



Authentic Leadership: An Appropriate Leadership Style for Teacher Professional Development in Thailand?

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Abstract

Although student centered learning has been made a core component of Thailand's educational reform it has yet become a reality. The author perceives the change toward student centered learning as a cultural shift involving the intrapersonal, the cognitive and affective, dimensions of teachers. Hence, in order for student center learning to be fully implemented the teacher's internal domain, his or her cognitive and affective world, must be addressed. In light of this intrapersonal paradigmatic shift in learning approaches, authentic leadership is suggested as a pathway for Thai educationalists to negotiate this change. Authentic Leadership as a model for instructional leadership is a scarcely studied topic in English literature on Thai education. Authentic leadership may have affinities with aspects of Thai culture that might promote it as an effective model of self-leadership for Thai teachers. The author suggests that incorporation of authentic leadership into Thai teacher training programs might facilitate the shift toward student centered learning going forward. Theory and research of authentic leadership are presented, and its aptness to Thai culture discussed. This paper utilizes Thai scholarly research as much as possible.

Keywords: authentic leadership, education, professional development, Thailand



Introduction

In the 21st century society and the workplace are changing, driven by exponentially rapid scientific innovation, technology, social media, information dissemination, A.I., robotics, the Internet of Things (IoT) and evolving management systems. In our current age of internationalization, globalization and continually advancing technology, critical thinking, problem solving, conflict negotiation, higher-order thinking and collaborative skills are fundamentally important (Becker & Maunsaiyat, 2004). Accordingly, students should gain skillsets and competencies, be adaptive to change and able to step beyond their comfort zones (Anunthavorasakul, 2018). There is now a vast sea of information readily available via the internet; the modern student should be able to critically analyze this mountain of data, apply it, and potentially create something from it. Rote memorization is no longer satisfactory. Modern students are becoming digital natives possessing a high degree of technological savvy who are increasingly social in nature. These younger students prefer a more collaborative learning atmosphere and a more proactive, self-guided role in their academic careers (Flynn & Vredevoogd, 2010; Seritanondh, 2013).

Thailand has rightly striven to progress along with this global trend in education toward student centered learning. The Thai National Education Act of 1999 embedded student-centered learning as a requirement of Thai education (National Qualifications Framework for Thailand: Implementations Handbook, 2006; Kirtikara, 2001; Phungphol, 2005). In Thai higher education student centered learning is observed in learning outcome 4 of the Thai Quality Framework (TQF), interpersonal relationships and responsibility, which states that students should have “good interpersonal skills and the ability to adapt to various situations and organizational cultures.” In this phrase two points are here worth highlighting. First, the words *interpersonal* and *organization[al]* refer to the aforementioned theme of collaboration. Second, one instance of variance among organizational cultures is found in their values, hence, a need for flexibility in, and recognition of, working with persons and organizations of differing value systems. Following this reform, thousands of Thai teachers have already been retrained and still many more are awaiting to be retrained to use the new student centered ideology (Phungphol, 2005). Yet despite this commendable effort to make Thai education more student centered, after nearly two decades many, perhaps the majority of, Thai classrooms remain teacher centered. A significant factor contributing to this stems from the second point mentioned in the learning outcome above: the ability to adapt to various situations and organizational cultures. The process of adapting inherently entails negotiating differences in values. As values are located in the internal dimension, it is thus at the intrapersonal level that sustainable change can be achieved: addressing the hearts and the minds of teachers.

The author proposes that authentic leadership (AL) can be an effective model of self-leadership for Thai teachers negotiating the presently occurring change from the traditional paradigm to student centered learning. It is recognized that AL arose in America toward the end of the 20th century; however, it is argued that the essence of AL does not in fact restrict it to being only a Western approach. Rather, the nature of AL permits it to be cross-culturally applicable. As will be described further on, AL does not promote a specific set of values or morals per se, but rather focuses on the individual’s development of their own unique set of values, and to align one’s being (behavior and thoughts) with those values, so as to be a person of integrity, someone who ‘walks the talk.’ In addition, AL evolved out of positive psychology, and its goals are to empower both the leader and the follower. From this background of positive psychology, AL espouses that



which is more universal in nature; for example, fairness, trust, empathy and mutually reciprocal empowerment are among its stated components. These values are not specific to America. In this way AL is less of a didactic approach and more flexible in nature, permitting a broader cross-cultural appeal. In its discussion of AL, this paper will delineate the model of AL, cite empirical research, which includes varied cultural contexts, of its benefits, and present examples of its practical usage for educationalists.

