ORIGINAL ARTICLES

THE EMBODIMENT OF AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP

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Development of student leadership capacity and efficacy is critical to the nursing profession, and vital to this process is a strong foundation in critical thinking that includes a depth of understanding of self (i.e., authentic leadership development). This article will (a) present a theoretical overview of authentic leadership as compared with other popular leadership theories, (b) provide an overview of development/implementation of an authentic leadership course, the first in a series of six one-credit courses as an integral component of the Macy Undergraduate Leadership Fellows Program for upper-level nursing students, and (c) discuss related implications for nursing education. Findings from an investigator-developed quantitative pre–post survey and qualitative evaluation questions are provided. Student feedback regarding the comprehensive nature of the course was extremely positive and affirmed the value of introspection associated with authentic leadership in ongoing personal and professional development. Critical pedagogy and action-oriented learning strategies also proved beneficial to student engagement. (Index words: Leadership; Undergraduate nursing; Authentic) J Prof Nurs 30:282–291, 2014. © 2014 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Authentic Leadership

Leaders are made, not born. Effective leadership requires deep passion, an unwavering commitment to serving others, a bold vision of future possibilities, and a conscious commitment to life-long learning (King, Altman, & Lee, 2011, p. i).

In our increasingly complex health care system, the challenges and opportunities for nurse leaders and the need for those faculty and mentors in charge of developing them has never been greater. Given that nursing leadership skills are critical at every level and in varied contexts (Porter-O'Grady, 2011), it is critical to expose students to leadership development during their formative years of nursing education to assure graduates' maximum impact on the profession and health care outcomes. Central to building effective leadership skills is self-development. Van Velsor, McCauley, and Ruderman (2010) stated that leadership development is characterized as the expansion of a person's capacity to be effective in leadership roles and practices. Emerging leaders will therefore need to learn how to actively participate in recognized processes for creating change, such as shaping culture, solving problems, building alliances, and/or securing resources with the proper development and support. Thus, a variety of leadership developmental experiences is recommended during a student's educational journey. While elements of effective leadership development curricula are exhaustive, key developmental areas include a personal leadership assessment and understanding of and experience with leadership challenges.

Therefore, this article examines the foundational component of leadership—authentic leadership development. An overview of authentic leadership is provided,

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specifically as it relates to other commonly known leadership theories. A unique authentic leadership course, the first in a sequence of six one-credit courses in the Macy Undergraduate Leadership Fellows Program (MULFP), is also described. The goal of this course is to enhance undergraduate nursing student's self-awareness and self-development. Lessons learned and implications for nursing education are also discussed.

Both student and licensed nurses will need to make a conscious choice about why, when, how, and where they will lead. By knowing one's authentic self, purpose, and strengths, a person can walk a path of leadership filled with purpose and meaningful impact. Moreover, the landmark Institute of Medicine's (IOM) *Future of Nursing* report (IOM, 2010) endorsed that all nurses are charged to develop and implement appropriate change strategies that advance quality, access, and value in a patient-centered care environment (Porter-O'Grady, 2011). Furthermore, the IOM committee recommended that

"1) Nurses should practice to the full extent of their education and training; 2) Nurses should achieve higher levels of education and training through an improved education system that promotes seamless academic progression; and 3) Nurses should be full partners, with physicians and other healthcare professionals, in redesigning healthcare in the United States" (IOM, 2010, p. 4).

These recommendations, on the surface, look rather achievable. However, strong leadership on the part of nurses will be required to implement the changes that the IOM has set forth. Without these changes, neither the profession nor patient care can successfully advance through the complexities of contemporary change and transformation. Purposeful renewed focus on leadership-related competencies needs to be integrated into all levels of nursing curricula along with the appropriate experiential practice and mentoring experiences (IOM, 2010).

Background of Authentic Leadership

Authenticity is derived from Greek philosophy and denotes a humanistic psychological stance, which means "to thine own self be true" (Zielinska, 2012, p.1). Wong and Cummings (2009) defined authenticity of an individual as an intense psychological paradigm that entails the knowledge, acceptance, and behavioral responses of a person, which is rooted in a person's core and ethical values, high standards, convictions, emotions, and motives (Wong & Laschinger, 2013). Specific areas to be discussed about authenticity include its historical and theoretical foundations, how it is displayed in appearance and speech, as well as its recognized pivotal underlying components.

Authentic Leadership History, Concepts, and Theory

During the last 100 years, leadership theories have emerged worldwide; these include charismatic, transformational, spiritual, and servant leadership theories (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Bamford, Wong & Laschinger, 2013; Murphy, 2012). The main critique of each of these theories is their lack of core processing on behalf of the leader during the development of leadership. An absence of self-awareness and self-regulation in a person who is in charge discounts the authenticity of his or her moral leadership. Each person brings his or her own true self into everything he or she attempts; therefore, it is impossible to dismiss one's exclusive self-narrative when communicating with others. The self-synergy of one's values and beliefs affects how and why relationships develop and whether these sustain or fail. Therefore, the significantly influential addendum of authenticity to leadership theories was vastly beneficial.

The construct of authentic leadership application appeared in literature initially in the 1990s pertaining to the interests of sociology and education (Ladkin & Taylor, 2010). A leader's true, authentic self operates from a combination of his or her internal personal realm in relation to the external world. A leader's development and construction of true self can be discerned through contextual factors associated with that leader's narrative process. When taking into account the exposures a person has had during his or her journey through life, it can be readily understood how one's views are thus shaped on issues such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, social economic status, gender, and other pertinent social justice issues. To date, however, leadership theories have not acknowledged the meaning or importance of these life experiences to leadership development.

When compared, there are several key distinctions between authentic leadership and preceding theoretical leadership foundations (i.e., transformational, charismatic, servant, and leadership). Generally, authentic leadership tends to be more basic, incorporating better engagement with a high degree of self-awareness (Murphy, 2012). In differentiating an authentic leader from a transformational leader, an authentic leader is required to exhibit a deep sense of self in his or her expression of a position; whereas, a transformational leader is focused more on having a clear sense of purpose, on valuing and empowering, on achieving balance and connectedness, and on joining with others (Laschinger & Smith, 2013; Shirey, 2009). The source of influencing advocates for authentic leaders is the creation of meaning for everyone, including themselves, through self-awareness and self-regulation. In contrast, charismatic leaders often use persuasive speaking strategies to influence their audience of followers; likewise, charismatic and servant leaders inspire others by employing swaying, believable practices (Jackson, 2008). Furthermore, both servant and spiritual leaders lack the presence of an explicit presentation of the leader's "true self;" whereas, an authentic leader's main emphasis is on the importance of the altruistic, self-directive, genuine position of one's role as a leader (Avolio et al., 2009). The process of reflecting on these key features of a leader that were missing from previous leadership theories exemplifies the critical significance of an authentic leadership theory.