The Role of Foundations in Promoting Educational Change: An Examination of High Impact Initiatives in School Leadership Preparation

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Abstract

For over one hundred years foundations have played various roles in promoting educational change; however, since the early 1980s their influence has increased considerably. In spite of significant increases in foundation funding for education, the research community rarely examines the impact of that funding. U.S. foundations, according to Fleishman (2007), have made significant contributions at home and abroad, yet little is known about what they have done and, in particular, their impact on education and the field of educational leadership. Since the literature has a dearth of information that describes and analyzes the contributions and failures of foundations in promoting educational change, this paper attempts to analyze the impact of two major foundation initiatives in education, with a specific focus on educational leadership. Two cases that have the potential to be of high impact on the preparation of educational leaders are examined: The Danforth Program for Preparing School Principals (DPPSP) and the Wallace Foundation’s State Action for Education Leadership Project (SAELP).
Foundations enable the creation of countless civic-sector organizations—groups dealing with human rights, civil liberties, social policy experimentation, public advocacy, environmental protection, knowledge generation, human capital building, and service delivery, among other causes—and assist them in building national, regional, and local constituencies that move into the forefront of continuing social change.”


The Foundation Landscape in the United States

A foundation is one type of nonprofit organization and is included in the tax code as a 501(c) (3) organization. The nonprofit sector is often referred to as the Third Sector, with private companies and public entities being the other two sectors. Other names for non-profit organizations include: civic organizations, charitable organizations, not-for-profit organizations, volunteer organizations, public benefit corporations and non-governmental organizations. The term non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are typically used outside the US. Whatever term used, what all types of 501(c)(3) organizations have in common is that they are nongovernmental organizations that are tax-exempt (as opposed to schools or public universities that are quasi-governmental organizations that are tax-exempt). According to O’Neill (2002), the IRS recognizes more than thirty categories of nonprofit organizations with foundations falling within the 501(c)(3) category, which includes “religious, charitable and similar organizations” (p. 4).

It is estimated that there are more than 71,000 foundations in the United States in 2007 (Lawrence, S., Austin, A., & Mukai, R., 2007). The majority of these foundations are small; however, there are 50 foundations with assets of over one billion dollars (e.g., Gates, Carnegie, Rockefeller, Ford, Irvine, Mott, Annenberg, Hewlett, Kellogg, Walton Family Foundation). According to a recent keynote speech by Peter Hero, Senior Advisor to the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, “…fifteen years ago there were thirteen billionaires in the United States; today there are 400 billionaires. And, one thousand around the world” (Hero, 2007). People with considerable wealth will continue to either create new foundations (e.g., the Better World Foundation*), or add their wealth to existing foundations such as community foundations. Many large foundations fund programs not only in the United States, but also throughout the world. For example, the Spencer Foundation of Chicago recently completed a major initiative in Africa dealing with doctoral degree programs in education. Foundations differ markedly from one another; however, in general they can be divided into three categories: perpetual foundations (e.g., Carnegie, Ford), time-limited foundations (e.g., the Rosenwald Fund), and donor-advised foundations (e.g., often available in community foundations, United Way).
Major Foundations Initiatives in Education

Since Andrew Carnegie created his foundation more than 100 years ago, several major foundations have undertaken a variety of education-related initiatives. The Carnegie Foundation’s high impact initiatives in education range from the Flexner Report (1906) which helped to revolutionize medical education to creating the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1906) which “…teaches, convenes, provokes and assesses”…and brings together the leading scholars…” (Shulman, 2006). Another example of a high impact foundation initiative was the Rosenwald Fund founded by Julius Rosenwald with the advice and counsel of Booker T. Washington (Lagemann, 1999). In 1912 the time-limited Rosenwald Fund “…facilitated the construction of 4,977 rural schools throughout the South with an additional 380 homes and shops to complement the schools” (p. 109). Two initiatives, The Flexner Report and the Building Schools For Rural African Americans, are, what Fleishman calls, “high impact initiatives (p. 98)” (2007; http://www.pubpol.duke.edu/dfrp/cases/).