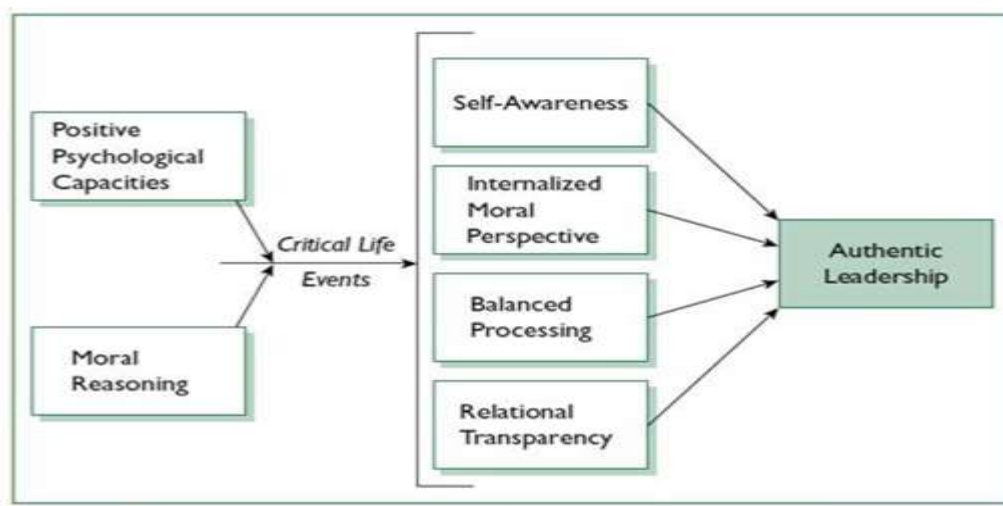
Authentic Leadership as a Method to Negotiate the Transition to Student Centered Learning

The American National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, USA (2002) states that teaching is a public activity in which the teacher works daily in the gaze of their students, and the extended nature of their lives together in schools places special obligations on the teacher's behavior. That is, through observational learning, students draw lessons from their teachers' characters. Consequently, teachers must conduct themselves in a manner that is worthy of students' emulation. One inference that can be drawn from this is that for student centered learning to become established in the classroom, teachers must set the example and the spirit of the student centered learning mindset.

In this regard, the educational change from traditional to student centered learning involves changes in teachers' and students' educational roles. Underlying this educational change is fundamental changes in the cultural values of which the educational participants were raised. Therefore, change is challenging. Authentic leadership might provide guidance through this transition. Authentic leadership is founded on positive psychology: it is values driven leadership based on integrity (Stoten, 2014) in which is stressed the long-term well-being of both leaders and followers. This basis in empowerment is clearly stated in the definition of AL given by Walumbwa et. al., (2008), which has become the foundation of AL studies: AL is a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both *positive psychological capacities* and a *positive ethical climate*, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering *positive self-development* (italics added for emphasis). Thus, authentic leaders "are interested in empowering the people they lead to make a difference more than they are interested in power, money or prestige for themselves" (Bawany, 2015). AL's primary focus on values and generating a positive psychology provide a pathway for teachers to reflect, explore, develop, clarify and internalize their values, roles and goals going forward. As Smith and Piele (2006) state: "In a world of conflicting values and continuous change, leaders need trustworthy ground on which to stand. For many, the foundation is a deep understanding and firm mastery of self." At this individual, intrapersonal, level AL is a means by which teachers can gain self-mastery and hence become proactive agents of change: it is from this internal perspective, in the hearts of teachers, that real change will occur. In fact, some educationalists have gone so far as to say that a consensus exists that AL should be an essential component of educational leadership (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2014).

