

FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP?*

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper was to explore the role and purpose of school administrators in international schools and obtain data helpful in redesigning principal preparation programs. An ethnographic case study was designed to obtain perceptions of issues related to leadership, curriculum, teachers, students, and parents in two U.S. accredited international schools located in Colombia, South America. The study provided a comprehensive picture of school administrators and their perceptions of their roles and how their former principal preparation programs affected their leadership skills. Additionally, results provide insights helpful in redesigning principal preparation programs to prepare global leaders. This ethnographic study also interjects the researcher's personal experiences as a graduate of an international school, a teacher with experiences both in U.S. and Colombia, and finally as an administrator in the U.S.



NOTE: This module has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and sanctioned by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a scholarly contribution to the knowledge base in educational administration.

Introduction

Internationalizing higher education has become a goal of many universities in the United States; but what does this mean educational leadership? When faced with the task of re-visioning principal preparation programs to create 21st century leaders, global awareness is a concept that is determined to be critical to the success of any professional (Partnership for 21st century skills, 2007). Therefore, principal preparation programs in the U.S. will need to grapple with curriculum revisions to incorporate this framework for 21st century learning. In reality, there is more to this process than curriculum revisions; this paper proposes that learning 21st century skills will occur from experiences that go beyond the classroom. In order to do this, faculty need to transform their vision of k-12 public schools to include learning not only from their local service regions but from networks of schools and universities outside the United States. The author of this study, faculty in a principal preparation program, in an attempt to expand networks and knowledge

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of international schools conducted an ethnographic case study of two schools located in Colombia, S.A. The findings from this ethnographic case study helped develop understanding of school administration in a developing country and also gather international principals' input to be used in developing strategies to internationalize curriculum taught in school administration programs.

Significance of the study

In business, free trade agreements (FTAs) help countries enter and compete in global market places (USA.gov 2008). FTAs have the purpose of opening paths between countries to promote opportunities for business growth benefiting the countries involved in the agreement. One benefit of FTAs is the improvement of intellectual property regulations (USA.gov 2008) and thus learning trades and sharing ideas are strongly encouraged. In education, FTAs would benefit principal preparation programs by learning different cultures, ideas, and concepts propelling those involved into a world with less boundaries and more global awareness. The US and Colombia signed a FTA in 2006 and at the time this article is written are awaiting the ratification of an updated FTA agreement. One of the many benefits from the trade between US and Colombia resulted in 14.3 billion dollars in trade in 2005 (USTR, 2006). If businesses can make monetary profit, why can't principal preparation programs make intellectual profit?

The trade agreement was not the only reason why Colombia was selected for this study. The author studied and graduated from an international school in Colombia and thus has personally seen the benefits of the education obtained from that country. In addition, the author has reflected on the implications for educational leadership in her role of a school administrator in the US for ten years and now educating future principals.

A review of literature on the internationalization of educational leadership programs or studies of school administration in South America yielded limited publications (Garrett, 1999) and therefore, this study will contribute to the understanding of educational leadership in developing Latin American countries such as Colombia. On a broader perspective, the description of educational issues gleaned from this ethnographic study contribute to the global understanding of international schools that can be incorporated in principal preparation programs. This study provides international school administrators perceptions of leadership issues, curriculum issues, teacher issues, student issues, and parent issues in these international schools. International principals also reflected on their own principal preparation programs and shared their experiences providing insight on venues to start on the path of internationalizing courses within principal preparation programs in the United States.

Growing Need for IHE's with International and Global Focus

In response to the same forces that have propelled the world economy, universities have broadened their mission to become more global. The interpretation of global is broad and interpreted differently at universities. Mestenhauser and Ellingboe (2005) propose several ways that universities attempt to become more global. One strategy involves actively recruiting and enrolling students from around the world who represent the entire spectrum of cultures and values. Another strategy involves initiating and expanding study abroad programs so that U.S. students experience the world and better prepare for global careers (Dazig, & Jing, 2007). Any IHE graduate will in some way contribute to the society where they choose to work and live in. The fact that graduates with credentials from U.S. IHE's will be entering the global economy posits the importance of deeper mutual understanding, tolerance and global integration worldwide (anonymous 2006 Universities branch out). These attempts to familiarize students, faculty, and administrators of institutions of higher education (IHE)'s with culture from different parts of the world only partially addresses the issue of having a global focus within an IHE.

