



UNIVERSIDAD DE CÓRDOBA

FACULTAD DE EDUCACIÓN Y CIENCIAS HUMANAS

DEPARTAMENTO DE IDIOMAS EXTRANJEROS



A PERSONAL LEADERSHIP STATEMENT

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UNIVERSIDAD DE CÓRDOBA

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING PROGRAMME

DIPLOMA COURSE

Lifelong Professional Development: Empowering Foreign Language Teachers

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Our Leadership Profile

As future leaders we see ourselves as integrated people, that is to say, being disciplined and humble people who strive to make their visions come to life. We hope to accomplish this by encouraging ourselves and others without disregarding their efforts, but instead recognizing them. We also aim to be creative leaders, and make people get out of their comfort zone, going beyond their limits, thus inspiring them to challenge themselves and convincing them to become another leader with a vision and clear goals.

— *Eliana Valentina Soto, Dany Paola Durango & Adriana Patricia Toro, Personal Leadership Statement*



Eliana Valentina Soto



Dany Paola Durango



Adriana Patricia Toro

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Introduction

Stogdill (1974) affirmed that “there are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept” (p.7). What makes someone a leader? This can seem like a simple question, and yet it continues to bother many people, including some of the best thinkers of the world. Several books on leadership have been written, tons of articles have been published, and until now it is hard to pin-point what leadership is. Nonetheless, like many other people, we can try to relay in others’ intent to define leadership, and thus create our own concept. According to Jaques E. & Clement (1994) Leadership could be the process in which one individual sets a heading for one or several people and gets them to move beside him or her and with each other in that heading with competence and full commitment.

Other authors remark as well that leadership has to do with people’s visions. Leadership is about exemplifying values, uttering visions, and making an environment within which dreams can be fulfilled, explain Richard and Engle (1986, p. 206). On his own Peter Drucker (2012) states that “leadership is lifting a person's vision to high sights, the raising of a person's performance to a higher standard, the building of a personality beyond its normal limitations”. By taking into account the prior definitions we dare to state that leadership is about the efforts of making a vision come to life and encouraging yourself and others to do the best in order to achieve it without disregarding their efforts, but instead

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recognizing them because, without those passionate, authentic and talented people a true leader could not exist.

Our assumptions

An assumption is known to be an act of faith or a realistic expectation that does not have empirical evidence to support but we believe is true. In this sense, an exceptional teacher always tries to be aware of what happens in the world and consequently about the last tendencies in education. It is at this point where leaders in education should start creating collaborative and inclusive learning/teaching environments, inclusive education is very important when generating an environment where all students can feel comfortable, respected and fully engaged with the learning process. When a teacher implements inclusive education is recognizing that the diversity, culture, identity and different experiences from each learner are important for learning. Committed educational leaders are able to identify these advantages of this type of education and use it to develop a safe learning setting where all participants are open minded when it comes to different ways of thinking other than their own.

The main task of school leaders is the promotion of the best education for all students, this includes especially disadvantaged students. To achieve this, leaders need to draw on their capacity to make a team work in order to guide their team through a path where they can teach students while respecting their individualities. For leaders to change a

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system, organization or teaching method, they should recognize that it is not an easy task. Leaders know it will take all their efforts, attention and skills development from their part and their team, that is why a leader should recall on their capacity to guide a group of people towards the same goal, that of creating a more inclusive environment for their students.

In the process of discovering how to be a better leader some of the questions have come to our minds: as good leaders, are we open to change? Why is it really necessary for us as teachers to be leaders for our students? What are our strengths as leaders? And most importantly, are we able to recognize our weaknesses and work to improve? Some of these questions already have an answer which make us feel more confident about our process to become leaders in the future. But other questions still remain unanswered which motivate us to keep learning more about ourselves and our capacities as English teachers.

Leadership Empowerment and Implications for the Future

It is known that the educational system is progressively changing and being affected, for better or for worse, by a variety of global standards. And that the results of international exams such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) play a bigger role in professional and educational development, especially when searching for new opportunities in foreign countries. Consequently, for educational leaders it is vital to comprehend educational

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reforms in the global context and think critically about the international standards. Stringfield (2011) states that a new and significant responsibility has emerged for educational leaders in the future, and it is that of closing the international achievement gap.

We also have to take into consideration that education in the 21st century can be considered as something new. A significant number of students experiencing schools since 2015 are from an entirely new generation. These children were born from 2010 and beyond, and have experienced childhood in an alternate world; they have never lived in a world without technology, they are very familiarized with innovation, having grown up using it: a significant number of them were given cell phones or tablets to play with before they could even walk. So, as teachers we are tasked with helping these capable, intelligent children prepare for difficulties we cannot completely anticipate. That requires changes in the educational system, since we are in a changing society in which we as teacher leaders need to act with leadership empowerment to acquire significant knowledge to face the challenges that may arise.

This century has been titled as the age of technology. Hargrove and Prasad (2010) have described 21st century school education as:

Twenty-first century classrooms are likely to be quite different from those many teachers experienced themselves. For example, they are more diverse in a variety of

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ways. ... Diversity is a reality, making it another reality that schools must be committed to becoming places where children from 3 to 17 have the opportunity to learn. In order to do this, teachers cannot teach as they were taught; they must update their current practices in regard to changing school populations, increasing technology, and new ideas about how children learn. (p. 5).

As can be seen, challenges related to Technology is the main difficulty that 21st century educational leaders face.

Taking into account what was stated before, our prospective plan for the future will be to reform the roles of leaders in Colombian school systems in order to improve the quality of schools in in the second language education, thus increasing students' academic achievement preparing them for a future professional life. As Hayes (2014) stated, we remain serving students in school frameworks that operate on a 19th Century timetable and convey a 20th Century curriculum. At the same time, we also plan to stimulate collaborative and inclusive learning/teaching environments, since inclusive education is important to generate an environment where all students can feel comfortable, respected and fully engaged with the learning process.

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This will be important when developing the next educational leaders that will lead in the future, who will have a solid understanding of global education which will help them to keep up with the high standards and at the same time improve their professional life skills.

Conclusion

The success of leadership plans depends on a clear and long-term vision, since leaders visualize what they want, and their impulse is delimited by the significance of the project, in which they see a greater calling and an opportunity to fulfill their goals. It also depends on the strength that leaders and their followers have to overcome life's obstacles and keep pursuing their ideals. That is to say that, the success of a plan to become a teacher leader and make a change is highly determined by the leader's capability of setting a vision and become rooted in it, as well as, the student's capacity to stick to that vision and carry it out. In addition, developing higher standards, defining quality for teacher education, incentivizing the implementation of new methodologies and technologies, and promoting access and inclusivity of new cultures are good methods to ensure the success of leadership plans in schools, as well as, to innovate and ensure quality of foreign language education.

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