Measuring Impact

According to Fleishman, in order “to measure the impact of a foundation initiative, one must find and record the ripples it creates in society—the broader and deeper the better” (p. 89). His research has identified seven possible types of impacts “…that mark the most effective foundation initiatives (p. 93)”. One key impact is that there is a major benefit to the public. This could be localized to a restricted geographic area, but there is high intensity in the work. For example, in the Southeast section of San Diego, California the Jacobs Family Foundation has worked with the local community to create an infrastructure to serve community needs. The Foundation provided funds to build the Market Creek Plaza that includes: a local bank, supermarket, restaurants, and a myriad of shops, all of which are managed by community residents. In addition, the schools, libraries, and other public service organizations within this geographic boundary receive additional support from the foundation.

A second benefit could be the outputs and benefits created by the initiative. For example, the Rosenwald Fund built nearly 5000 schools and 380 homes and stores in the rural south. A building in and of itself is not an impact; however, examining the benefits that accumulate to the people who use the building is the test of the impact.

According to Fleishman, another possible benefit that can be a measure of the success of an initiative is the expansion of knowledge. Books and papers published about an initiative are outputs, not outcomes. Fleishman maintains that, “The impact of research lies in the social change produced as a result” (p. 94) of the foundation’s initiative. This benefit may be key to assessing the success of foundation initiatives in the arena of educational leadership preparation.
Another category of benefit identified by Fleishman is when a movement is launched. For example, the Ford Foundation was instrumental in providing the startup funds for the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund (MALDEF) that has played a major role in America’s civic sector.

Fleishman offers the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching as an example of a foundation initiative that has served as catalyzing an urgent social need. A sixth category is what he calls helping an existing organization find a new path. And another possible benefit category is taking an initiative to scale. One example offered by Fleishman is how the Ford Foundation’s financial support was able to take a local micro-credit initiative of the Grameen bank in Bangladesh to scale by providing sufficient funding for the program.

Since millions of dollars are spent each year by foundations working in the education arena, it is incumbent on researchers to study the stories of the most successful and effective initiatives. Today, nearly ever major foundation, save those whose mission targets other areas (e.g., the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s focuses on health issues) is granting substantial funding to educational institutions and initiatives. Given the steady increase in the number of large US foundations and the growth in the investment portfolios of those foundations, the amount of money available to support education will continue to increase substantially.

Recent Foundation Education Initiatives

According to Carnegie Corporation of New York’s president, Vartan Gregorian, there are several US foundations “who thought it was their duty to become involved in the cause of school reform” largely due, he argues, to the landmark report in 1983, A Nation At Risk (Gregorian, October 4, 2004). Numerous examples of major foundation initiatives in education since 1982 include: the Carnegie Foundation’s Teachers for a New Era (TNA); PacifiCorp Foundation for Leaning’s Early Childhood Literacy Initiative; The Chicago Public Education Fund’s Master Teacher Initiative Linking Resources to Results (King, 2006); to name but a few. Even though large sums of money have been awarded, few foundations have researched the impact of their initiatives. Only recently have some large foundations used empirical measurements to examine the extent of an initiative’s impact.

In 2006 Grantmakers published a series of five case studies for Education (GFE). GFE is a national nonprofit organization whose “...mission is to strengthen philanthropy’s capacity to improve educational outcomes for all students.” (retrieved 8/19/07 www.edfunders.org/about/index.asp). GFE offers workshops, opportunities to network, study groups, etc. for education funders. Thus far GFE has published five case studies that detail education initiatives by
five different foundations: the Chicago Public Education Fund (2006); the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2006); the Donors Education Collaborative of NYC (2006); the Noyce Foundation (2006); and, the PacifiCorp Foundation for Learning (2006). Each of these cases describes the initiative, assesses the foundation initiative’s impact and describes lessons learned.

In an Op-Ed article in the Chronicle of Philanthropy (August 9, 2007), two foundation presidents, Paul Brest of the Hewlett Foundation, and James Canales of the Irvine Foundation, discussed the importance of sharing with other foundations not only their successful initiatives, but also the unsuccessful ones. The Irvine Foundation of California published “Midcourse Corrections to a Major Initiative (2007)” that describes the problems experienced during an eight-year, $60 million effort that sought to improve educational achievement at low-performing schools in five cities. The foundation hired an evaluation group to conduct a thorough review. The evaluation led to changes that are now underway and there is hope that the project will experience successful outcomes.