Another strategy proposed by Mestenhauser and Ellingboe (2005) to become more global is to encourage faculty exchanges. One barrier that poses a challenge in internationalizing curriculum is faculty's lack of experience and knowledge of international aspects of their curriculum. Therefore, faculty exchanges serve the purpose of enhancing the content and experiences of those who chose to work overseas. Additionally, IHEs benefit from the international visiting faculty learning from language, culture, and international perspective of their curriculum (Murakami-Ramalho, 2007). Another incentive and vehicle in increasing faculty's experience may be found in expectations of faculty research. Research conducted at IHE's should focus on domestic as well as international education in order to deepen faculty's experience and knowledge about global issues in

their field of study (Mestenhauser, & Ellingboe, 2005).

In order to truly internationalize an IHE the efforts need to be integrated within the functioning and educational programming of the entire institution (Mestenhauser, & Ellingboe, 2005). In other words, the curriculum of educational programs should integrate global learning within the content of every program offered at an IHE. Therefore, developing mission statements is only the beginning of internationalizing an institution, the challenge lies in changing mindsets so that programs integrate international and global aspects and faculty teaching reflects global changes (Stark, & Lattuca, 1997).

Global and International Issues in Educational Leadership

Presently, principal preparation programs in the U.S. study leadership and management theory to address educational issues and problems of practice in U.S. schools. The underpinnings of leadership theory are essential in addressing educational needs in schools in general. Arguably, some leadership theories such as situational leadership, contingency approach, and transformational leadership lend themselves more to be applied in international leadership (Mestenhauser, & Ellingboe, 2005; Owens, & Valesky, 2006) and therefore are appropriate and helpful to international school principals that are educated in the U.S.

Graduates that choose to work in international settings have the potential of impacting education worldwide, however, faculty fail to address global and international education. It is therefore important for faculty to include global issues in leadership education to enhance principal preparation programs. But how can this be accomplished? Most educational leadership theory benefit from the study and influence of culture and how culture is a variable in theory and leadership practice. Internationalization of educational leadership therefore, would be better achieved by integrating culture into leadership concepts. This argument does not negate the value of educational leadership program at universities in the U.S. on the contrary preparation programs are effective yet could benefit from the integration of culture and international issues to the existing theory and practice.

Many principal preparation programs do address some international issues and even provide international field experience via foreign travel. An Ed.D. in educational leadership at Arizona State University includes a course that studies education in a global context. After completing the course, students travel to foreign countries for two weeks to visit schools and attend learning sessions on the local education systems. Students in this preparation program indicated that learning global perspectives helped them better understand international issues that affect teaching and learning (Danzig, & Jing, 2007). In addition, the foreign travel gleaned educational leadership ideas about “best practices” in foreign countries and helped make comparisons between the foreign country teaching methods and the local school districts’ teaching methods (Danzig, & Jing, 2007). Internationalization of principal preparation programs to include learning global perspectives meets the latest policy framework for 21st century learning that is now impacting the educational requirements of many states in the U.S.

The framework for 21st century learning (www.21centuryskills.org¹) calls for student outcomes that extend beyond the core subjects such as English, reading, mathematics, to weave in 21st century themes. One of the themes is global awareness. In order to achieve this reform, school leaders are facing curriculum revisions that broaden content learning with a global perspective. A major goal of this reform is to prepare students to engage meaningfully in a complex world beyond just the U.S. (Bacon & Kischner, 2005). In the 21st century the egocentric approach that the U.S. established thanks to the vast and rich resources in this country will no longer suffice because many countries of the world are virtually interconnected via world markets, internet availability, and world issues such as global warming and terrorism to name a few. Solutions to world issues will require international collaboration such as FTAs.

Global education should and must be taught in all aspects of curriculum of public schools in the U.S (Ramler, 2002). The challenge then lies on principal preparation programs and teacher preparation programs to internationalize their curriculums so that graduates enter the public school system and globalize the public school curriculum in the U.S. There are many schools located around the world that teach the U.S. curriculum and can help principal preparation programs learn more about global education issues. These international schools are accredited by U.S. accreditation bodies and much can be learned from these principals. Their

¹<http://www.21centuryskills.org/>

experiences can shed light on educational leadership of international schools.

International Schools that teach US Curriculum

There are different kinds of international schools that are accredited by United States accreditation agencies in the world. The purpose of these schools fall in mainly two categories: to teach children of U.S. parents working abroad and to prepare children native of international countries to learn English and attend universities in the US (Murakami-Ramalho, 2007; Penwell, R., Cronin-Jones, L., Hakverdi, M., et al, 2002). This study addressed the latter category of international schools. Therefore, when international schools are mentioned in this article, the author is addressing US accredited international schools that educate children native to the international country. There may be children of US parents enrolled at these schools but they are not the majority of the student population. These international schools are typically private schools where wealthy parents send their children.

