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SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR PREPARATION IN BAJA CALIFORNIA

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This study is an investigation of school administrator preparation in Baja California, México undertaken by professors in the US and Mexico. We used focus groups to determine the day to day challenges of rural school directors and what recommendations might be implied for educational administrator preparation.

This study crosses the border between Mexico and the United States. The rationale is based on two ideas: first, research in other countries provides an opportunity to examine programs and identify alternative theories, procedures, and practices of educational leadership; second, cross-cultural research can yield different perspectives and allow researchers from each culture to perceive leadership practices in a new light.

In the following sections, we will review writers who have argued for the internationalization of the field of educational administration and examine models of culture that can be useful in pursuing this analysis. Then we will look at education in Mexico and the status of the field of educational administration. This will lead us to the major questions of this study.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Educational Leadership across National Boundaries

Hallinger and Leithwood (1996) recognized that research and preparation in educational administration had a number of “intellectual blind spots” but that from the early 1990s, the field had become more receptive to a number of new perspectives and diverse voices. They suggested that the perspective of school and societal culture could bring about a reconceptualization of the field. (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996; 1998). They noted that while principal leadership can determine school culture, school culture and the community in which it is situated have a far greater influence on shaping the principal. Within communities in one country, there are a variety of cultural norms that determine how a leader will be perceived; across national borders, community expectations of leader effectiveness will vary even more (Den Hartog, House, Hanges, Ruiz-Quintanilla, & Dorfmann, 1999).

According to Heck (1996), the application of culture in studies is rife with potential contradictions. Cultural systems are complex and their study requires identification of subsystems. When making cross-cultural comparisons such as those around educational leadership, there is a risk of “decontextualizing the leadership norms, values, or behaviors from their wider contextual setting” (Heck, 1998, p. 65). The challenge for researchers in educational leadership is to bring together the disparate studies into a “larger theory of how school leadership processes work within schooling context within and across cultures and nations” (Heck, 1998, p. 65).

Dimmock and Walker (2000) agree and argue that educational research and theory need a renewed focus on exploring educational leadership across national boundaries and cultures. They warn against ethnocentricity in examination of educational issues. Individuals and societies are bound to see the world through their own culture and indeed are socialized to find meaning in the cues of that culture. Often, however, they do not realize that there are other ways of seeing or making meaning until they experience life in another culture. Cross-cultural work can lead to mutual understanding in a global society. It allows the opportunity to extend and limit theoretical concepts and move toward a more universal understanding of educational administration.

However, Collard (2003) pointed out that cross-cultural perspectives are often too limited to fully appreciate the dynamic interplay of intercultural communication and understanding that occurs when two cultures work together toward a common goal. He studied leadership-training courses taught in China by western universities. Collard warned against the wholesale transmission and acquiescence to Western leadership theories in China and other Pacific Rim nations.

His theoretical framework focused on several important concepts: the recognition that culture is dynamic, fluid, and multi-faceted and the understanding of the agency or determination of leaders within a cultural setting who are not “passive consumers of the latest imported ideologies” (p. 4). Through conversation and interview, this framework of intercultural communication creates a dialectical interaction that leads to the mutual creation of meaning and understanding.

Murphy (1999) argued for the internationalization in the field of educational administration because there is an increased exchange between individuals, groups, regions and countries. One of the challenges that educational researchers face is the identification of the international and national forces that influence public policy in the field of education such as “values and ethical concerns, political ideology, national goals, worldwide economic forces, public pressures, and personal and community forces operating to bring social change” (p. 78).

1.2. Cultural Models

There is extensive literature that explores different models in cross-cultural educational research and leadership. We chose to include several models here to highlight the varying values and perspectives on leadership in different cultures. We start with the classic work of Hofstede (2001) in which he initially identified four cultural dimensions: power distance, individualism and collectivism, masculinity and femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and later added a fifth dimension called long-term outlook. Then, we present the analysis of the Transformational/Charismatic Leadership model by Den Hartog, House, Hanges, Ruiz Quintanilla, and Dorfman (1999), followed by Banks’ Stages of Cultural Identities (2004). Last, we present Romo’s Latino educational administrator interaction model (1999) to achieve institutional transformation. These models lead to our own conception of stages of cross-cultural development.

1.2.1. Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions

From 1963 to 1973, Hofstede collected and analyzed data to identify national differences among 116,000 individuals from seventy-two countries. His analysis focused on employee values. In his initial research, he analyzed data from forty countries. Later, he added ten nations and three multi-country regions (2001). By the end of 1970, a total of 53 countries were surveyed, and he had found the following cultural dimensions.

Power Distance refers to the degree of equality or inequality between individuals in a nation’s society in areas of wealth, power, and prestige.

Uncertainty Avoidance focuses on the extent to which a culture determines individual levels of tolerance to unstructured situations. Extreme uncertainty manifests itself in anxiety. Societies differ in the way in which individuals cope and deal with unexpected situations. Individualism and Collectivism describes the prevailing relationship that exists between an individual and the community in a given society. An employee in an individualistic culture is expected to work according to self-interest. In a collective culture, the individual functions according to the interests of the group.

Masculinity and Femininity focus on the degree to which the culture reinforces the role model of male control and power. It refers to the distribution of roles among genders.

Long versus Short Term Orientation is the fifth and last dimension implemented in the Hofstede's model. It refers to the degree to which culture determines and influences individuals to accept delayed rewards and gratification of their economic, material, psychological, social and emotional needs (Hofstede, 2001).

Hofstede (2001) recommends that not all of these five dimensions should be applicable to one particular phenomenon. While these dimensions were aimed at discriminating among national, ethnic, and regional cultures, other sub-cultures such as gender, social class, generation and organizations should be taken into account when conducting research.