Despite the cases reference above, few publications describing the lessons learned from foundation initiatives in education can be found. To assist faculty in educational leadership programs, foundation representatives interested in supporting the development of school leaders and various types of education policy stakeholders, it is imperative to examine high impact initiatives in school leadership development so that we can better understand how to learn from past funding mistakes, and enhance our understanding of what works for programs that develop successful school leaders.

This paper summarizes two potentially high impact cases that describe initiatives funded by foundations to improve educational leadership preparation. These cases are illustrative of some of the strategies and tactics that foundations use in order to achieve their desired outcomes.

Selection of the Initiatives

This study used several of Fleishman’s possible types of impacts in order to select programs for examination. According to Fleishman, “to measure the impact of a foundation initiative, one must find and record the ripples it creates in society—the broader and deeper the better. (p. 89). The strategy used for sampling was what Goetz and LeCompte (1984) call comprehensive sampling. The universe of all possible cases was examined and only two foundation initiatives were found to meet Fleishman’s criteria used to identify high impact initiatives.

The two cases selected were: the Danforth Foundation’s initiative Danforth Programs for the Preparation of School Principals 1986-1995; and, the Wallace Foundation’s State Action for Educational Leaders Phases I and II, 2002 to present. Each case includes a description of the goals and objectives, the
organizations involved and the major outcomes of the program. Finally, the impact of the initiatives on the field of educational leadership is examined.

Data Sources and Methods

Since this study attempted to analyze the emerging role of foundations in promoting and partnering to initiate reform in the arena of educational leadership preparation, the existing literature was used not only as the major data collection strategy, but also for the identification of possible initiatives. Key word searches were used in electronic databases, as well as online search engines. The criteria for section included: 1) the initiative had to be in the field of school leadership preparation; 2) more than one site had to be funded; and, 3) the initiative had to have existed for a minimum of five years since the original foundation funding. The rationale for selecting an initiative that was beyond one site (e.g., one Principal's Center or university program that is funded by a foundation) was that the potential for high impact, beyond the one location, possibly minimal, and difficult to examine/measure. This does not mean that single sites cannot result in high impact initiatives, it only means that since this study was conducted to explore the scale of an initiative, it was determined that the likelihood of high impact would be found if more than one site was funded. The rationale for not selecting initiatives that have been funded for less than five years is that it is extremely difficult to assess impact in such a relatively short period of time.

The primary data sources were existing documents (evaluation reports, scholarly publications, programmatic materials, etc.). Secondary data sources included interviews with key personnel from foundations, university programs, school districts and other partners. A total of eleven interviews were held. They included: five-university faculty, three district personnel and three foundation project officers. The main purpose of the interviews was to assess whether the universe of possible cases did, according to the interviewees, achieve high impact using one or more of Fleishman’s definitions. In addition, since neither of these initiatives has been written about in great detail, the interviews were used to triangulate data. The interview guide used was based on the seven categories identified by Fleishman to assess the most effective foundation initiatives. Since one of the initiatives is currently being funded, participants who are quoted are not identified.

Limitations

This study has numerous limitations. The criteria for selection was limited to those initiatives funded by foundations, and did not include initiatives funded by a single donor without a request for proposals being conducted. In addition, only initiatives within the United States were examined. There may be existing examples of foundation initiatives in other countries, supported by foundations in that country; however, this study was limited to the United States. Also, as more large U.S. foundations support school leadership preparation and development
worldwide, it will be important to examine international initiatives in school leadership preparation. Finally, there are some new foundation initiatives in school leadership preparation that are in existence at the time of writing this manuscript, however, they have only recently been funded and therefore did not meet the third criterion.