International Schools in Colombia S.A.

In Colombia, S.A. there are nine international schools accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). These schools teach the Colombian national curriculum and a U.S. accredited curriculum (SACSCASI, 2005) graduating students with a diploma from each country. Upon graduation, students have options to enter universities in Colombia as well as the United States and Europe. But more importantly, students in these schools become proficient in both Spanish and English. These international schools, also referred as binational schools by the principals in the study, teach the curriculum in English even though the national language is Spanish. There are only some courses taught in Spanish and these are the required national social studies courses, religion, and Spanish language arts.

Teachers in international schools in Colombia are hired as visiting teachers from the United States, Canada, or other English speaking countries (Penwell, R., Cronin-Jones, L., Hakverdi, M., et al, 2002). Native teachers in these schools are fully bilingual and have obtained their teacher education degrees from universities in the United States. The students in these schools are mostly native from Colombia. The families that choose these binational schools do so with the purpose of educating their children to learn English as well as to prepare them for university studies. Students are typically highly motivated and knowledgeable with 100% college attendance upon graduation.

Method

An ethnography case study approach was employed as the method of data collection. The purpose of this ethnographic study was to do a case analysis of schools within the cultural perspective of a developing country (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). The researcher in this study used multiple methods to triangulate data for this study. Initially, the researcher used survey questions to gather data. Next the researcher visited and observed administrators and teachers at each school site conducting interviews during this time. Finally, the researcher interjects personal experiences recalling experiences as a student in one of the schools in this study and later a teacher in the same school. During the visits, field notes were compiled on-site to record the experiences observed during the visits. The field notes included answers to open ended interview questions, recordings of observations made in classroom visits, and meetings with administrators.

Administrators from two K-12 binational schools participated in this study. The schools in which these administrators work are located in the Atlantic coast region of Colombia, South America in the cities of Barranquilla and Cartagena. The sample was purposely selected based on proximity in a selected region of Colombia. These are neighboring cities that can be accessed in a reasonable amount of driving time (approximately 2 hours). The area selected were cities with which the researcher was familiar with allowing for additional background information to be included in the study.

Each school has an elementary principal and a secondary principal. In addition, each school has their own director on site that provides leadership and supervision from preschool to twelfth grade. Initially principals and directors responded to a survey developed by the researcher to identify their perceptions on (a) educational purpose of SACS accredited international schools (b) teacher issues; (c) student issues; and (d) parental issues. The surveys were sent via email to each respondent. After collecting the survey data, the researcher visited the two schools during fall 2006 to observe and interview each principal and director to collect additional data and determine principals' perceptions of the degree to which their principal preparation program addressed leadership in international settings. Conversations with principals helped

gather suggestions on how principal preparation programs could include global leadership to better prepare those who chose to lead an international school. Having graduated from one of the schools, the researcher wrote field notes on personal reflections comparing being a student and to leading the school. Below is a geographical representation of the location of the schools involved in this study.

School 1 School 2



Figure 1

Findings

Description of the two binational schools in the study

Both schools in the study were private, non-sectarian, non-profit K-12 schools. The program of instruction was college preparatory; the language of instruction was English and all students study Spanish beginning in the second grade. Both schools taught the U.S. curriculum and it was emphasized more than the native curriculum. Each school’s student profile during for school year 2006-2007 is analyzed on table 1.

Table 1. Schools’ enrollment demographics

Demographics	Student Enrollment	
	School 1	School 2
Total enrollment	736	650
<i>continued on next page</i>		

Prek-5th	423	347
Grades 6-12	313	303
Senior Class	43	36
Students' nationality	90% Colombian & 10% U.S.	98% Colombian & 2% others
% attending college in U.S., Colombia, & Europe	100%	100%

Table 1

Teacher demographics

For both schools all teachers were licensed in their area of instruction. The teaching staff was comprised of bilingual Colombian teachers and foreign teachers whose English is their first language. Table 2 illustrates teacher demographics in this study.

Table 2. Teacher demographics

Demographics	School 1 n=54	School 2 n=63
# US or Canadian citizens	Na	22
# of Colombian citizens	na	38
# of teachers in both middle and high	26	33
# elementary teachers	28	30
U.S. Credentials	20% (middle and high)70% (prek through 5th)	70%
Avg. time international teachers stay at this school	3 years	2 years

Table 2

Administrators' Demographics

School administrators in this study provided a great variety of backgrounds yet similar in some aspects. One pointed similarity was the fact that they all had between 11 and 20 years of leadership experience and most of that experience was in international countries. Three of the four administrators had 0-1 years of leadership experience in the U.S. and the fourth administrator had five years in the U.S. prior to working in international schools. For all but one, their initial career move into international education occurred upon completion of their principal preparation program. All of the administrators completed their preparation programs in the U.S. Interestingly three of the administrators interviewed have had their international experience in only one country which was Colombia. Two of the three have been at the current school for over 15 years. The third administrator that has had only one country experience has worked in three international schools within the same country. The secondary principal was the only administrator who had experience in 4-5 different countries.