Compared to other countries, Mexico scores high in power distance, high in uncertainty avoidance, high in masculinity, and low in individualism on Hofstede's dimensions. Mexico can be described on these dimensions, but care must be taken not to stereotype the entire country. There are regional differences and variations among individuals as well as changes across time.

In a nation with high power distance there is a strong belief in authority; students are dependent on teachers (teacher-centered); parents side with teachers; the educational system is hierarchical and focuses on the top level; there may be more concentration of authority (centralized); inequalities between managers rely on formal rules; subordinates are expected to be told; authoritative leadership predominates, and close supervision is related to productivity; authority is based on tradition; leaders tend to be older (Hofstede, 2001).

Mexico's high uncertainty avoidance may translate into an educational setting in which students expect structured learning situations and seek correct answers; students may be taught that truth is absolute; there may be a fear of failure, a preference for tasks with predictive outcomes, no risks, and specific instructions (Hofstede 2001).

In societies where the masculinity index is high such as in Mexico rewards to students may be publicly displayed; children tend to be socialized to fight back; teachers pay more attention to boys; family is important; there is a strong sense of traditional family concepts; men describe themselves as more competitive than women (Hofstede, 2001).

The low individualism in Mexico may indicate that collective interests prevail over individual interests; private life is curtailed by public interest; opinions and votes are determined by in-groups members; political power is unbalanced; there is a rigid social and occupational class system; there is a large gap in wealth between economic sectors; there is less control over job and working conditions; mobility across occupations is low; leadership focuses in management of groups; employees are viewed in a social context; incentives are given in groups; direct praise for performance is perceived as a threat to harmony; low individualism in the educational setting translates into teachers dealing with students as a group; individual initiatives are not encouraged (Hofstede 2001).

1.2.2. The Transformational/Charismatic Leadership Model Project GLOBE

More recently, Den Hartog *et al.*, (1999) undertook an extensive worldwide study of the cross-cultural attributes of leadership. The study identified global leadership dimensions and characteristics that were universally accepted across cultures and those that contributed to outstanding leadership. The results indicated that charismatic/transformational, team oriented, and participative leadership dimensions were perceived as attributes of outstanding leadership in all cultures. Other characteristics universally endorsed included: “excellence oriented, decisive, intelligent, and win-win problem solver” (p.240).

Some characteristics have different meanings that will not necessarily translate across cultures in the same manner. For example, charisma represents ambivalence in some countries, and clear direction in others. While charisma is a universally endorsed attribute of transformational leadership, several questions arise as the term “charisma” does not have a universal meaning and attributes related to this characteristic vary among cultures.

Communication of vision varies among cultures with reference to preferred use of language and non-verbal cues. Oriental cultures pause longer during speech. Cultural differences are found in tone of voice and gestures. In Latin cultures a strong tone of voice with high and low pitches shows enthusiasm while a more monotonous tone is preferred in South East Asia to indicate self-control.

The risk-taking attribute identified in this study is not universally valued as a contributor to outstanding leadership because what is considered risk-taking behavior in one culture does not necessarily mean the same in another. Risk taking is culturally contingent. For example, in Mexico if a manager appoints someone of a lower social economic status to an administrative position despite the stockholder’s wishes, he may be perceived as a risk taker, while this behavior may not necessarily be viewed as a risk in other countries. This appears to be consistent with Hofstede’s finding that power distance and social status are very important in Mexico. Challenging the stockholder’s orders is perceived as a high risk behavior in a society where maintaining the status quo is valued greatly.

Compassionate leadership also has different connotations in countries such as Mexico. In one of Hofstede’s examples, a secretary described her manager as compassionate because he not only held charismatic attributes, but he would get involved her personal life such as calling her husband’s doctors to be sure the operation scheduled for him was the most appropriate action. While this behavior is considered an invasion of privacy in many countries, in Mexico it is not perceived as such.

1.2.3. Stages of Cross-Cultural Identities

Banks (2004) agreed with Collard (2003) in that cultures, experiences, and cultural identifications are interconnected and dynamic. In addressing the need of internationalization of education, Banks (2004) advocated a global democratization of education in which citizens should be able to relate to other nations. He believed that “multicultural literacy” (p. 291) would allow acquiring knowledge from different ethnic and cultural perspectives. Political, social, and economic aspects of globalization present serious challenges, and nation-states are responsible for identifying issues, theories, and concepts to prepare students to function well within and across nations. Banks pointed out, “Global education’s major goals should be to help students understand the interdependence among nations in the world today, to clarify attitudes toward other nations, and to develop reflective identifications with the world community” (p.293).

Banks (2004) conceptualized a global identification model. He believed that individuals cannot develop a global identification until they are able to define themselves within a reflective

cultural identification. He presented a six-step model for cultural identity: cultural psychology captivity, cultural encapsulation, cultural identity clarification, biculturalism, multiculturalism and reflective nationalism, and globalism and global competency. Banks (2004) believed that students would be able to reach cultural development if educational leaders and teachers play an active role in assisting students to achieve their own cultural identity.

During the cultural psychology captivity (stage 1) individuals may experience cultural self-rejection and low self-esteem; they may internalize the negative stereotypes and beliefs about their own culture that is institutionalized within the larger/dominant group.

At the cultural encapsulation (stage 2), students believe their culture and ethnic group is superior to others (cultural ethnocentrism). Since individuals are just becoming aware of cultural consciousness, they tend to limit their participation to their own group. At this level individuals are ambivalent about their feelings toward their cultural group. When individuals are defined on their personal attitudes and identity, they develop clear positive attitudes; their cultural pride is genuine, natural, and spontaneous. When individuals experience this behavior, they are at the cultural identity clarification level (stage 3).