Two Cases of High Impact Initiatives in School Leadership Preparation

In the next section two cases of initiatives that have had a significant impact on school leadership preparation are presented. Each case begins with a brief history of the foundation. This is followed by an overview of the school leadership initiative and a description of its components. The case concludes with an examination of the impact of the initiative.

The Danforth Foundation

The Danforth foundation was first established in 1927 by William Danforth and his family “for charitable and humanitarian purposes and to promote the well-being of mankind” (retrieved September 10, 2007 http://record.wustl.edu/news/page/normal/7659.html). Created with the fortune made from his company, Ralston Purina, the foundation initially had programs and grants to help young people from around the nation to learn the essence of his personal philosophy, the “Four Square” life. The ingredients of a four square life were: a body, a mind, a personality and character. For seventy years the Foundation offered a variety of programs that included scholarships for students and teachers, university support and many other education-related initiatives serving students and educators around the country. In 1997 the Danforth Foundation ceased to be a national foundation. Its endowment had significantly declined and the Board of Trustees changed the focus of its direction to the foundation’s location area—St. Louis. The Danforth Foundation is no longer in the top fifty foundations in asset size.

The DPPSP Initiative

The Danforth Program for the Preparation of School Principals (DPPSP) began in 1987 and focused on improving the preparation of school-site administrators. Each year from 1987 to 1991 three to six departments of school administration entered a cohort that eventually resulted in a total of twenty-two universities participating in the project. DPPSP lasted for a total of six years (Wilson, 1993). Each of the twenty-two institutions was provided with approximately $50,000 over the tenure of their grant.

According to Gresso (1993) the Danforth Foundation related to the historic efforts of other foundations that focused on leadership development such as Kellogg and Ford, as well as “…the efforts of faculty members at Butler University to pioneer field experiences through a planned internship” (p. 3). Project officers at the Danforth Foundation believed that due to “recent reform
reports…a major overhaul [in leadership preparation] was about to begin in education” (p. 2). The Foundation found considerable resistance from university personnel for a variety of reasons including lack of resources, lack of university support and unwillingness, for a variety of reasons, to share responsibility for preparation with local school districts. Priority for selecting university departments was given to schools that had deans who had a history for supporting school district partnerships. In addition, the foundation was seeking”…geographic diversity…geographic location” of the university-based programs. (p. 7,8). Another criterion included programs that had an existing reputation for innovation and already established some success, among other criteria.

In order to select universities to participate in the project the foundation made “inquiries to investigate the degree of interest in this alternative principal-preparation program” (p. 6). One former dean interviewed for the study stated that he felt it was key that the foundation explored the interest that the department and university administration had for working to change preparation.

“I remember being asked that if we ran two preparation programs did I think that if the Danforth funded program was successful would we eventually phase out the existing program. I wasn’t sure we could do that with our existing faculty, but we had just hired a new faculty member so if we got a grant I would let her know that the long term goal was to improve our program and if that meant eliminating the existing program, then so be it.” (Interview #2, 7/2/07).

**Components of the DPPSP**

The Foundation asked each applicant to consider eight components for this new school leadership initiative. According to Gresso (1985) they included: assessment, candidates, curriculum, cycle, internships, mentors, university-school partnerships including a steering committee, and a program facilitator. A key factor is that the Foundation did not require each university to have these basic program components, instead they were asked to consider including these components. One faculty member commented,

Our new program didn’t have to have these components, but we knew Danforth wanted us to have them. So, if it made sense to us, which it did. We included it. (interview #4 8/15/07)

From reviewing the literature and talking with study participants, it is clear that the Danforth Foundation, either through examining existing literature on leadership in education and on other fields, as well as by examining their work in other Danforth projects and by hiring consultants to this project, had a theory of change. This theory was articulated in the components that each program was to consider. The Foundation believed that assessment for screening candidates
was a key component of a good preparation program. They also believed that since so few ethnic minorities and women were in school administration positions, then the initiatives created by the Danforth funding should encourage identifying approaches to recruitment and selection for women and candidates of color. A key aspect of the foundation’s theory of change was that it was crucial to partner with local school districts in preparing future administrators. This included curriculum development and review, creating and implementing the internship, identifying and training mentors, and forming a mechanism such as a steering committee that would provide feedback, evaluation and agenda setting. Finally, the Foundation required that a facilitator be identified. This person’s role was to be “…a teaching member of the faculty and a liaison between the university department and the Danforth Foundation” (Gresso, p. 12).