Table 3. Demographic description of school administrators interviewed

N	Role	Years in present role	Leadership Exp in U.S.	Leadership Exp in Intl Countries (number of different countries)	Principal in U.S.?	Country of Origin	Gender
1	Elementary Principal	17 years	5 years	19 years(1)	yes	USA	Female
2	Middle and High Principal	Over 9 years	0-1 years	14-16 years(4-5)	Yes	Hungary	Male
3	School Director	2 years	0-1 years	11-13 years(1)	Yes	USA	Female
4	Elementary Principal	7-9 years	0-1 years	20 years(1)	Yes	Colombia	Female

Table 3

Perceptions of educational purpose international schools

In interviewing and visiting administrators of each school the perceptions among school leaders were very similar. The highest ranked purpose by the three principals was to prepare students to be fluent in the English language as well as native language. The second highest ranked purpose was to prepare students to become leaders in a global context. The director of school one identified this latter purpose as the number one purpose and then preparation of fluency in the English language as the second main purpose. The purpose of preparing students to attend college ranked third for all respondents. Each differed on the location that the students would attend college whether in the native country, the U.S, or Europe. Two administrators indicated that the location did not matter while two indicated that the location prepared students was to attend college in the native country first and next to attend college in the U.S. Interjecting personal reflections; the main purpose of education has not changed since the 1980's when I attended school there. As a student, I recall my parents emphasizing the main reason for attending this school was to learn English fluently and that they hoped that I would attend college in the United States. During these times in Colombia, women were not expected to attend college as it is now. Instead, a woman's role was to enter into marriage and start a family. But for my family and that of my classmates times were changing and true to the curriculum of the school, 100% of the graduates attended and completed a college education.

Perceptions of teacher issues in international schools

School administrators ranked in order of importance teacher issues mostly faced at their school. The highest ranked teacher issue was high teacher mobility. Teachers hired to teach in these schools were mainly from the U.S. or Canada on a two-year contract. According to the principals, upon completion of their contract most teachers decide to move to a different country to work. Administrators shared that only a few teachers that did not adapt to the culture or could not deal with the differences in language and climate typically would leave early in the contract. To prevent this from happening and to help teachers adjust to living in Colombia, an extensive orientation is delivered to help teachers understand the new country and the students they will be teaching. All administrators mentioned that this orientation had been extremely helpful in alleviating the changes teachers experience by moving to this country. The geographical location of these schools is in a climate where it is hot year round. The breeze from the ocean, located approximately 5 to 10 miles from the schools cools the air slightly. Both schools have air conditioned classrooms yet many of the taxis, and businesses many not be air conditioned. Many of the teachers miss central air conditioning when living in this area. In contrast, people native to this country are very gentle and warm hearted. Teachers express their appreciation for the local music, food, and historical places to visit.

The next ranked teacher issue found in this study was teacher recruitment. Recruiting teachers to work in these schools is difficult due mostly to the negative publicity and image portrayed in the media about Colombia. Of those teachers that do decide to teach in these schools, most have less than five total years of teaching experience. Administrators strongly noted the difficulty in finding certified teachers willing to move to this county. However, administrators shared that once teachers decided to teach at these schools most of the fear dissipated due to the safety in the two cities and the higher order level of teaching and learning encountered with the students in the schools. Consistently teachers share their excitement and appreciation of teaching their curriculum at higher order thinking levels and at the ability of the students to understand and engage in rigorous learning activities. Interjecting personal reflections, I had the opportunity to teach in one of these schools during school year 2003-2004. I taught algebra and geometry to eighth and ninth graders. As a teacher in these schools, I engaged students in explorations of mathematical concepts to a deep level of abstract thinking. Students worked well in groups or individually. Healthy competition among classmates centered on excelling academically. Teaching and learning were the essential components of my daily teaching routine compared to my teaching years in U.S. public schools where classroom management was an additional essential component of my daily teaching routine.

