
CREATING AN INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE THAT FOSTERS INNOVATION IN EDUCATION

Stefanos Gialamas

Peggy Pelonis

ACS Athens – American Community Schools

Abour Hachmi Cherif

DeVry University

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The prosperity of Western nations today is greatly impacted by the global economy and hence, there is greater importance attached to human capital and the thought of a high-skilled, high-waged economy. It is thus no longer possible for governments to protect domestic workers from the full force of international competition. The relocation of industrialized jobs to host economies such as China, Poland and Brazil evidences the realities of the new economy. Furthermore, technology's rapid and continuous growth leaves little room for pondering and reflection. Today we move quickly, gain optimal knowledge rapidly, and understand how to use it fast. "The one with the most knowledge wins", is often a phrase used in management and leadership books to emphasise the necessity of knowledge for the success of the organisation as a unit, even if it is not necessarily applicable to individual employees (Pearlson &

Saunders, 2006). Thus the acquisition of and skill in the use of knowledge has become the charge given to K-16 education by modern society and therefore, "the dynamic of transformation and the need to seize opportunities, to constantly innovate and constantly improve performance are everywhere: Schools at the cutting edge of innovation and collaboration will be selected from amongst the best schools as a lever to transform secondary education" (Ball, 2008, p.17-18).

Obtaining knowledge through constant innovation in order to improve performance may create a competitive edge and may contribute to the global economy, but it seems that it is also a path toward further individuation and isolation. As classrooms are microcosms of the broader community what is necessary for future generations is that educators teach how to use knowledge in collaborative ways for contributing

toward the betterment of society as a whole. As Daniel Goleman indicates in his book *Social Intelligence* (2006, p.334) "Schools themselves are very recent artefact of civilization. The more powerful force in the brain's architecture is arguably the need to navigate the social world, not the need to get A's". Students who move into the world with a feeling of belonging and a 'can do' attitude are students who are less likely to give up in the face of adversity and who, no matter how difficult circumstances seem around them, find ways to make a difference in at least one segment of their environment. Alfred Adler (in Mosak & Maniaci 1999) referred to this as social interest; a 'yes, I can...' attitude. Such people seem to be task oriented and seek solutions, focusing on what needs to be done in cooperative ways and by considering the well-being of others.

This 'can do' attitude according to Adler encompasses feelings of belonging and the 'empathic stance that people take is not just to one person or group of people. It is a bonding to people as a whole, to the community, not just as it exists now but for an ideal society amongst all. O'Connell (in Mosak & Maniaci, 1999) referred to the process as *humanistic identification* that is, identification not with a person, but with humanity itself" (p.116). Thus, as society changes, schools and colleges must change to meet societal needs; they must create a culture of innovation as well as a culture that fosters social awareness, social interest, social engagement and social commitment. This is vital to creating societies with members responsible for its harmony and wellbeing.

A Culture of Innovation

"For much of the twentieth century policy social sciences, including the tradition of political arithmetic, were mainly geared to addressing fellow academics, government advisors and policy makers. It was a model of history 'from above'. These target groups obviously remain important, but history is also made 'from below'. The concept of self-reflexivity suggests that agents can now be more knowledgeable about themselves and their place in the world and should be included in any debate about policies concerning fundamental social problems and in particular about how their relationship to society may be part of the social problems identified" (Lauder et al., 2004).

Durkheim (quoted by Lauder et al., 2006) referred to education in relation to its host society in the following way: "each society sets up a certain ideal of man, of what he should be, as much from the intellectual point of view as the physical and moral; that this ideal is, to a degree, the same for all citizens". Thus, Lauder et al. conclude that,

"Education is the influence exercised by adult generations on those that are not yet ready for social life. Its object is to arouse and to develop in the child a certain number of physical, intellectual and moral states which are demanded of him by both the political society as a whole and the special milieu for which he is specifically destined" (2006).

But, Durkheim's contention of community-targeted 'socialization' may be taken a step further if we question whether the acquisition of knowledge is pursued only for the purpose of

gaining future employment and maintaining a competitive edge in careers. Taking knowledge and using it for economic gain, rather than driving a future-oriented approach aimed at sustainable development.