Impact

The DPPSP initiative resulted in numerous examples of outcomes that support the extraordinary impact of an initiative that expended a little over $1,000,000 to implement. The foundation decided not only to invite twenty-two universities from throughout the nation to participate, but also created learning cohorts for the program facilitators. Considerable evidence is still in existence today that many of the components key to the theory of change encouraged by the Danforth Foundation are still operating in some programs. For example, the University of Washington, one of the original DPPSP universities, recently welcomed their twentieth “Danforth Education Leadership Program” cohort of students (retrieved 9/2/07 http://departs.washington.edu/k12admin/danforth/). Another example can be found in a study commissioned by the Wallace Foundation. The University of Connecticut’s Administrator Preparation Program (UCAPP), another of the DPPSP universities, was recently cited as one of eight programs in the United States selected as exemplary in pre-service and in-service principal development (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007). According to the researchers, “The programs were chosen because they provided evidence of strong outcomes in preparing school leaders and because in combination they represented a variety of approaches…and partnerships between universities and school districts” (p. 2). The UCAPP initiative today still contains many of the original components set forth by the Danforth Foundation.

Literally hundreds of references can be found in the literature about the DPPSP initiative of the Danforth Foundation. Because of the DPPSP initiative, dozens of papers have been presented at conferences such as UCEA, NCPEA and AERA. These papers, and their resultant publications, have generated considerable discussion and debate among university school administration faculty and district personnel about what type of leadership is needed in our nation’s schools and how universities can best nurture that leadership. Not only did the Danforth Foundation’s initiative help to expand the knowledge about good school leadership preparation through supporting program facilitators to come together annually, but also through providing ongoing learning opportunities for
university faculty (e.g., PBL training). In addition, the foundation commissioned a study of five DPPSP university sites that resulted in a widely-cited book by Milstein and Associates (1993) entitled *Changing the Way we Prepare Educational Leaders: The Danforth Experience*. It was one of the first researched-based books describing the components and outcomes of university principal preparation programs. One could argue that another of Fleishman’s types of major impacts for foundation initiatives can be found in the DPPSP initiative. Given that the foundation supported programs located at various types of universities as well as in various locations through the nation, not only was the national dialogue on principal preparation heightened, but the foundation jumpstarted an important reform dialogue within the university educational administration faculty community. Thus, I maintain that the foundation’s DPPSP initiative helped to launch a movement to improve principal preparation. And, in particular, a core program component -- forming partnerships with school districts in that preparation -- was key to the movement. Unfortunately, another of Fleishman’s marks of high impact foundation initiatives—*taking an initiative to scale*—was not fully realized. In deciding to change their focus on programs from a national to a local one, the Danforth Foundation stopped supporting initiatives such as The DPPSP. Had additional universities been invited to join the network, it is very probable that the foundation’s Danforth Program for the Preparation of School Principals could have had a far greater impact on university-based principal preparation programs.

**The Wallace Foundation**

In the 1950s Dewitt and Lila Acheson Wallace established a group of family foundations that had various funds that merged in 2003 resulting in what is today called the Wallace Foundation. Located in New York City, the Wallace Foundation is a national foundation that currently has three foci for philanthropy: strengthening educational leadership, improving after school learning, and supporting the arts. The foundation has assets of approximately $1.5 billion making it one of the top 50 foundations in the United States (Foundation Center, 2007).

**The SAELP Initiative**

Phase I of the Wallace foundation’s initiative, State Action for Education Leadership Project (SAELP), was launched in 2000 in fifteen states. In 2004 the same states were awarded another $3.6 million for SAELP Phase II and another nine states, and partner districts within them, were added. States participating in the project had to show that their top-level leaders, including governors, were committed to the project. In addition, not only did the training of school leaders have to be improved, but also there had to be a commitment to improve working conditions. Working conditions included things such as offering incentives to attract leaders to particular schools, providing the authority to the school administrator to make the necessary decisions, and creating job reasonable
descriptions. The Wallace Foundation’s theory of change is based on the idea that student achievement will improve if educational leadership is enhanced (Wallace Foundation, 2004).