Expanding upon Walumbwa et. al.'s, (2008) definition, the model of AL is comprised of four dimensions: self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing and relational transparency. *Self-awareness* asks the individual to seek toward understanding her/his own values, strengths and weaknesses, purpose and how her/his actions affect others. Furthermore, increasing self-awareness involves moving away from a unilateral vision toward an understanding of the complexity of the self. Self-awareness is gained through interpersonal interactions. In

internalized moral perspective the individual clarifies his/her own morals (the principles that he/she lives by) and is thus guided by their own internal compass, not by external influences and pressures. Possessing this internal moral compass allows individuals to be adaptive to various situations because the fear of losing one's identity, which creates defensiveness, is absent, and because they can consciously adjust their behavior to the situation, while being cognizant of and true to their own morals. Through *balanced processing* the person strives to process information in a way that includes the perspectives of others in order to make fair, equitable decisions aligned with their moral compass. In balanced processing authentic leaders are explicitly open to perspectives that challenge their personal beliefs. Finally, *relational transparency* looks at building deeper, more trusting relationships by being sincere and appropriately sharing intimate matter with others. Authentic leaders have enough strength of character to be sincere, open and truthful in relationships.



Positive psychological capacities, moral reasoning and critical life events are antecedents which contribute positively to AL. Due to space considerations, this paper is limited to discussing AL's four main components.

AL promotes contemplative practices, a validated internalized set of morals and values, a fair decision making process, and genuine relationships. General practices to develop AL include seeking feedback regularly; engaging in self-reflection; engaging in self-observation and mindfulness, which increases awareness of one's thoughts and feelings; active listening; seeking the input of others; when situationally appropriate, openly sharing one's vulnerabilities, not as a sign of weakness, but as a means of building trust and empathy; and leading in ways that empower others (Avolio & Wernsing, 2008, Bawany, 2015, Warrell, 2013, Yaacoub, 2016).

In relation to the model of authentic leadership, engaging in *self-awareness*, the first component, encourages educationalists to reflect on how their values and perspectives affect and influence their perceptions of SC ideology, and to explore how SC ideology challenges their deeply held, life-long learned educational beliefs. Educationalists would also seek to understand their own strengths and weaknesses, in relation to both the SA and the SC ideologies. Second, through



internalized moral perspective teachers establish a set of core values and morals, then based on that foundation act in accordance with it: they develop their own internal moral compass. In this regard, educationalists examine which of their values and beliefs toward education are unalterable and which are more flexible. This internal moral compass serves to guide teachers through the conflict of competing accountabilities, the first, to SA ideology, which represents both their traditional educational ideology as well as their traditional cultural background, and to SC ideology, which they are being trained and retrained in, and pressured to adopt. These two domains are interconnected: it is impossible to develop an internal moral compass without having developed self-awareness. While these two domains focus on the internal dimension, the other two are more focused on the external dimension. Thus, having developed their self-awareness and an internal moral compass, educationalists strive to develop balanced *processing of information*. In this regard they explore how their values and moral perspective affect their *processing of information* in order to ensure that their decisions are fair and consistent, and that this objective decision making process is openly perceptible to others. Teachers would seek to directly incorporate into their decision making process the various stakeholders, for example, their students', schools' and society's needs and perspectives. Educationalists would seek the input of, and feedback from, others. Finally, through *relational transparency* educationalists would strive to present to the public a genuine, rather than a fake or distorted, persona.

Below is a select list of contemplative questions that explore cognitive and affective matters, which traditional teachers might be useful to teachers.