During biculturalism (stage 4), individuals have a sense of cultural identity and are prepared to participate effectively in their own cultural group as well as in another cultural community. At this level, individuals have the strong willingness to work across two cultures.

After they reach biculturalism, individuals can move toward the multiculturalism and reflective nationalism level (stage 5). At this stage, they possess a clear, reflective and positive cultural identification, as well as positive attitudes toward other cultures or ethnic groups.

In the globalism and global competency level (stage 6), individuals have achieved a clear reflective and positive approach toward other cultures and ethnic groups. At this level they have acquired national and global identifications. They have the attributes to function within their own culture, within other cultures and in the global/international community.

1.2.4. Latino educational administrator and cultural interaction model

Like Banks, Romo (1999) embodies the search for democracy and equity in which culture plays an important role in shaping society's practices and beliefs. He developed a cross-cultural model from his experience in education and the challenges that Latino educators have encountered in a society where the dominant culture shapes public policy and educational practices. Romo classifies Latino leaders into four groups: the captive, the tourist, the pioneer and the explorer. He views this model as an educational road map to encourage transformation and democracy, since culture plays a significant role in shaping educational administration and practices.

1.2.5. Metacultural Stages

Romo's terms captive, tourist, pioneer, and explorer can describe a progression that is very close to what we mean by metacultural stages. The term metacultural is used in a variety of ways in the social science literature (Mulhern, 2000). Van der Horst (2000) used "metacultural competencies" to refer to those skills and dispositions that allow people to move freely in and out of multiple cultures with a high level of comfort and communication.

Kramsch (1993) described a "metacultural third place" found when two or more cultures work toward communicative competence in one particular language. This third place is distinct from

cultural and linguistic borders and boundaries and instead encompasses a personal journey toward the metacultural.

We propose four levels of cross-cultural leadership:

1. Intracultural research takes a local perspective and meaning is created through the lens of local culture. There is little knowledge or awareness of other cultures. Knowledge gained in this way may still be quite applicable within the confines of one culture.
2. One-way cross-cultural leadership reaches and extends across. There is more awareness of other cultures. However, there is a tendency to promote the prestige of one's own cultural and national community, look down upon others, and impose one cultural point of view.
3. Two way cross-cultural leadership recognizes implications for one's own culture. Leadership is intercultural in the sense of mutual or reciprocal. Leaders are conscious of intercultural dynamics and understand other cultures through the lens of their own culture as well as through that of the new culture.
4. Metacultural leadership extends beyond individual cultures to create new knowledge. This is a global perspective that transforms how leaders view their work.

Metacultural leadership goes beyond cross-cultural leadership to achieve greater depth of understanding. The assumptions are different from the outset. Instead of asking how can I study another culture, the question becomes how can I join with people of another culture to define important questions, investigate them together, and determine the implications for each of our cultures and suggest considerations for other cultures?

This third place is metacultural as exemplified in the work of Diaz Loving (1999). Concepts developed in one culture cannot be superimposed on another culture. The terms must be deconstructed and recombined in a way that has meaning in the new culture. He calls for the indigenization of psychology and by extension other social sciences and educational research. A universal theory will not result from the application of one theory to many cultures, but rather, by redefining that theory in each culture.

1.3. Education in Mexico

A first step to an intercultural journey is to have at least some knowledge of the history of the country and the structure of the educational system. Mexico's proximity to the US and a 2000 mile shared border offer a unique learning opportunity for scholars from both countries. The differences in language, income levels, history and culture provide contrasts that can lead to growth, change and reinvention for both countries.

Mexico's population is 104.2 million people with fifty-two percent being under the age of twenty-five. The Mexican Constitution specifies that every individual has the right to receive a public education, which is free and not affiliated with any religion. Attendance in Mexico, although compulsory, is viewed as obligatory through the ninth grade (Chavez, 2004).

Mexico faces challenges in the areas of equity, quality and governance. One hundred thirty thousand children live in the streets of Mexico (*ni_os de la calle*). Less than fifty percent of the indigenous population of fifteen year olds finishes primary education (Chavez, 2004).

The federal government has taken up the challenges of educational quality. There are plans to articulate the curriculum of the first three levels of education: pre-school, elementary and middle

school. Efforts are under way to balance decision making at the federal, state and local levels and to democratize school life (Chavez, 2004).

Garcia (2004) gave a panoramic view of the evolvement of educational administration in Mexico beginning with the work of Ramirez, the founder of educational administration in Mexico. He focused on supervision and relationships with attention to basic concepts of school organization, knowledge of administration, and pedagogy of educational management.

Educational management in Mexico has been characterized as centralized, bureaucratic, and authoritative, without vision, with significant isolation of other sectors of the community and the state; by offering a homogeneous education to a heterogeneous population and by having processes that concentrate more on the delivery of instruction than the actual learning. Until recently, school directors would take over the position of principal with no specific preparation just some general knowledge combined with political alliances. (Alvarez, 2003)

In 1979, the *Dirección General de Educación Primaria de la Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP)* determined that there was a sense of urgency to align and unify the function and role of the school supervisor by creating a set of standards. Recently, Alvarez (2003) described a school leader as one who creates a learning community by promoting professional collaboration among staff and establishing active participation among all stakeholders, including parents. He goes on to say that a school leader or director must be able to facilitate dialogue among all of the groups to build stronger learning communities along with establishing a positive school climate that promotes harmony and diversity for all.

In 1979, the establishment of the *Universidad Pedagógica Nacional (UPN)* began the first educational administration programs of *licenciatura o maestría* in educational administration. Following the creation of these first programs, other universities began implementing educational administration programs that allowed students to earn a Bachelor's and/or a Master's degree.

