Thirty Years of Breaking New Ground: Authentic Leadership and Resilience in Citizenship Education

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RQ: How does a small group of women educators in a Central American country understand notions of authentic leadership and resilience?

Theoretical Frameworks
- Authentic leadership – plays a critical role in cultivating and sustaining resilience, especially in those dedicated to social justice in education (Avolio et al., 2004).
- Resilience – essential trait for “those who wish to shape a more just future by challenging and changing the status quo” (Lyman, Strachan, & Lazaridou, 2012, p. 125).
- Application of multiple frameworks including, but not limited to, psychological resilience, social justice leadership, and women as social justice leaders.

Setting: Colegio Naleb’, a small, independent, democratic school in Fraijanes, Guatemala.

Sample: Six women including the school’s founder/leader and five teachers who have been affiliated with the school for at least 20 years and who regularly take part in delivering professional development for public primary school teachers who work in small towns and rural areas.

Data Collection: I modified and translated an existing interview protocol (Baldwin, Maldonado, Lacey, & Efinger, 2004); conducted semi-structured interviews in Spanish of at least 40 to 45 minutes that I translated and transcribed.

Key Findings
- Personal life issues: Participants described a variety of adversities in their lives. They explained how and why they were able to manage and overcome the challenges they faced including family difficulties, the impact of societal and political upheavals, and professional opposition.
- Resilience: Participants discussed their understandings of the word resiliencia in the context of their work and their personal lives.
- Authentic leadership: The participants’ descriptions of their experiences with the founder/leader point to authentic leadership attributes such as “positive psychological capital, positive moral perspective, leader self-awareness, and leader self-regulation, and follower self-awareness/regulation” (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, pp. 315-338).

Discussion
- Colegio Naleb’ is a small, independent, democratic school with a three-branch government, an approach to conflict resolution called dialogue, and an educational program based on family values and citizenship development. The participants in this study have been working together for at least 20 years in some cases and 30 in others. In addition to working together to develop, refine, and implement an educational model for the school that emphasizes democratic practices and citizenship development, they have also created a citizenship education curriculum for adults that they have been delivering in Guatemala for over 20 years. The workshops for adults have been attended by hundreds of educators, government employees, and leaders from private sector organizations.
- The role of authentic leadership (Avolio et al., 2004) in cultivating and sustaining resilience in a group of followers, especially those dedicated to social justice in education through citizenship development, should not be underestimated. For these women, it is the leader’s enduring authentic leadership that has played “a significant role in developing hope” (p. 808), which in turn contributes to sustaining resilience.
- There continues to be a need in Guatemala for leaders and teachers resilient enough to be courageous, persevere, and speak out (Lyman et al., 2012).