Therefore, academic institutions, now more than ever, play a leading role in preparing young people to cope with and be productive members of an increasingly global society. The opportunities and learning outcomes, for students attending schools, are directly related to the educational experience and thus the credentials they receive

The institution's culture is defined by its' history, policies, management style, and most importantly the thinking and behavior of its' constituents (Pelonis & Gialamas, 2010), in other words, it is the way of doing business within the institution. But as society changes, so culture must change. In changing however, it is important to resist rejecting the old in favor of an all new way of doing things, for there is wisdom and experience embedded in the 'old ways' therefore, change means keeping from the existing culture what is meaningful and useful while being open and flexible toward societal changes/needs and adopting innovative practices to meet these needs. Innovation then refers to the inclination to think 'outside of the box'. It is not enough to have new ideas, it is necessary to develop new ways of doing business, alternate ways of thinking about a condition and multiple problem solving approaches so as to develop the new competencies necessary to meet societal challenges head on. Preparing students to address future challenges through innovation also means

preparing students to be flexible and open minded so that when solutions find dead ends or when they seem non existent, the hope and desire to continue searching does not diminish.

Student-Centered Innovation

Students are of utmost importance in learning institutions. In fact, if institutions are to be successful in transmitting knowledge in ways where students assimilate it and turn in into tacit knowledge (Pearlson & Saunders, 2006), "learning must be student centered where students engage in critical thinking. This means that students do more than reproduce knowledge; they question and challenge the ideas of others and forward their own opinions and ideas" (UTAS, *undated*). Furthermore, today's students attend schools attached to gadgets; iPods, PC's, MP3's, flash-drives, and cell phones to name a few of the most recognisable. How sensible is it to expect a student to "Sit in a small space for five hours a day while a teacher talks about the past and present"? (Wiles, 2007)

In relation to the state itself, education continues to serve a social function, the state cannot be completely separate from it (Durkheim, 1956, in Lauder, 2006: 83) but while it is the responsibility of the state to provide education that will deem its citizens worthy of competing for the plethora of future job opportunities by placing them at the centre of optimal knowledge acquisition, more importantly, it is the educational composition that will develop well-rounded individuals, cooperative citizens and innovative problem solvers, all of which can only enhance the

functioning of society and contribute to a better future. Most educational systems around the world however, promote an individualistic approach to education. Students are encouraged to be competitive, achieve the highest grades, best test scores and in general are taught to think of their own personal performance. On the other hand once they pass the threshold of graduation into the 'real' world, they are expected to work in teams, collaborate and become part of a bigger thinking puzzle to create for a common good. We must ask ourselves, why is it that young people today seem to find it difficult to be optimistic about the future, develop symptoms of depression and feelings of helplessness particularly during transitional times i.e. when transitioning from high school to college (Counselling Today, beyond academics 2011). In fact, 'Western research from the 1980s and 1990s indicated that young people felt deepening despair and powerlessness about the future especially regarding the environment, the economy, unemployment and health issues, notably drug abuse and AIDS'. (Gidley, Hampson 2004). Are these symptoms only due to the change and loss associated with adjusting to being a college student and later moving out into the workforce, or could these symptoms also be related to how prepared students are to face the challenges of society? and is being prepared directly related to the type of teaching and learning that takes place in educational institutions today?

Gidley & Hampson (2004) contend that negativity regarding the future is closely connected with disempowerment and therefore

how prepared students felt to act and solve problems that they envisioned was closely connected to their style of education.

An educational setting fostering innovation prepares students to address future challenges through innovation. That is, it is not enough to simply generate new ideas but rather to instil in students the new competencies deemed necessary to face the changes of the world we live in by:

- **Inspiring** faculty to come up with new, creative and applicable ideas
- **Confirming** student learning with these new ideas
- **Detecting** necessary resources to implement these ideas
- **Implementing** the new ideas
- **Assessing** student learning as a result of these new ideas
- **Modifying** the ideas and their implementation as appropriate

Innovation is a continuous act within the institution and while creativity means giving birth to new ideas, innovation ensures that creativity is not promoted for the sake of creativity but rather has inherent in every idea implemented a learning benefit for the student.

