

International Collaboration: Risks and Change

Despite the increasing encouragement for bottom-up educational reform there seems to be very little interest in promoting comprehensive and broad-based faculty and university international exchanges (Hill et al, 1998). Noll (1995) cites social psychologist Allen Wheelis, who in Quest for Identity stated, "Social institutions by definition tend toward solidification and protectionism. His depiction of the dialectical development of civilizations centers on the tension between the security and authoritarianism of 'institutional processes' and the dynamism and change-orientation of 'instrumental processes'" (p. xiv).

Change is difficult. International collaborative programs may not be readily embraced because of the inability to accept risks and the administration's fear of giving up control if educational programs are not run strictly from their university campus. According to Friedman (1999) the establishment of international programs has not been embraced because, "Unfortunately the system of globalization has come upon us far faster than our ability to retrain ourselves to see and comprehend it" (p. 22). Therefore, universities' mission statements are often outdated and educational practices remain primarily tradition-bound.

However, today's leaders need to be able to articulate a vision of where their educational system is going and a plan for getting there. To be an effective leader requires taking risks and encouraging others to challenge themselves by taking ideas to action. For the author, it is precisely these risks that both faculty and administrators must take if we are to make the classroom, and the campus in general, dynamic places of learning.

International programs will inevitably challenge educational leaders in ways they may not enjoy. Taking risks, however, is what universities will have to accept if we are to develop effective faculty and staff collaborative international exchange programs within an interdisciplinary setting to meet the challenges of

the 21st century. What leadership changes does this entail? It requires us, for example, to let go of the current management infrastructure which has been characterized as rigid and authoritarian for one that is flexible and encourages innovative international initiatives which are developed from a bottom-up approach. This implies that the university leadership should constantly interact with its faculty and staff around international issues for the new millennium. The university administration needs to understand that although they may find it difficult to modify hierarchical authority, risks will be reduced when they forge consensus and mobilize faculty and staff.

The administration, collaborating with faculty and staff involved in international programs, can harmoniously establish themselves as risk-takers and effective leaders in a collaborative setting by identifying difficult problems and facilitating a discussion about possible solutions among faculty and staff.

The concept of collaborative and interdisciplinary leadership is crucial and can be successfully implemented, as demonstrated by the development of the consortium in El Salvador and the establishment of a partnership with Collaborative Educational Programs for the Americas (CEPA). The University of El Salvador allowed for a collaborative leadership infrastructure in forming their consortium. The university leadership (J. B. Guillén, personal communication, August 3-7 & November 17, 1998) established a collaborative setting among all participants from the University of El Salvador, private universities, and governmental officials. They ensured success by focusing on developing a broad-based consortium and shared leadership. Hence, CEPA inherited this broad-based concept from the strength and leadership of many individuals--educators, police, military, and other professionals. CEPA leadership embraces a broad concept that does not rely on one person.

Discussion

As the supply of qualified leaders is diminishing the pressures for educational reform are escalating. Hence, new leadership training programs like CEPA are relevant and vital. The need for universities to respond to international challenges is pressing. Though we recognize that there are risks involved in international programs, we should not become disheartened. The investment can be extremely rewarding. It is important that risks be regarded as challenges

rather than as problems. This has been the philoso-
phy of Collaborative Educational Programs for the
Americas.

Because CEPA is action-oriented and pro-
motes bold thinking and innovation it is imperative to
disseminate these new ideas and practices through
publications, forums and newsletters. CEPA forums
are already scheduled to: (a) establish a Center for
the study of Educational Leadership/Administration and
Democratic Institution-Building throughout the Ameri-
cas and to promote community involvement region-
wide, (b) prepare visionary educational leaders for the
future and establish programs which focus on leader-
ship as a sharing process, and © establish an organi-
zational infrastructure that is focused at the strategic
level for improving skills of administrators responsible
for the institutionalization of professional development
programs.

Summary

Taking the risk of creating a new educational
infrastructure for the professional development of in-
ternational leaders is a unique academic enterprise
with a tremendous potential for success. The CEPA
international conferences and forums seek to sharpen
the focus on instructional leadership. Preparing cur-
rent administrators for new modes of leadership will
require changes in content and delivery of professional
development as educational programs move across
international borders in a global community. CEPA
offers a new model for instructional leadership which
embraces vision, risk, and change, communication and
community building and outreach for the new millen-
nium for creating a cadre of qualified leaders. CEPA's
innovative infrastructure also represents an opportu-
nity for universities to initiate significant change and
establish a worthy educational system during the next
century of complex and dynamic interaction.

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