- To what extent am I comfortable with the questioning atmosphere of the inquiry based learning classroom?
- How comfortable am I with the more egalitarian interpersonal interactions between myself and the students?
- Which of my inner personal values are deeply held and inviolable, and which can be adapted to better fit the democratic, egalitarian values of student centered learning?
- How do I envision my role as more of a facilitator?
- How can I shift from direct teaching to promote inquiry based learning?
- How do I envision the decentralization of power from a teacher center into the classroom, to be shared more with students?
- What are my strengths and weaknesses in relation to student centered learning?
- How can I promote collaborative work involving the expression of individual opinions while still remaining true to our societal value of non-confrontation, harmony and maintenance of face?

The above questions are one example set, developed by the author, of how authentic leadership might be pragmatically used for teacher development. Avolio and Wernsing have enumerated at



length a complete set of developmental practices for each of authentic leadership's four core components. (Avolio and Wernsing, 2008).

Review of the Research

Substantial empirical research exists demonstrating the benefits of authentic leadership to organizations, a research base which is strengthened by its multiple cross cultural studies. While this research is primarily in the field of business organizational studies, it has become a standard practice to apply research in business leadership to educational leadership, on the basis of schools also being organizations. However, on the other hand, in citing this research it is not intended to imply that schools should be managed as private businesses are; it is a way to refer to rigorous research on AL that has been conducted in professional settings.

A study by Alok (2014), comprised of 182 business professionals in various organizations in India, using structural equation modeling, found that promoted staff psychological ownership; that is, employees felt increased levels of belonging to their organizations. In two joint studies in China (Xiong, Lin, Li & Wang, 2016) comprised of 292 total participants across over a dozen organizations, a positive correlation was found between authentic leadership and employees' trust in their organization. In a Korean context, a study comprised of 599 professionals in the knowledge industry examining authentic leadership, psychological capital and work empowerment found that employees' perceptions of the level of their leader's relational transparency strongly related to their level of empowerment (Joo et. al. 2015). It has also been demonstrated that authentic leadership enhances motivation (Peus et. al., 2011), is correlated overall with positive emotions in followers (Agote, Aramburu & Lines, 2015), increases employee job satisfaction (Cerne, et. al., 2014) and that, in sum, authentic leadership seems to initiate a positive cycle in which "positive attitudinal and behavioral outcomes . . . in turn both piggyback on each other in a virtuous cycle of positivity" (Banks, McCauley, Gardner & Guler, as cited by Yaacoub, 2016).

Professional Development

In discussing the application of AL to Thai educationalists, there are two factors in its favor. First, AL can be empirically measured. Although its validity and reliability would need to be confirmed specific to the Thai context, the theory-based instrument Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) has been proven valid and reliable (Walumbwa et. al., 2008) (hence the numerous studies verifying the benefits of AL to organizations cited earlier in this paper). The ability to empirically measure the efficacy of AL makes its inclusion in teacher development programs more practicable. Second, following along this line of practicability, AL is not genetically endowed, or trait based, but state-based. That is, AL is based on character, which can be developed. Consequently, AL can be practically taught, developed and learned over time.

One potential method of professionally developing AL is through an approach based on action learning. A Canadian study by Louis Baron (2014) involving 143 participants over three years at a business organization found that significant increases in AL were made through training based on action learning. In this study's active learning approach, theory and knowledge of AL were combined with diverse activities, group work and experientially based learning situations.



Participants engaged in hands on experiences devised to increase AL. The focus of the first stage was self-awareness, that of the second stage was having a positive impact on others (relational transparency), and in the final, third stage, the balance between the authentic self and the demands of the group was explored (i.e., being true to one's own self while being flexible toward group needs, having the courage to follow one's internal compass even when it conflicts with group consensus, and related matters). An implication of this research is that AL is best generated through active learning, rather than traditional lecture based, book based teaching. This idea is further evidenced by a study which explored the development of AL in 50 professional educationalists in Israel over one year (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2014). This study also utilized an active learning approach, the difference in this case being that it utilized team based simulations that had as their teaching fulcrum professionally related ethical dilemmas. The study found this approach effective, and, moreover, one that can be used cross-culturally. The efficacy of action learning being highlighted, if such approaches were instituted into teacher training and professional development organizations in Thailand, teachers would thereby incidentally have the opportunity to adjust to the collaborative style of SC ideology by the learning of AL through a similar approach, active learning.