In 1992 and 1993 the landmark decisions, *Acuerdo Nacional para la Modernización de la Educación Básica* and *La Ley General de Educación*, paved the way in restructuring Mexico's public education to meet the needs of all Mexicans rather than just a privileged few. These decisions established a set of standards that called for significant changes in the structural and qualitative analysis of the organization, management and operation of the basic institutions of education. Among the standards was the decentralization of the operation of schools, promotion of social participation from all stakeholders, redefining basic education, which led to new educational plans including new texts, re-examining the value placed on the teacher's role and profession, and lastly renovating the programs for primary and secondary school directors. These decisions then led to the *Programa de Desarrollo Educativo 1995-2000* that brought to the forefront as high priority the formation and preparation of school directors and supervisors by creating the first courses for school directors known as the *Cursos Nacionales para Directores de Escuelas Primarias y Secundarias* (Alvarez, 2003).

Garcia (2004) maintains that the *Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP)* and the *Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (SNTE)*, which is a national teachers' union, have the dominant power to make decisions. Plans for decentralization of the education system and advancement of educational administration are counter forces but decision-making is still concentrated within the central government.

Garcia (2004) believes that the educational administration curriculum needs to be enriched. Less than thirty percent of the courses taught at the *Universidad Pedagógica Nacional (UPN)* were directly related to the knowledge base of educational management. This was also found in most other

public and private universities where there was a disconnection in the direct relationship of many of the courses to the discipline. Not only did Garcia find that the curriculum was not a match, he also found that the professors were not necessarily experienced in the world of the school or trained in this field. Garcia pointed out that future administrators do not participate in any kind of field experience prior to beginning their principalship as lawyers, doctors, and nutritionists do within their own curriculum.

The Schools of Quality project was created to help transform schools and elevate the quality of education. This project had two fundamental ideals: participation and consensus, participation of the school and the community in the project itself and the ability to come to consensus on the way the project should be implemented. However, Garcia (2004) argued that it has had limited success in moving from theory to practice one of the fundamental ideas of the project is to create consensus to meet school objectives; however, there is little direction in how to prioritize these objectives or how to define consensus. School directors feel that they can create the autonomy within their school community to carry out these plans.

Garcia sees the issue of school hours as one of the hardest to resolve. The excessive load that is given to school administrators and the shortened school day are not sufficient for daily tasks and objectives to be met. He believes that four and half hours a day for teaching and learning are not enough time for the daily program objectives and demands to be met. This is also not helping the status of the education profession. Daily school hours continue to be split into two different times and taught by different people.

Alvarez (2003) says that it is also important to recognize that in many countries around the world, including Mexico; researchers are uncovering multiple inequalities in educational opportunities in which sectors that are less fortunate are receiving an education that is less quality resulting in an education that is not truly integral or democratic. Despite all of the organized efforts by the government, changes in educational administration preparation have not reached the level that many researchers and directors feel could be attained. In his study, he interviewed school directors and the results continue to point to some of the same concerns that Garcia feels are forces that keep this field from advancing. In Alvarez's conclusions and recommendations, he points out that it is necessary to establish and clarify a new educational management strategy in the context of changing paradigms in educational administration by applying the knowledge from the *Plan Estratégico de Transformación Escolar* or the *Proyecto Escolar*.

He also states that it is not only necessary for the establishment of a series of courses, it is equally important to provide educational administration models that are flexible and functional. Alvarez (2003), just as Garcia, finds that it is imperative for school directors and those that teach the courses for educational administration to engage in continuous learning and reflective practices. He suggests that in order to enrich educational administration programs, it would be beneficial to provide ongoing learning of problem solving strategies using specific day-to-day examples. This would be one way to allow public administrators to be part of organizations that are ever changing and at the same time allow them to be continuous learners.

In Latin America, interest in the preparation of administrators is relatively recent (the decades of the 1980s and 1990s). The International Institute for Educational Planning (IPE-UNESCO) in Buenos Aires proposed nine inter-related competencies for educational administrators. These competencies include strategic educational management, leadership, communication, delegation, conflict negotiation, problem solving, anticipation, teamwork, and participation of diverse constituencies

(Pozner, 2000). In her discussion of the need for such skills in school leaders, Pozner describes a continually changing world characterized by rapid technological developments, the democratization of institutions and a global environment. School administrators need competencies that fall into these nine areas in order to meet these challenges. Competencies in Latin America can guide preparation programs in educational administration and their adequacy can be judged by how well they relate to problems of practice.

Slater, Boone, Muñoz, Base, Romero-Grimaldo, Korth, Andrews, Bustamante, Alvarez, Topete, and Iturbe, E. (2003) used focus groups to ascertain the views of school directors in Mexico City. They reported that teacher motivation was the major challenge that they faced. This current study built on the work of Slater, *et al.* (2003) to address three questions: first, what challenges would focus groups of school directors in Baja California report, second, would they be similar to the challenges reported in Mexico City, and third, how would they characterize their relationships with teachers?

2. METHODS

The primary goal of this research was to examine educational administration preparation in Mexico and to understand more about the interaction of school directors with teachers. We used focus groups to ask school directors to examine the relevance of their training and suggest ways that preparation might help provide skills and knowledge to address school challenges. A team of researchers from a university in South Texas and a university in Baja California, Mexico carried out the project.

2.1. Focus Groups

The researchers selected focus group methodology for a variety of reasons. Heck (1998) maintains that because of the dynamic, constantly evolving nature of culture and because it is “holistic and socially constructed by its members,” the study of the culture should be field based (p.64). The narrative, conversational style of the focus group enhances communication. Focus groups are an effective way to garner opinions and responses: “Focus groups are fundamentally a way of listening to people and learning from them. Focus groups create lines of communication” (Morgan, 1998, p.9). Focus groups yield rich data brimming with experiential and anecdotal detail. (Morgan & Krueger, 1998).