Serving Humanity

Social awareness, Social interest, Social engagement, Social commitment: Knowledge in and of itself may contribute to ones' individual intellectual bank, may provide the tools toward achieving a competitive edge, may get one into the best of higher educational institutions and ultimately may lead to work with satisfactory

compensation. But knowledge devoid of the awareness and skills toward the betterment of the human condition is incomplete education. Holistic education encourages the student to go beyond the self toward the common good. *Social awareness* according to Goleman (2006 p. 84) “refers to a spectrum that runs from instantaneously sensing another’s inner state, to understanding her feelings and thoughts, to “getting” complicated social situations”. Further on the hierarchy of knowledge connected to society is the idea of *social interest*. According to Adler (in Lundin 1989) social interest is innate and is an aptitude which deems one responsive to social situations. However, although inborn, social interest must be developed within a social context. Such a context according to Adler is first and foremost the family and secondly the school setting. Social interest may include interest beyond people, such as, animals, the environment or care for the entire universe. Social interest is an extension of the self into the community; a collective responsibility and striving for the betterment of the community and a condition which Adler strongly believed is a main criterion for positive social adjustment. In addition, *Social engagement* is the ability to put interest into practice. Becoming aware of a social condition is a first step, developing an interest toward improving the social condition is second and finding ways to engage in bettering the condition is a step further toward taking responsibility for part of the solution. Finally, *social commitment* to a cause, a human condition, the betterment of a situation or the improvement of a person’s life, becomes a way

of life for students as they develop a positive mind set toward improving any aspect of society. At this level individuals consciously are committed to help and inspire anyone around them to become better without the fear that the other might outshine him/her. In this phase students go beyond awareness and interest. They move toward a deep feeling of commitment and responsibility as they see themselves as part of the problem as well as the solution and belonging within their community/society means collaborating toward improving it. In a school culture of fostering social awareness and practicing innovative teaching, the social spectrum defined above becomes part of the daily teachings whether within the curriculum, through community projects, role modelling, mentoring or researching. Therefore, it is an ethical obligation for an individual or an organization to act having always in mind the benefit of the society at large and the educational experience must be comprehensive based on their academic, physical, spiritual, ethical and social engagement and development” (Gialamas, The Bullet, The University of Mary Washington Student Newspaper, Oct. 2011).

Innovative Academic Leadership

Innovative academic leadership is the continuous act of effectively engaging members of the academic institution as well as utilizing their differences, authentic energies, creative ideas and diverse qualities for the benefit of the students, faculty, and staff and for every constituency of the institution. (S. Gialamas, International Herald Tribune, Athens Edition, September, 2011).

The Innovative Academic Leadership (AIL) is comprised of three dimensions:

- **Interpersonal:** Includes inspiring others to strive for excellence and reaching for their maximum potentials, guiding and motivating exceptional performance, being the example for inspiration and instilling confidence in advance for success.
- **Setting standards:** includes establishing the standards to good conduct, serving as a model for meeting these standards, being laureates for the truth and the beautiful and modeling integrity and ethos (as defined by the ancient Greeks).
- **Serving Humanity:** Includes the entire spectrum of social awareness, social interest, social engagement and social commitment.

Innovative leadership requires a preparedness to accept and live with a certain amount of risk because it involves taking risk with new ideas that have not been tried and could fail. Similarly, it means a willingness to work with half developed ideas most of the time and a willingness to be flexible and resilient adjusting rules and parameters as ideas develop. Moreover, this type of leadership involves flexible decision making – the ability to make decisions based on adjusted internal (institutional) and external conditions or parameters. Furthermore, a leader’s ability to respond speedily is vital as is his/her personal enthusiasm for every project undertaken and there is a continuous demonstration of enthusiasm for the vision and goals. Innovative leadership also encompasses the ability to create positive tension

and finally the innovative leader is well aware that while new ideas stem from each individual or a group of individuals, it takes a team of members to make the ideas a reality thus, promoting team creativity is essential.

According to Len Sperry (2002) a leader who is effective works simultaneously on two levels: One level is *performance*, which ensures *productivity*. The other is the *people* level, which considers *health*. While in the past performance was solely emphasized with little attention being given to people, the result was low commitment and low morale, high rates of burnout and increasing health costs. The innovative leader understands his/her people well and takes care to tap into people’s strengths as well as their diversity as each person thinks differently. Furthermore, the innovative leader exhibits the following:

The innovative leader sees a universe of infinite possibilities and is constantly looking to inspire others to experience life creatively. Continuously generating new ideas as well as positive energy, the innovative leader influences congruent decision making practices according to the adopted principles and values. The innovative leader shapes the future of the organization by understanding the organizational identity over a time period. Looking at the past via the present is necessary in order to shape the reality of the future. The leader, by tapping into the collective qualities of his/her people, crystallizes the vision of the organization and thus moves the organization to a different stage with a different reality. In addition the innovative leader is looking continuously to improve the leadership and

management structure of an institution for making effective and efficient decisions. The innovative leader is committed to provide clearly and precisely to all constituents the following:

- The current status and the identity of the organization;
- The organization vision;
- The rationale of the vision;
- A strategic plan of how the vision can be accomplished;
- Strategies to establish a Leadership Team;
- Action Plan of implementing the strategic plan.