Perceptions of student issues in international schools

The highest and only student issue mentioned by all administrators was peer pressure. Discipline issues and academic achievement issues ranked second but all principals made a note that these were minor issues that did not interrupt learning in schools. The nature of the peer pressure dealt more with societal and elitist expectations than traditional issues such as lack of discipline, lack of motivation, or lack of high expectations for their future. The majority of the schools' student enrollment consisted of children of wealthy and influential families in politics, community, business, and industry in the city and the country and therefore they were considered the children of the "crème or the crop". School administrators elaborated on examples of peer pressures and shared that peer pressures were different based on gender. For girls pressures were related to belonging to the "in crowd". Many of the issues female students dealt with were things like being excluded from parties, or excluded because of the name brand clothes they wear, or the brand of car they drive. Physical appearance was also a major source of peer pressure shared by all administrators. Native girls struggled with weight issues, clothes to wear, and weekly appointment to beauty salons. The pressures were generated by student gossip and were brought to the school campuses even though the arguments or problems occurred after school hours. One administrator shared that girls at times were very cruel to each other in their comments and their intentional alienation of another peer. For male students disagreements generated on the soccer field and had a tendency to be carried over into the school day.

Administrators shared that the above student issues were attributed to the fact that many wealthy parents were busy with elite society social events and therefore their time was spent with other adult peers instead of devoting their attention to their children. Most of the parents employ live in nannies to raise their children. Interjecting personal reflection, as a student in these schools, I was not considered wealthy in my peers eyes. My family was not a member of the country club and we did not drive foreign expensive cars. I did at times feel like I did not belong in my friends' social circles but was not excluded. I believe that my high academic scores kept me from falling in the gossip track as much as possible. I was always in the top three of my class and there was a continued competition on every academic task we engaged in. Socially, I befriended two dear girls that were similar to my social status and we were inseparable. Our graduating class of 40 students experienced so many memorable moments from kindergarten to twelfth grade that to this day 24 years later we still keep in touch and care about each other.

Perceptions of parental issues in international schools

School administrators of elementary schools indicated that teaching values to their children was the highest ranked role of parents. The perception in high school differed. In high school the parents' highest ranked role was to fundraise for school needs. The second highest ranked roles of parents were the same for all administrators which were to actively help with homework and to volunteer time at school during and after school. Parents, according to these principals, value education greatly and as a result the majority, if not all students, completes a university degree and become influential in politics, community, business, and industry as their parents. Interjecting personal reflection, as a student my parents valued the education I

received and often would tell me how my inheritance was invested in the tuition of my schooling. Truly, I am reaping the benefits of my inheritance. I have accomplished many professional goals and am fully bilingual thanks to the k-12 education I received. Having taught there, I felt that parents trusted teachers and their expertise in teaching. Their involvement was in making sure students were completing their homework and understanding their classes and their money was used to contract for such help. Many parents would hire tutors after school for the purpose of helping students learn and these efforts were evident during the instructional day. It always was a pleasure to communicate with parents and share the learning experiences that their children participated in. During this visit to the schools, I informally spoke with several parents as they were waiting to see administrators and gathered the same feeling I had when communicating with my students' parents. I heard parents speak highly of their children's teachers.

Perception of principal preparation program and international leadership

In discussing the level in which some individual courses in their principal preparation program addressed leadership in international schools, three administrators strongly disagreed that their preparation program did such thing. The remaining administrator indicated that some courses did address leadership in international schools. Administrators in this study shared that the content of their leadership education in the U.S. is applicable in different countries however every principal commented that principal preparation programs may be improved greatly by explicitly integrating global education and understanding of international cultures as an additional contextual factor for school administrators.

Principals also suggested that programs should actively seek and enroll in courses teachers and principals who work in overseas positions Principals suggested that diversifying student enrollment in principal preparation classes opens discussions and represents real life. Overseas teachers and principals also benefit from courses because in international schools professional development options are limited. Many teachers take courses for the purpose of professional development.

Finally, principals suggested that some courses in principal preparation programs should include learning about cultures, cultural differences, experience some cultures, and understanding the need for flexibility due to cultural issues. Encouraging study abroad programs and administrator exchanges could be a venue of integrating culture into principal preparation programs, as well as using technology to connect student in the U.S. with schools and administrators in international schools.

Lessons Learned

It is inevitable that the world is interconnected thanks to the advancement of technology. The interconnectedness of the world provides a venue for IHEs to become more global in their missions. Specifically to principal preparation programs, this study helped demonstrate that graduates from these programs are able to be successful in leading U.S. accredited international schools, however, much more can be done in internationalizing the educational leadership curriculum. Free trade agreements for intellectual benefits are win-win situations for principal preparation programs. In this case, international schools in Colombia offer valuable ethnographic information on leadership and school systems in Latin American countries. Therefore, a FTA with developing countries can benefit those involved.

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