In the fall of 2004, state officials in Baja California invited school directors to participate in a workshop on leadership presented by US researchers at a university in Baja California. There were 15 participants: four males and eleven females. They were directors of pre-schools, kindergartens, and elementary schools from rural areas in Baja California. One was a director of special education. They ranged in age from 27-51. Most had over twenty years of experience in education. Each participant signed a consent form to participate in this study.

Two focus groups, one with seven members and one with eight members were conducted simultaneously in seminar rooms at the university after the workshop session. The workshop participants who were able to stay for the evening session participated. Mexican and US researchers who were familiar with focus group methodology conducted the sessions in Spanish. US researchers observed and took notes. The sessions lasted 90 minutes and were audio and videotaped. Participants were provided with a list of questions in Spanish and given ten minutes to write answers to serve as a guide. Participants responded in writing and verbally to the following questions:

1. What circumstances led you to assume a position of leadership in education?

2. What are some of the day-to-day challenges that you have faced in exercising leadership? Mention what has prepared you well to undertake these challenges and what you feel you were not well prepared for?
3. What preparation did you receive to assume your position, and what preparation would you like to have had to confront major challenges?
4. What preparation would you recommend for the education of future educational administrators?

During the focus group meetings, the participants were asked to share their written answers and expand their own views. Questions 1, 3, and 4 were used as background. The heart of the analysis focused on the challenges that the directors faced (question 2).

2.2. Data Analysis

The naturalistic inquiry approach recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) guided the analysis of data. Such qualitative inquiry is open-ended with few preconceived notions about the views of the participants. The goal is to listen to and understand their stories and give voice to the participants with less emphasis on causality. The data were subjected to a method of constant comparison, a process of continual discovery, question, and confirmation as information is collected and analyzed. Results may not generalize to other settings, but can meet the standard of transferability as determined by those who would apply the results. The strength of the approach resides in the cross-cultural composition of the research team and in the ability to gage the impact of linguistic and cultural differences in the practice of leadership.

The US researchers read, discussed, and summarized the oral and written comments of the focus group participants. They identified dominant themes, shared impressions about the process, and raised questions that have metacultural implications.

3. RESULTS

The results are reported as brief stories that the participants shared during the focus groups. Each one has a title that seemed to characterize their challenge.

3.1. How to Avoid Being Eaten

Juanita (1002) spent her first five years as a pre-school director. However, her training was for primary school. She started her story, "There were two senior teachers. I had just graduated, and they were long in the tooth. That is, they were going to eat me. My challenge was to establish my value as a director, but I never could." She was unable to exert the authority of the position, and she felt that she did not know the ways of pre-school. It was a fight for power. She consulted a secondary school director who told her it was best to keep her feelings to herself. Her inspector only came by once a year. She shared her troubles and cried, but had to continue to face her trauma alone. It was hard to go to work in the morning. She only looked forward to getting away to Ensenada on Thursdays.

Her classes went well. Since she was trained in primary teaching methods, she taught children to read. They succeeded and began to read ahead of other children their age.

After 25 years in education, she faces a similar challenge. She just took a new position as director of a kindergarten where the previous director had served for 12 years and had her way of doing things. Everything was structured, groups were arranged. The challenge is how to get teachers to

try new ways of doing things and accept her authority. It's the same challenge but now she has more experience.

3.2. Children in Synchrony

Emanuel (2001) is a 42 year-old director of a primary school. He spoke much longer than the other participants in answer to the question about the challenges that he faced. The moderator wanted to stop him gently and continue with other questions, but could not determine how to avoid the danger of a rude interruption. The transcriber became exhausted by the length of the passage but persisted. Another researcher listened to the CD several times, but said that he just lost her. A professor advised us to pay attention to the sayings and their universal and timeless meaning.

Emanuel identified spoke about teachers. They resisted change, feared working collaboratively, and were not invested in their work. He was also concerned that parents did not come to school, and there were few resources.

Emanuel is translated as "God is with us." He used biblical themes to describe his mission. Teachers watch and fear being watched. Parents come but hesitate to contribute. He said, "I lived in this school. I am living it now....(There is) sacred ground that no one can enter. One has to look for a way to break the barrier." In this case, the sacred ground was the exclusive province of teachers. The irony is that others cannot enter. He looks for a way to break the barrier so that teachers can work together. He wants them to realize that a teacher is not an isolated fortress. Rather, teachers must study and share experiences whether they have done well or poorly.

Teachers tell him, "I want to draw a circle around the school.... Parents meddle too much." He counters that parents have not entered classrooms nor have they questioned teaching methods. The school is on a hill. Parents can look up and watch the teachers come and go.

Ninety percent of the parents came to Family night to visit classrooms and talk with teachers. It was hard for them to leave other obligations to come. They visited, but they did not want to be asked to do anything and would not volunteer to serve on the school council. They would just as soon leave that to others.

Emanuel has to fill out paper work, complete accounting, maintain the building, fix toilets, restore electricity, keep inventory, arrange contracts and keep an attendance list. At the same time, for every five things he plans to do, two are completed. Families come to visit, a child gets sick, a teacher is absent.

He said that the authorities are not genuinely interested in the success of the school. They provide computers but no computer teacher. The regular teachers are supposed to teach computers, but they are not trained. Other schools have much more than this rural school. The Quality Schools Program was a good idea, but the new financial formula has resulted in less money for the school. He has to fight for resources.

He argued that it is well and good to talk of leadership in theory, attend workshops, and read books, now is the time to act, "convince teachers, convince parents that the children are to be found in the synchrony." Emanuel hopes for a new sacred ground, the area where parents and teachers come together, which is where children prosper.

