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Learning Experiences in Higher and Further Education- An Innovative Socialentrepreneurship Project in a Public Mexican University

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Abstract

This innovative educational project is the result of the work of a group of academics, who met the challenges of the 21st century, added their specific visions and made contact with transdisciplinarity and the formation of a significant formation in their students of the Educational Administration Program with learning orientated to the transfer, that is to say new fields of application (Campirán et al, 2005); this transit was possible through the metacognition resulting from the synergy found at the Universidad Veracruzana (Mexico) and the HEC University Montreal (Canada) to generate spaces that transcend the classrooms and thus express this vision that would allow to refocus and redirect their educational goals (Campirán et al, 2005). Internationalization of social entrepreneurship is part of an educational bonding project led by the academic group CA-UV-367 "Entrepreneurship, Management and Internalization" from which academics articulate formally the critical and complex exercise for an object-relation of learning of different visions: academic formation (curricular design); accommodation (spiral

organization); development of visions based on competencies (Campirán, 1999, in Morado, 1999) and integrative concepts (Campirán et al, 2005). The results obtained from the exercise and the use of the transdisciplinary vision approach greatly enriched the units of competence and the curricular contents of educational experiences: Strategic and economic planning over time promoted and strengthened in students their comprehensive and flexible training in addition to enhancing their resources and academic capabilities by projecting themselves as members of a global community.

Keywords: innovative educational project; social entrepreneurship; educational bonding.

Introduction

According to OECD (2016) reports, innovation will be essential to promote major qualitative changes in education, as opposed to the quantitative growth seen during last years. These changes are needed to enhance efficiency and improve the quality and equity of learning opportunities globally. To achieve these goals, new skills must be developed through academic programs, such as critical, creative and complex thinking, social innovation and communitary responsibility; all these could be promoted linking the academic framework with real professional practice. Therefore, topics such as entrepreneurship and social innovation take relevance into curriculum design.

Also, Falch & Mang (2015) state that educational innovation has an important effect on economic growth; then, the role of education is to develop the skills needed in labor market. Educational system must provide the conditions to prepare better trained workforce.

Based on the above, the relevance of the innovative educational project (IEP) Internationalizing Social Entrepreneurship is that it led the joint work among a group of students which participated in an international competition which aimed at the creation of a social enterprise to solve a real social problem using an online educational platform; during this process, students were coached by professors part of the CA-UV-367 and advisors of the General and Regional Coordination of Bonding.

This educational innovative project contributed to the achievement of two competence units from two educational experiences: Economics and Strategic Planning. The Economic Competence Unit was designed to distinguish and explain economic characteristics and theories that explain the economic behavior of the organization in the design and analysis of conceptual maps, synoptic charts, critical lectures, case studies and essays in order to allow students to develop analytical, reflexive and proactive attitudes about the importance of the economy in the business world. This is relevant because through the study of economic theory the student

understands that the problems of poverty, inequality and environment have not been solved with the application of orthodox economic models with multiple failures.

The Strategic Planning Competency Unit was design to analyze and create an integrative project through bibliographic and field research applied to the fundamental knowledge of strategic planning, and to generate with a responsible and proactive attitude strategic plans that allow companies to position and remain in the market through the achievement of competitive advantages; with a sense of commitment, autonomy and social responsibility. These contents were relevant for the project because a strategic business plan contributes to all commercial and non-profit activities; also, it is an administrative tool and allows entrepreneurs to know where they are and where the company is headed; as well as allow the advance of the same and contribute to overcoming the obstacles, managing to clarify its vision and to take advantage of the opportunities and resources (Stutely, 2000).

Objectives

The main objective of this project consisted in the development of a proposal to solve the problem of single mothers who leave their children to the care of unqualified third parties, offering them a kindergarten and quality education service and, simultaneously, to support low-income students to obtain a part-time job that will help them finance their studies and thus avoid dropping out of school.

The proposed solution was designed from the transdisciplinarity (complex thinking) approach by intervening the theoretical, heuristic and axiological knowledge of educational experiences: Economics (economic theories) and Strategic planning (business plans and models); of the Line of Generation and Application of Knowledge, specifically Entrepreneurship and Social Companies; the development of mobile applications and a foreign language (English).