Faculty as Catalysts for Innovation

Innovation within an institution is manifested primarily by the faculty. The faculty transmits knowledge, skills and mind sets to students, either explicitly or tacitly. Faculty who promote and foster innovation are not afraid to generate, adopt new ideas and develop different teaching methods. There should be a high degree of autonomy and independent judgment among faculty without the need to have the administration's approval every step of the way. Such faculty has a high degree of social interest as well as the courage to move forward with half developed ideas. Usually, such faculty has a range of personal and professional interests and is constantly stimulated to professional growth and development. They are self motivated, hard working, dedicated and able to hold and process multiple ideas simultaneously. According to Lightfoot (1983) in her book *The Good High School; portraits of character and culture*, "one of the

most important qualities of a good school is the consistent, unswerving attitudes toward students. The first impression is that teachers are not afraid of their students" (p.342). This fearless regard of adolescents is striking. Thus, the rapport developed between students and teachers and the ease with which teachers move among their students is a good indicator of the courage to live among, educate, mentor and guide students in innovative ways without the regard for possible obstacles on the way.

Curriculum for Innovation

In order to fully prepare students to face the challenges of society, knowledge in and of itself is not enough. A holistic education is important in developing 'educated' students without compartmentalizing subjects and simply producing 'mathematicians' "cyber experts" "political historians" "writers" and so on. A holistic education then can assist students in participating more fully in a life that is multifaceted. This type of knowledge can provide support in appreciating art, enjoying literature, analyzing problems, designing research, pondering existential dilemmas and engaging in relationships through common interests and can be a means of communication and bringing people together. Curriculum then is essential in what and how students are learning. According to Orkwis and McLane (Fall 1998) usually classrooms contain a number of students who do not understand the curriculum. These students, may include those identified with learning disabilities but also include the linguistically and culturally different, those

who are considered low achievers and an indistinguishable group of students who understand some of the subject matter but not enough to become competent in it. School curriculum must be directly related to what is relevant to each student's life. It must be exciting, current and congruent with the needs of the global community and must naturally include aspects from the Arts, Humanities, and Social Studies to Mathematics and Sciences. Innovative curriculum in particular is comprised of four inseparable and integrated components (SCRI):

- S**kill competencies: acquiring new skills and mastering existing skills
- C**ritical thinking competencies: developing decision making competencies for problem solving
- R**elevance applicability: Relating competencies to one's environment (course of study and real life situations)
- I**nspirational delivery: Expressing the understanding of complex concepts in a unique and refreshing way.

In particular, the curriculum of an international school must take care not to reflect any local cultural bias (western, eastern, etc) and thus must be reviewed often. The design suggested calls for a vertical approach that recommends beginning at the upper end of studies (senior year) and moving downwards. The desired competencies and learning outcomes once carefully chosen can then allow a vertically downward movement where necessary and sufficient enabling objects can be identified.

To illustrate, let us assume that one of the learning objectives to be acquired by senior year is for students to determine whether a collection of data is reliable and valid. Students must have the knowledge to analyze and compare statistical numbers such as the mean, median, mode, standard deviation and correlation coefficient and they must be able to run statistical tests. They must also be able to master available technology tools to simplify the process of calculating such statistical numbers. This presupposes that in order for faculty leaders to continuously develop, filter, and crystallize the curriculum in their areas of expertise, they must also always remain learners and seek continuous content knowledge as curriculum needs and demands increase dramatically in certain areas such as science, mathematics, technology, business, economics. "Ideally, a curriculum should be able to be modified or customized to meet the needs of both teacher and student." (Orkwis, McLane, 1998).