3.3. Wisdom to Resolve Conflict

Elizabeth (1001) is a 46 year old primary school director. She said that the only preparation she had for her position was a one-hour course. She has learned from the experience of others and has

done reading on her own. She knew nothing about the rules and procedures that she was required to implement.

She lists her major challenges as maintaining a collegial group of teachers and resolving conflict, “with the self-confidence to give a response that will not harm anyone, to have appropriate wisdom.”

3.4. Getting along with others

Juan (1008) is 38 years old and a director of special education. His position is different from the other directors in that he is in charge of eight special education teachers at four schools. He is concerned about the relations between the special education teachers and the other teachers in the school. He reported, “Sometimes the relationship among personnel wears out, and it is difficult to establish a dialogue.”

Special education teachers have to work with regular teachers and teach students who come from regular classrooms. These teachers have different priorities, and the interaction would seem ripe for conflict.

Juan mentioned the punctuality of teachers as a problem. He would like to have had more preparation on rules and regulations and speculated that some of his superiors purposely hold back information. He said, “Knowledge is power. Many do not share with their subordinates because they don’t want to share power. If they let you know the rules, it would be easier to provide direction.”

3.5. Reading for Life

Esperanza (1007) reported that she has been working in education for 28 years 10 months and three days. She is the director of a pre-school. She would like to get to know each teacher individually. She wants the faculty to work together as a team, and she would like them to develop the habit of reading. She loves to take courses and read outside of the area of education to grow as a person not just as an administrator. She follows the rules but still treats teachers individually.

She reported that the SEP provides an extensive bibliography, but few read the books suggested. She said that unfortunately, she has accepted this situation. However, she was telling her colleagues in the focus group how important it is to read, and she concluded by mentioning that pre-school children study reading through theater. It is therapeutic for children and adults.

3.6. Collegiality in the Bar

Estefana (1006) is 46 years old. She divided her career into two stages. At first she was concerned with fulfilling her responsibilities and completing the required documentation. The inspector was located far from her school, and she had little understanding of legislation. She had to study the pamphlets to understand what she could.

In the second stage of her career, she became concerned about the factions of teachers in the school. They were isolated from one another, and there were problems between them. She wanted to get to know them, but rather than visit their homes, she met them in bars. She was not used to spending time in bars and drinking beer with teachers, but in this way she was able to talk with them, come to agreements and forge more of a team spirit.

3.7. Unify

Claudia (1005) became a secondary teacher when she was 16 years old. She did not have teacher education preparation, just her own experience, and the idea that she would do what she could.

She faced the challenge of preparing and succeeding. Her parents, family, and teachers gave her a sense of commitment, persistence, and responsibility. She was able to deal with complicated situations with her colleagues. She spent time meeting with parents of students.

She became a pre-school director in an indigenous community in a rural area where there was little access to information. She wanted to integrate teachers into a team with common goals. Their personal and professional interests varied greatly and had to be formed into one commitment. She also wanted them to arrive on time, and to reach out to parents to improve parent-school relations. Her theme was to unify.

3.8. Looking for Students in the Fields

Tomas (1004) is 27 years old and in his first year as director of a Telesecundaria Rural. He is completely alone. The inspector is 100 kilometers away, and there are no phones.

He spoke rapidly about the challenges that he has faced. He said that it is difficult to convince parents that their children should go to school. Their attitude is, "It's better that he not go." It's all right if they miss a day, but if they miss more, he goes out to look for them and often finds them working in the fields.

The community has a low level of education. The students do not do well on examinations of mathematics and reading. They do not know their multiplication tables. He has obtained books and a few computers for the school. He had to set up the system to check out books and keep track of them. When technology fails, he has to find a way to get it repaired.

He has not had courses to prepare him to manage the school, handle administrative tasks, or complete all of the necessary documentation. He has had to learn while running the school.

3.9. Build Your Own School

Angelica (1003) is a pre-school director, 36 years old. She travels each day to a community on the coast. She loves her school and describes the community as precious, but the school was small and in bad condition without lights or water. Her first challenge was to construct a new school. She received no official help of any kind. She had to appeal to parents and together, in solidarity, they did the manual labor of building the school. She had to organize all of the work. She learned to work with what she had. They did good work. The parents had a sense of ownership of the school.

Her major challenges are to manage conflicts, coordinate the work in a collegial way, and improve the school physically, academically, socially and as a community.

3.10. The Persistent Doorman

Eduardo (2002) is 50 years old and has been working in education for 29 years. He is the director of an elementary school in the afternoon shift. He mentioned the attitude of teachers and lack of punctuality as the major challenges he faces. Classes start at 1:00 p.m. in his school, and teachers work a double shift. Some are even directors in the mornings. He cited lack of punctuality as a chronic problem. Teachers were following their own schedule and would not arrive on time. He had to reach other directors and supervisors in the same school area to coordinate schedules, but still, they would be late. He said was going from class to class until teachers arrived. He had to plead with them to come to come to work on time. Even the janitor arrived late and left early.

Another challenge he mentioned was that teachers are not equally committed to both schools. While they give 80 percent of themselves in their morning jobs, they are too tired to work in the

afternoon. They schedule their leaves and meetings in this shift. He urges them to schedule their meetings in the mornings, but teachers are not willing to make this change. He said, "This is an ongoing challenge... right now I am the doorman, the one who is 'kind-of' picking up things, and, yes!.. I am opening doors too." He believes teachers respect him because he sets the example. He also works long hours (double shift) and manages to get to school early.

3.11. Doing It All

Claudia (2003) is 28 years old and the director, as well as teacher, of an elementary school. Claudia is pursuing her Master's Degree in Educational Administration. She has been working in education for 7 years and as a director for 2 years. She is responsible for educating all the students in this small school of six grade levels.