Thus, the collateral objective of the project was to show that the classroom is a dynamic space, integrated by several dimensions (simultaneity of processes, presence of certainty, uncertainty and genesis) where it is possible to carry out the exercise of complexity.

Methodology

For this work the model of a Social Project was chosen because it was sought to generate in the students a learning experience that invited them to discover a social problem in its near context, which was the main theme of the competition, work autonomously and collaborative; to construct the learning the characteristics of the method proposed by Blumenfeld et al (1991):

1..An approach that is based on a real problem and involves several areas: high rates of teenage pregnancies; high rate of single working mothers; female desertion; limited job offer with part-time hours; low quality education for the children of single

mothers; insertion into society of individuals "educated by television" or unskilled personnel.

2..Opportunities for students to carry out research that allows them to learn new concepts, apply information and represent their knowledge in a variety of ways: social economy (Flores, 2009); on-line course on: social enterprises (Sanchis, Villajos, & Ribeiro, 2012), sustainable development, business models (Stutely, 2000), marketing strategies for social enterprises, strategies for financing social enterprises; technological applications.

3..Collaboration among students, academics and others involved in sharing and distributing knowledge and experiences among members of the "learning community": creativity and innovation, social impact, systemic thinking and the green environment; public relations and marketing; financing for entrepreneurs.

4..The use of cognitive tools and learning environments that motivate the student to represent their ideas: most of the competition and the training were developed through a platform designed for it.

Project stages

Pre competition stage: the project was considered to have an extension of one year, its complexity was reduced to the theme of social business; only the platforms of the Universidad Veracruzana and HEC Montreal University were used; to achieve the objectives various spaces were used: classroom, CA-UV-367 cubicle; facilities of the different faculties of the Veracruz University Veracruz region; the virtual university library and virtual seminars conducted by professors experts in the subject of Social Economy, strategic business plan; social business, business models; marketing strategies (social networks); sources of internal and external funding (crowdfunding). Regarding autonomy, it was agreed that academics and students could control the progress of the project and students had the responsibility to find the meaning of being social entrepreneurs and belonging to an autonomous university; the expected results were reflected in the accorded products (sustainable social business model) and the guiding questions that were raised were: What does it mean for me to be a social entrepreneur of the Universidad Veracruzana?, with the sub-questions: What and who is an entrepreneur? What is a social enterprise? What does it mean to manage a social enterprise in Mexico? What does it mean to manage a social enterprise in Veracruz? Likewise, the expected product was a business model aimed at solving the problem of single working mothers and low-income university students.

Competition stage: competition results in Montreal (Canada) were: in the 2016 edition, competition admitted 44 teams from 30 different universities around the world; only 27 teams completed round 1 which had to comply with the following requirements: business concept, stakeholder analysis, feasibility of social support; 21 teams which completed round 2 had to fulfill next requirements: a brief speech of

business presentation and check the ability to raise funds for their business; round 3 only was completed by 15 teams who had to attend in person training in Montreal and conducted the formal presentation of the business idea in 15 minutes before investors.

Post competition: after returning from competition, students produced a report of their experience; the information was analyzed and processed using the qualitative methodology (content analysis) by the members of the CA-UV-367, which could contribute to develop new research products on Entrepreneurship, Management and Internationalization.

Conclusion

Beyond the impact on the two educational experiences mentioned at the beginning of the project, student participation in the SBC competition in Montreal (Canada) transcended to transdisciplinarity.

Adopt the exercise of complexizing the classroom represented a major challenge for academics which had to migrate in their educational exercise towards the ecological model that far exceeded the conventional university spaces; it was dealt with from the beginning of the competition with simultaneous spaces full of emergent situations during the 6 months of pre competition and during the training week. Likewise, a new relationship was developed among the university community to share the experience of faculty members, which generated 4 social business projects for the next edition of the competition.

Finally, there is no doubt that complexing the classroom is a major challenge and an experience-learning of life for students, but also for academics which are aware of the responsibility of dealing with humans and the possibility of forging and empowering socially responsible global individuals.

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