School Counseling and Social Entrepreneurship

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Abstract: School counselors are the pupil personnel service providers in the school who are responsible for individual and group counseling and consultancy work, all of which require networking collaboratively with administrators, teachers, parents, and the community. Given this context, it is argued that a social entrepreneurship approach is beneficial, in particular for school counselors, who are in a unique position to span the boundaries of their organizations and engage with the larger community. This article examines the work done by interns in a school counseling training program in several New York City high schools. While mainly providing mental health care, they are also engaged in a variety of projects to improve the lives of their students. Their services and activities are evaluated to identify correspondences with social entrepreneurship.

Keywords: School Counseling, Social Entrepreneurship

Introduction

Pupil personnel services constitute a unit that brings together a range of para-educational professionals from the school system, including the school counselor and the school psychologist. They are often described as "gatekeepers" for specialized services. For example, they play a crucial role in providing services to students with ADHD (Graczyk, Atkins, Jackson, Letendre, et al., 2005). It is therefore important that these professionals engage with the community to effectively identify needs and adjust their targeted services.

There is also a growing need for pupil personnel service providers to collaborate within the school system, especially with regards to leadership. Such collaboration is necessary because of their pivotal role of promoting and leading school initiatives more effectively (Perusse, Lally, Haas, & Mische, 2009; Sink, 2009; Vaugh, Bynum, & Hooten, 2007).

The approach of the social entrepreneur is of value to those pupil personnel service providers that interact with the community and attempt to change existing services based on its needs. The following diagram illustrates the dynamics of the relationship between the pupil, school, stakeholders (parents, educators and the community), and the counselor:

The social entrepreneur concept originated in the U.K. and is a useful model for those working in the non-profit sector. Unlike the business entrepreneur who sees value in the creation of new markets, the social entrepreneur aims for value in the form of transformational change that will benefit disadvantaged communities and, ultimately, society at large. Interestingly, as much as 3% of the U.K. population has been classified as socially entrepreneurial (Van Ryzin, Grossman, DiPadova-Stocks, & Bergrud, 2009).
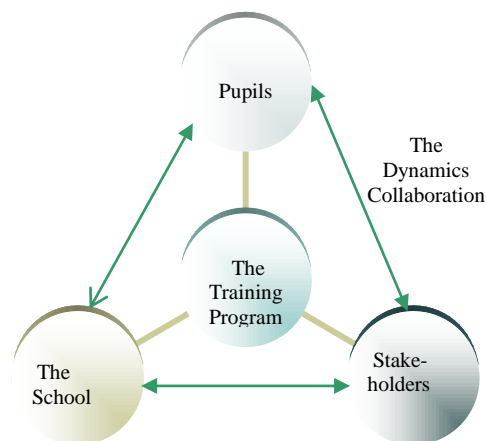
So social entrepreneurship is clearly not a phenomenon limited to a handful of uniquely talented individuals making widespread transformative change. As this paper demonstrates, social entrepreneurship can take place on a small scale, and according to a simple set of principles. Rather than emanating solely from a talented individual's genius, the success (or otherwise) of a

social project lies in its networks and connections. This valuable concept can of course be applied universally and, in this article, specifically to the area of U.S. education.

The different pupil personnel services roles vary in their scope for social entrepreneurship. School psychologists are required to focus on individual assessments and other forms of evaluation.

The roles of the school counselor and school social worker lend themselves to social entrepreneurship. The school counselor is able to focus on dealing with issues related to community needs and to engage and interact with community members to address the needs of students and their families.

The boundary-spanning potential of the school counselor's role was demonstrated in a study that analyzed and compared the contributions of a small number of school counselors and school psychologists (Goodman and Young, 2006). The analysis of the work of interns in a school counseling training program from different schools indicated that they were not confined to their duties in the schools. In their internship experience we felt that they crossed over their organization's boundaries to connect with the outside community and initiate projects with their students. Their endeavors clearly adopted aspects of social entrepreneurship, as outlined below.

Methodology

The alliterative concept of *the five C's* (Leadbeater, 1997) provides a useful methodology for evaluating the school counselors' social entrepreneurialism efforts. It also provides a set of prescriptive tenets for those who wish to replicate such efforts. The five C's in this type of entrepreneurialism effort include: 1) community members, 2) challenges, 3) creativity, 4) complexity, and 5) connections.

Students in the internship stage of the school counseling training program were encouraged to report on their internship experiences as they relate to Leadbeater's five C's'. Three of our students presented their findings to us for discussion as part of an internship supervision meeting as outlined below.