At first, her focus was on the children. They did not know how to read. At that time, she was not concerned about the building or the parents. However, as she continued in her job responsibilities, she realized that she needed the parents' support to implement changes.

Her school is in a rural community where resources are scarce. The community lacks running water and electricity. She has even had to teach restroom etiquette to get children to use the facilities behind the school.

Another challenge she mentioned was in respect to the unfinished school building. For example, the school did not have a floor. She sought the parents' support to help with issues related to the school building. She enthusiastically expressed: "Now, we have a little floor...a little one, but we have one."

Claudia, like other participants, faced problems with organization, pedagogy and administration. She was trained to teach 3rd graders, but she did not know how to plan lessons for 6 grade levels. The administration and paperwork had been overwhelming for her. The support she received from her supervisor was not sufficient to understand how to meet these challenges. She said, "They [supervisor and staff] helped me with the paperwork, but for all the rest...there!..You're on your own."

3.12. Just Passing Through

Rosario (2007) is 47 years old and has been working in education for 19 years, 15 of these as a director. She works at a school with 18 teachers. The city is located 45 minutes away. She called this school a pass through school, *una escuela de paso*, because the teachers are waiting for a transfer to another school closer to their homes or to the city. She referred working with adults in this type of school as her biggest challenge.

As the director of the school, she held the teachers responsible for making sure that schedules and rules are followed. She felt that teachers should fulfill their responsibilities. The class schedule was a nonnegotiable so teachers were expected to arrive on time just as the children were expected to. Initially, the school bell would not be rung until all of the teachers arrived and most of the time, the teachers were late and the students had to wait.

How has she worked through this? She has relied on her experiences and built relationships with each individual teacher. She stated that the teachers should not negotiate their role but rather assume their responsibilities.

3.13. Water from Stones

Margarita (2006) is 40 years old and has been working in education for 21 years, 8 as a director. At present time, she is a director of a pre-school. She stated that the biggest challenges that she faced were collaboration among the staff, the bureaucracy and required paperwork. She had to begin by changing the teachers' "bad" habits such as arriving late, leaving early or not preparing lesson plans. She explained by saying that the teachers would tell her "Well, the previous director would allow us to arrive late or leave early due to this or that."

Margarita said that the only way to improve compliance was to explain to them constantly and consistently that she worked differently than the former director. She would tell the teachers that she needed them to work collaboratively. Through modeling and persistence, over five years, Margarita was able to overcome these obstacles. She added, "I cannot complain now, I have a good team."

The bureaucracy and the paperwork were also big challenges for Margarita. She felt that these stifled her work rather than assisted her to improve the school as a whole. She said that her school had many problems such as no traffic lights, paved roads or fencing around the school. All of this required her to solicit help, materials and funds to improve the school. She had to work through the system. Although some of these battles were won, she felt that she had to spend an enormous amount of time and energy to make changes and, at times, the bureaucracy just made it harder for her.

How does she continue knowing that she has to face these daily challenges? She said it is her persistence and her sense of responsibility that allow her to continue. She also stated that she loves her job and has a desire to give more everyday. She explained by saying that teachers and directors are able to get water from stones, *sacamos agua hasta de las piedras*. Margarita also felt that they are not prepared to resolve problems but are able to because they rely on logic, ethics and common sense to move the work forward.

3.14. Reflecting On Your Work

Manuela (2005) is 51 years old and has been working in education for 30 years, 5 as director. She did not speak very much, but spoke softly and clearly. Her greatest challenge was working with adults who are not committed to their mission as teachers. She has worked in several schools and at each one has encountered teachers who only go through the motions of doing their job as a form of simulation, *simulación*. She has been director for 3 years now and sees her biggest obstacle as convincing them that they are headed down the wrong path due to their lack of investment as educators.

How has she helped the teachers get on the right path? She has worked with the teachers by providing them with collaborative meeting times that require them to read and reflect on an article. The idea was to have them reflect on their practices and their errors so that they would be able to take some of this with them to their classrooms and make some changes. She felt strongly that through self-reflective practices they would find the right path and grow professionally. Her own practices and experiences are what have helped her provide the space for teachers to reflect on their teaching.

3.15. It All Began With a Dream

Consuelo (2004) is 42 years old and has been working in education for 24 years. She began her work as a teacher with 6 students, a wooden box of papers and a dream of providing an education equivalent to what students received in the city. She took the students to an empty room on her own property and began to teach. Her first goal was to build a school. It took hard work and sacrifice, but she was able to build the school for the students. She was never promoted to be the director. She felt

unappreciated and said with a trembling voice that all they said to her was, “Go to your classroom and thank you!” And then she added with tears in her eyes, “After dedicating your life to this job.”

Finally after 15 years of dedication, she was granted full directorship in another school. Here is where she realized that her dream was much more than just constructing a place for the children to learn. She believes that the actual teaching and learning that take place in the classrooms is what is important. If this is not happening, then it does not matter that you have a school building. Her dream now is to be sure that children are well prepared and to make her school a “true school.” She explained that the pedagogy that she had put aside for many years must be implemented on a daily basis for learning to occur.

She further explained that there are many challenges throughout the system but the biggest ones she faces are the bad habits that are present on a daily basis. Some of these were non-compliance to the work schedule and routines. When she spoke of this, she spoke with passion that was clear through the tone of her voice. She explained further by saying that they have two bosses in Mexico, the one that pays them their salaries and the one that suppresses their good work. Consuelo said that the union, *sindicato*, was not helpful; it only ruined their work and their teachers. She felt that the union, *sindicato*, comes to the schools to defend teachers that she knows are lazy and do not do good work making it very difficult for her to make changes in the teaching and learning. They want to make sure that the employees’ rights are not being violated, and she wants to be sure that children’s rights are not being compromised. These two bosses, as she calls them, make the work and the dream extremely difficult to fulfill.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The three questions of the study 1) what challenges would focus groups of school directors in Baja California report, 2) would they be similar to the challenges reported in Mexico City, and 3) how would school directors characterize their relationships with teachers can be addressed in several ways. The themes of the participants’ answers are summarized below. Then we go beyond what they said to discuss how they said it, and finally, we share questions from a cultural perspective.