Speaking to the cross-cultural viability of authentic leadership, studies conducted in Asia (India, Korea and China) as well as in the Middle East (Israel) and Africa (Kenya) finding benefits of authentic leadership within their respective cultural contexts have previously been referred to in this paper. However, while analyses between cultures at the national level can be objectively made, the uniqueness of individual cultures must also be respected. Asia is vast and the cultures disparate; while some connections can be made between Korea, China and Thailand, Thailand is a Southeast Asian nation, possessing its own ancient, unique culture. Thus, that authentic leadership was found to be effective in business organizations in those cultural contexts does not mean that it will be so in Thailand. Yet there do seem to be compelling lines of enquiry between authentic leadership and Thai culture. One such is the initial similarity of values between authentic leadership and Thai Theravada Buddhism, namely, compassion, tolerance and non-judgmentalness. Mindfulness is in fact a practice of the self-awareness dimension of authentic leadership (Avolio & Wernsing, 2008). In this way potential overlap exists between authentic leadership and aspects of Thai leadership. Future research could examine the translation of the ALQ into Thai language, and its validity in the Thai cultural context. Another line of future research would be toward the development of a model of professional development for authentic leadership appropriate to Thai culture. Referring to the study of developing AL in school principals in Israel using professionally related ethical problems as the teaching basis, given the increasing pressure in Thailand on school principals at all levels to make their schools viable in an increasingly competitive market (due to factors such as a declining birthrate in Thailand causing a shrinking consumer base, increased competition through regionalization [ASEAN] and globalization [the increasing popularity of private international schools], and competition from online education) while simultaneously maintaining their standards and integrity, this approach might prove fruitful for both its development of AL and its ethical development.



Conclusion

Although the Thai government has made student centered learning a key aspect of national education since 1999, differences in cultural values between traditional Thai leadership and student centered learning have presented significant challenges. While in the literature other papers have raised the topic of a gap in values between these ideologies, this paper's focus upon it initiates a more specific discussion on the subject. Going forward, the discussion would be greatly served by contributions from Thai scholars. It can be noted here that values and perspectives are not the only factors stymying the uptake of student centered learning; external factors, such as inordinate class sizes (classes of forty and more students are normal in Thai public education), lack of time to organize student centered lessons, and lack of supporting materials all contribute to prevent SC learning.

Because it is not only teachers' skillsets that need to be developed, but also the cognitive and affective dimensions, it has therefore been suggested that education, training and professional development of educationalists should include components which deal with this change of values and perspectives. Toward this end, authentic leadership has been promoted as a potential means for Thai educationalists to navigate the gap between the SA and the student centered learning. Through authentic leadership praxis, educationalists would develop their character, and subsequently the ability to consistently walk the talk, to lead by example. They would develop a level of self-mastery that can assist them through this ongoing, turbulent time of change. That authentic leadership can be empirically measured, that a substantial body of research demonstrating the multiple benefits of AL in a variety of cultures exists and that authentic leadership has been shown to be teachable are in its favor.

On the point of professional development, it is argued that training of SC learning has to date ironically been primarily based on trainees attending teacher-centered lectures on SC theory: it has been taught from the book. It is therefore suggested that for both AL and SC learning, training based on active learning, which has participants directly engage in learning experiences, is a more effective approach.

Finally, Thailand's culture must be respected. Its cultural values of hierarchy, high power distance and pleasant interpersonal relationships do possess their own merits. In the current global educational emphasis on student centered ideology the positive aspects of the scholar academic ideology, Thailand's traditional educational model, are being denigrated. It is very much a choice for Thailand to what extent and in what ways it desires its education to become student centered. The question for Thailand going forward is how it shall best adapt student centered learning to fit with its own cultural traditions. In this light, this initial analysis of the underlying values and paradigms of both student centered ideology and authentic leadership, and how they fit with Thai culture, can assist Thai educationalists.



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