The curriculum must also be articulated by considering both ends of the educational spectrum. Thus, curriculum development and revision cannot take place in isolation. For example, changing the Mathematics curriculum at the High school level makes sense only if faculty is well aware of what takes place during the first and second year of college just as much as they are aware of what takes place in the Middle school or Junior High school.

Curriculum Delivery

"Access to the curriculum begins with a student being able to interact with it to learn"

(Orkwis, McLane, 1998). These authors further contend that curriculum must be delivered using a variety of methods so that all students have access to the curriculum despite linguistic, cultural, learning differences or other barriers. Most importantly however, the curriculum must be challenging to every student.

Today, with all the available teaching and learning tools, delivery options are endless. The opportunities are invigorating for any faculty committed to providing the best educational experience for students. "Face to face" teaching and learning can be enhanced with online opportunities, learning tools (such as videos, simulations, virtual environments etc) eliminating barriers and being inviting to all learning styles. Furthermore, faculty can create many enhancement opportunities for student learning as the faculty is no longer the only source of knowledge and information. In turn, faculty can enrich their role by also becoming coaches, mentors but most importantly examples and inspirers.

While curriculum delivery today can be very demanding, usage of the available tools can create fresh, diverse and challenging teaching methods which can prove to be very rewarding. Moreover, one can teach complex topics without being in the most expensive environment. For example, one can teach DNA replication, analysis and its effects by inserting certain enzymes without needing an expensive laboratory, but having instead access to virtual labs and simulation tools.

Curriculum Support

The requirement for having a current, exciting, and relevant curriculum together with adopting creative and innovative strategies and techniques in teaching and learning demands a very strong commitment to faculty development and growth and at least modest infrastructure in technology and facilities.

According to Len Sperry (2002), "development prepares individuals for increasingly responsible or complex jobs" and he asserts that there are four skill requirements necessary for development: a. enhancing skills to improve performance b. supporting ongoing, non stop learning, c. aligning training with the organizational mission and d. measuring development outcomes. Therefore, the institution's leadership at all levels must commit to not only providing development support but must also recognize efforts and identify ways to exhibit appreciation.

It may take several hours to integrate a technological tool or a new strategy in teaching and learning. The process design, implementation, assessment, and modification can be time consuming and demand a lot of energy. There is also no guarantee of success. Risk taking therefore is an underlying concept on creative teaching. Nothing is automatic and creativity is not sold in bookstores. The leader (s) must be tolerant of risk generated mistakes, must be a cheerleader (s) of new teaching strategies and be the pillar (s) for faculty development. The growth and development of the institution's faculty is the most important investment the educational

institution. It is also expensive and can take much time and energy from faculty and administration.

Curriculum Assessment

Student assessment must be related to the diverse curriculum and the learning objectives. The learning objective must guide the assessment approach and the tools we use. Assessment should not be focused in one type of learning approach or one type of competency. For example if a desired learning outcome is the student's ability to use mathematical concepts to solve a real life problem then multiple choice questions are not appropriate. If a desired learning outcome for a student is to utilize his/her knowledge and skills to produce energy using renewable resources then an exam or a test within a classroom setting is not assessable student learning.

In general, assessment of student learning must be congruent with the four components of an innovative curriculum (SCRI). For example a coherent assessment approach to determine if a student has mastered the concept of quadratic equations should include questions and statements like the following: (S) Solve the following quadratic equation, (C) determine if the given quadratic equation has real or imaginary solutions, (R) identify from your everyday life (i.e. newspapers, magazines) how a quadratic equation is used. (I) express your understanding of the concept of a quadratic equation in any way you want (i.e. a poem, a drawing, a painting).

Conclusion

Our demanding and exponentially changing world demands visionary, innovative and ethically committed leaders. In turn, educational institutions need to provide rich, textured, holistic, meaningful and harmonious educational experiences to students. Students must not only learn new content and obtain new competencies to help them shape their future but they must also develop and adopt a set of universal principles and values. These principles and values in conjunction with ethos will be essential guides in their life journey.

The great educational institutions of the future will not be more of the same as defined today. They will be the ones which will be effective in the midst of all drastic changes in society so there is a need for new type of knowledge and most important wisdom, which is the ability to utilize knowledge to construct creative solutions to societal changes.

Innovation and an authentic leadership approach are the enabling objectives to provide young people with a unique, meaningful and high quality holistic educational experience. These people will then exercise wisdom in decision making as they become the keepers of the future of this small planet of ours.

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