4.1. Summary of Themes

The stories of fifteen school directors had some common themes. They worked in rural, isolated areas far from supervisors and colleagues. They entered their first jobs with no experience or training in educational administration. The communities were poor, and the directors had to look for the most basic of resources. In one case, the director had to organize parents to build the school.

They spoke of similar challenges. Many complained about teachers’ lack of dedication, which was often expressed in terms of punctuality. They wanted teachers to come on time, work collaboratively, and reach out to parents. Some said that the union protected teachers who did not want to work hard.

The directors had an enormous amount of paper work, but had little training in the laws, rules, regulations, and policies that they were supposed to implement and report on. They were concerned that parents did not vigorously support the mission of the school. They did not want to come to school or volunteer to help. Some parents preferred that their children stay home to help with chores.

In Mexico City, Slater *et al.* (2003) reported two challenges of school directors. The first was lack of resources. The other was how to motivate those with whom they worked: teachers, staff, and

supervisors. They expressed similar frustration with teachers who did not share their dedication as did their counterparts in rural Baja California.

4.2. Impressions

What the directors said was important, but incomplete without noting how they said it. These more subjective data can give a fuller picture of the working lives of the directors. In the focus groups, they spoke one at a time taking turns. The others listened for lengthy periods without comment, and occasionally nodded in agreement or made brief comments. Sometimes a story brought laughter or cries of sympathy. It seemed as though they could have gone on for a long time. They wanted to talk about their work and were delighted to have an audience of fellow school directors and university professors.

They had come to Ensenada from a considerable distance for a workshop in which they participated in activities to share ideas and discuss leadership. In this setting, they seemed to feel special. They were away from the press of day to day problems and seemed ready to think in new ways.

One director was moved to tears when she spoke about how she had built up her first school from nothing only to have it taken away from her. Another director returned to her community and reported her excitement to a school volunteer. She initiated a new practice of parent meetings in which she asked for their opinions about the running of the school.

Most of the school directors had been in their positions for considerable time. They persisted with an idealism that they expressed in the focus group sessions. They were candid about the scope of the problems that they faced, but none seemed ready to quit or give in. They seized on the workshop and focus groups as a way to rekindle their faith.

School directors in Mexico City spoke deliberately and at length about the challenges that they faced (Slater *et al.*, 2003). They were somewhat more subdued as though they took for granted the opportunity to share their concerns. These directors met with others frequently as part of a graduate program. They had perhaps moved beyond feelings of isolation to pursue further education to gain the skills they needed in their schools.

4.3. Cultural Questions

The stories of school directors in this study may suggest a changing portrait of Mexican school administrators on Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions. In what has been a high power distance culture, these directors are no longer able to rely on position power to get things done. They are searching for new ways to motivate, give a sense of ownership, and share responsibility.

Mexico has been relatively high in uncertainty avoidance, but these school directors could be characterized as risk takers. They moved into rural communities with no preparation and took their first jobs as directors of schools. Many of school directors are women. In a culture that has been characterized as high in masculinity, the women in our sample have taken on leadership roles.

Time orientation appears to be an area of great conflict. The school directors spoke strongly and at length about the importance of punctuality. Their concern about the smooth running of the school may be related to their long-term hopes for the children under their care.

Our sample is too small and regional to make conclusions about the application of Hofstede's theory in Mexico, but the attitude of these school directors may suggest that the dimensions are changing.

4.4. Metacultural Questions

What can be learned from school directors reporting on their work lives in one culture while researchers from another culture listen and analyze? How can we go beyond summaries and impressions? The place to start is with our own questions. Here are some of the issues that puzzled us about the directors' reports in Baja California.

Why is there such an apparent gulf between the dedication of teachers and the dedication of the directors? The directors were passionate, persistent, and idealistic. They described teachers as completely lacking these qualities.

Some challenges appeared to be common in Baja California and Mexico City and similar to the experience of US researchers as well. We may speculate that these challenges cross cultures, and that school directors face a universal challenge to motivate teachers to work together on a common agenda for the school. First-year principals may find teachers entrenched in old ways of doing things and skeptical of new leadership. They may wonder if their authority will be accepted. When they begin planning, they want to get everyone on board, and worry about those who resist or are reluctant. They may struggle for years to win over a majority of teachers to a new agenda or just obtain a degree of cooperation. This is the central challenge of leadership.

US principals also face the challenge of resolving conflicts and creating working teams. Skills in conflict resolution and working with adults are in high demand on both sides of the border. These were mentioned in Mexico City as well (Slater, *et al.*, 2003).

What may be different is the perceived idealism of teachers. There are many missing ingredients here, but it may be that US principals see teachers as more dedicated, and perhaps, they are. Future research should examine the perceptions of US principals and perceptions of teachers in both the US and Mexico.

The participants had recommendations for educational administration preparation. They wanted courses in how to work with adults, resolve conflicts, encourage collaboration, and engage teachers in the mission of the school. Beyond courses, we noted that these teachers already seem to be committed to ideals and values that are the foundation of their work.

Where do the ideals of school directors and teachers come from? What fuels their belief in the importance of education? What makes them persistent? How can these more fundamental qualities be supported and nurtured for both school directors and teachers? This is the central question for educational administration preparation.

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