The Wallace initiative also included other components. The Wallace Foundation worked with other foundations as such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in several of the selected states. This is an example of a strategy that helps to enhance impact by leveraging resources. At the same time they expanded their outreach efforts with the media so that there would be increase reporting on leadership issues in key publications such as Education Week. The foundation also partnered with the Council of Chief State School Officers, the National Governors Association, and the Education Commission of the States in order to bring together the relevant state and district educators to discuss how to link leadership to improved learning (The Wallace Foundation Report, 2004).

Impact

The Wallace Foundation has played a major role in what Fleishman calls the expansion of knowledge. The foundation has commissioned a number of studies (e.g., the Center on reinventing Public Education’s Buried Treasure: Developing a Management guide form Mountains of School Data, and When Learning Counts: Rethinking Licenses for School Leaders; and the Southern Regional Education Board’s the Principal Internship: How Can we get it Right, and Schools Can’t Wait: Accelerating the Redesign of University Principal Preparation Programs). In addition, the foundation created the “Knowledge Center” as a resource on it’s website. One of website’s topics is ‘Education Leadership’ and copies of all reports commissioned by the foundation on the topic can be easily downloaded.

It is possible that another of Fleishman’s marks of a high impact initiative--taking an initiative to scale-- can be found in SDAELP; however, there is still insufficient evidence.

According to one school district administrator (#7 9/6/07),

I think the strategy used by Wallace moved too fast and expanded too quickly into far too many states…. I was never convinced some of those states should have been brought in. When they expanded [Phase II] they hadn’t gone deep enough in some of the earlier programs.

Foundation Impacts Contributing to the Field of School Leadership Preparation

The Danforth Foundations’ DPPSP initiative is an example of a foundation identifying possible components of a model and then encouraging and supporting the examination and in-depth exploration of those components. One possible outcome could be to say that the foundation helped to launch a movement in
university-based leadership preparation reform by setting out the components of a model for principal preparation.

It may, in a few years, be possible to say that the Wallace Foundation’s SDALP initiative illustrates how a foundation can help *take to scale* the research-based attributes of a model of principal development. Clearly, one of the high impacts that Fleishman identifies has been demonstrated. The Wallace Foundation has helped *to expand knowledge* by 1) commissioning research; 2) advocating for policy; and, 2) publishing scholarly reports.

As foundations learn from each other about their attempts to positively impact various education initiatives, learning from the research results of evaluation studies is key to accumulating wisdom for the field. Numerous questions were raised by participants in this study, as well as by reviewing the literature. They include: How long is optimal for seeing the necessary impact? What kind of technical support might be provided by the foundation that will facilitate the initiative? Why do grants rarely allow for operating expenses to be included? The answer to these questions and others will help to ensure that the vast sums of foundation funding is used to do what Fleishman says is a key role for the Third Sector—be at the “…forefront of continuing social change” (p.3)

**Conclusion**

Little is known about the roles U.S. foundations have played because no comprehensive study has examined their specific contributions to educational leadership. Since there has been considerable growth in the number of foundations and the major roles they play in reforming education particularly since the mid-1980s, it is crucial that those of us who work in educational leadership be at the forefront of the discussion, critique, and examination of those initiatives. Much can be learned from foundation initiatives such as DPPS and SDAELP, and it is through accumulating wisdom of the field that professors of educational leadership can make significant contributions to enhancing foundation education initiatives.

In June of 2006 Warren Buffet donated, over a period of time, thirty-one billion dollars to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; a foundation that already was the largest charitable foundation in the world with $29 billion in assets. On an annual basis the Gates Foundation will need to spend approximately $3.5 billion. This is an unprecedented opportunity and an incredible responsibility. It is important to note that a significant portion of that $3.5 billion will annually go towards education. It is hoped that this paper will begin a dialogue at UCEA about a topic that is not only vaguely understood, but also little researched.
References