Findings and Discussion

Mr. Smith, Ms.Clark and Ms. Ramon, interns in a school counseling training program, reported in an internship class meeting on the various aspects involved in his social entrepreneurship efforts with relation to Leadbeater's five C's:

1) *Community members.* Mr. Smith reported that he approached leaders and active community members to recruit them in their efforts to initiate after-school projects. These projects were intended to serve high-school students and provide them with assistance with homework assignments, provide both students and their families with access to counseling services, and a place where parents, school personnel and students could meet, interact, and discuss issues related to common interests. These projects were founded on the principles of understanding each individual community's needs and then conducting outreach activities based on those needs. The other two interns agreed with Mr. Smith on the fact that there were no fixed guidelines because each community has different needs, and any outreach had to be flexible.

2) *Challenges.* Ms. Clark reported that the main challenge was to train counselors to address the different needs of the community using the available resources within the community. She reported that many pupil personnel service providers have low expectations because of limited resources within an overburdened system. This usually results in a uniform approach that does not take into account a community's needs, culture, and ethnic influences. It appears to us (the authors) that from the outset the interns in a school counseling training program had unusually high standards and expectations. This is why, as internship instructors, we used "outside the box" thinking where we encouraged students to listen to the concern of families, and community members to ensure that all issues were considered.

All three school counseling interns were in consensus that they were faced with a number of major challenges during their efforts to open after-school projects. These obstacles included obtaining funding for the project, finding an accessible and appropriate location, finding a suitable building, and ensuring sufficient numbers of counselors and support personnel.

Funding the project was of course a crucial first step. The bulk of the funding relied upon local contributions and the remainder was raised through contributions from students' families. While this level of community commitment was heartening, it is hoped that in the future funding sources will be through government grants, either local or federal.

Ms. Ramon reported that finding an accessible location was particularly difficult due to the collaborative nature of the project. The after-school programs needed to be accessible for the student groups from both schools that the counselors worked at. Consequently they ensured that the location was close to public transportation and offered adequate available parking for parents with cars. Another consideration, not unimportant, was the need for local food vendors nearby to serve participants lower-order needs, corresponding, to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1968). Finding a suitable building was also challenging because the facility had to be in good working order with operational heating and cooling systems, elevators, appropriate room sizes and furniture, and computer facilities.

The three interns said that the staff for the project was mostly recruited from teachers from both schools. Most of the staff agreed to volunteer their services. The support personnel were individuals that operated the building's heating and cooling systems and provided security and cleaning services. These individuals were paid employees of the project.

3) *Creativity.* The school counselors' creativity was evident in their approach to the project. They first ensured that the program was able to adequately provide services to students, and then they expanded its scope to include services to students' families and to provide a forum for community members. In this way the school counselors were able to engage all the stakeholders in the project. Here it would be important to note that the most important resources of the project are its staff and instructors who service the students and their families. It is important that the staff understand the importance of outreach activities and interacting with different community members. Therefore one of the project's goals is to be creative and innovative in its approaches. One example is the inclusion of community members in the project so that they can provide input about needed services and community involvement. The project shuns formality and encourages the student, their families, and community members to openly discuss important issues, particularly those with cultural or communal significance.

4) *Complexity.* It was evident in the approach of all three interns that their work embraced the diversity that is the hallmark of communities in New York. There was no "one solution fits all" approach, just as there was no single approach for each group or subgroup. Through their work we realized that in order to be effective, services have to be tailored to each group's particular needs and local requirements. Of course, at the same time, while there are many differences between groups there are also many commonalities, as all groups have a need for certain core services. This recognition of complexity was at the heart of the project's delivery.

5) *Connections:* As a result of this internship class presentation by the three interns, as well as our ongoing instruction and supervision discussions that followed on several occasions, we realized that in the realm of social entrepreneurship the project managers and members were constantly trying to make connections with and between students their families and the surrounding communities. This included finding project sites, connecting with families of the students, networking with community leaders, and engaging actively with members. The project and its programs stressed the importance of forging connections between students, families, and communities.

Conclusion

The application of the social entrepreneur model to education has great value due to the constantly changing needs of students, their families, and the surrounding community. The school counselor is well placed to apply this model in meeting the needs of the students as the counselor can bridge the gap between the needs of the school and the availability of services in the community. By adopting a simple set of measures – the 5 C's – the counselor can maximize his or her endeavors in social entrepreneurship.

This boundary-spanning role is multi-directional, since the school counselor also works with other professionals within the school, and while utilizing them as resources, at the same time can import insights about the outside community. The counselor then becomes not only an interpreter of the school to the outside community, but also an interpreter for the community to the school. Finally, it is important to note that the role of the school principal is key to all

successful reforms (Leech & Fulton, 2008; McCurdy, 2003). Therefore, the school counselor, to be an effective social entrepreneur, must ensure that the principal is directly involved to champion his or her attempts to engage the wider community and to successfully instigate appropriate changes in services.

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