Title
(Co) creating nuevas teorias in educational leadership: Introduction to a "del corazón (from the heart) leadership model

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Author
Oliva, Nereida

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Introduction

> *Necesitamos teorías* (We need theories) that will rewrite history using
> race, class, gender and ethnicity as categories of analysis, theories that
> cross borders, that blur boundaries—new kinds of theories with new
> theorizing methods . . . And we need to find practical application for those
> theories. We need to de-academize theory and to connect the community
> to the academy. "High" theory does not translate well when one's intention
> is to communicate to masses of people made up of different audiences. We
> need to give up the notion that there is a "correct" way to write theory.
> (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxv)

I worked with a university-school-community partnership in the Rocky
Mountains area while I was enrolled in an educational leadership doctoral
program at a flagship university. I worked primarily with parent leaders that were
involved in a parent initiated parent group at the elementary school that hosted the
partnership and served as a liaison between parent leaders and school teachers and
administrators. Working with the parent group and parent leaders allowed me to
"see[1]" and learn about leadership models and styles that were not necessarily
being discussed in my educational leadership courses. Like queer Chicana
feminist, theorist, and writer Gloria Anzaldúa, I felt that the theories presented to
me and the discussions we were having in class did not include issues of
intersectionality, race and racism, gender, class, immigration status, language,
religion, and sexual orientation. These leadership theories were not applicable to
my interpretations of the mothers' stories, perspectives, and experiences. As such,
I feel that the quote above speaks to the core of this study and provides guidance
in disrupting and *(re)conceptualizing* educational leadership theory.

What is presented in this piece is part of a larger qualitative study that
examined how Latina mothers participating in a parent initiated parent group in
the Rocky Mountain area, define, enact, and embody leadership. Scholars outside
of the educational leadership field have examined the multiple and intersecting
roles Latinas[2] have in and out of schools and how they make sense of their roles
(Dyrness, 2011; Mendez-Negrete, 2002; Pardo, 2002). Within this scholarship,

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1 Working with the mother leaders allowed me to observe or "see" leadership
approaches that are not typically regarded as leadership. They type of leadership I
observed while working with the mother leaders was communal, non-hierarchical,
and geared towards social justice. It is important to note that the mothers would
not identify or label their participation in the parent group as leadership. To them,
their leadership and participation in the parent group was necessary and vital to
their and their children's survival and future.

Latina mothers can be found to be engaged parents and community activists, all while fulfilling their gender-specific responsibilities of a wife, partner, and mother. Central to this body of scholarship is how the multiple roles of Latinas are an extension of their mothering; their activism is not separate from their mothering. Latina mothers have been able to redefine what mothering is and what it should look like while weaving their activism into their daily routines (Pardo, 2002). However, as insightful and as important as this body of scholarship is, it has yet to be included in the educational leadership field.

Thus, this piece affirms Latina mothers as leaders in the educational leadership discourse and also serves as an invitation to explore the leadership framework the mothers co-created as part of the larger study I conducted. Recognizing that women have challenged leadership models and epistemologies by centering and including discussions on the intersectionalities of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and other forms of oppression (Delgado Bernal, 1998a; Douglas-Horsford, 2011), the mothers 'leadership model furthers the educational leadership conceptualizations and frameworks women , in particular, women of color scholars have provided the educational leadership field(Méndez-Morse, 2003;Dillard, 2003). These frameworks provide the tools and lenses necessary to examine and understand the experiences and realities of women and women of color in educational leadership and to create theories reflective and inclusive of such experiences and realities

I begin by introducing the Latina mother leaders whose knowledge and leadership expertise is highlighted through out this piece and also share the theoretical framework that informed and guided the larger study. I then share the methods used in the larger study that allowed me to learn more about the mother leaders' leadership ideologies. Lastly, I present and introduce the leadership model the Latina mother leaders conceptualized and (co)created. Understanding the mothers' leadership framework is valuable and informative to educational practitioners and scholars. This framework, *nueva teoría* (new theory), aids those of us attempting to study educational leadership and supplements efforts to "de-academize theory." Because the demographics of public schools and higher educational institutions are rapidly shifting, it is vital that current and future educational leaders be prepared with the tools and lenses necessary to ensure that students of color not only be academically prepared but that they also be provided with the tools to speak their truths, realities, and experiences, and to collectively imagine, hope, and work towards a socially just and conscious world.

The Mother Leaders

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2 In this paper, the term Latina is used to refer to women of Latin American ancestry and heritage.

Before presenting the leadership framework, I find it appropriate to introduce the mother leaders who not only conceptualized their leadership framework but that also embody such leadership traits. Seven Latina mother leaders participated in the larger research study. All of the mothers are of Mexican descent and have lived in the Rocky Mountain area for over ten years. Two of the mothers were born in the United States and the other five were born in Mexico. The two mothers born in the United States strongly identified themselves as *Mexicanas* (Mexican) and not as Chicanas. The mothers' level of education varied. The lowest level of attainment was *la primaria* (elementary school) and the highest level was community college. All the mothers have daughters and only one of the mothers did not have any sons at the time of the study. The table below presents the mothers' demographics, including their language, birthplace, education level, and number of children.

Table 1. **Mothers' Demographics and Background**

Name	Language	Birthplace	Education	# of kids
Alondra	English/Spanish	United States	U.S./Current college student	4 daughters/1 son
Dulce	Spanish/English	México	MX/certificate	2 daughters/1 son
Cataleya	English/Spanish	United States	U.S./high school	2 daughters/1 son
Marisol	Spanish	México	MX/ primaria	1 daughter/ 2 sons
Mayte	Spanish	México	MX/ primaria	1 daughter/3 sons
Natalia	Spanish	México	MX/ secundaria	2 daughters/2 sons
Yanira	Spanish	México	MX/ Prepa	2 daughters

As the table indicates, the primary language spoken by the mothers' was Spanish and to honor this, the parent group meetings were conducted in Spanish and English translation was available as needed. Additionally, all of the mothers participated in the parent group in various ways and several of them help official positions in the group such as secretary or co-chair.

Theoretical Framework

A *muxerista*[3] theoretical framework was used to explore how Latina mother leaders participating in a parent initated parent group, define, enact, and embody leadership. Anita Tijerina Revilla's (2004) conceputalization of *muxererista* theoretical and research framework provided me the multifaceted lens needed to make sense of and understand the multidimensional lives and experiences of Latinx mother leaders as she merged Critical Race Theory, Latina/o Critical Race Theory, and Chicana Feminisms to better explore the pedagogies between Latina student activists that were part of Raza Womyn, a student led organization at UCLA.

Others scholars have used a *muxerista* framework to better capture the complexities and richness of Latinas' lived experiences and realities (Flores, 2017) of Latina leaders (Mejia, Quiroz, Morales, Ponce, Chavez, Olivera y Torre,2013), Chicanx college students (Revilla, 2004), and mentorship among Chicana/o (?) professors and students (Villasenor, Reyes, & Muñoz, 2013). A *muxerista* centered approach centers and honors the lived experiences of Chicanxs/Latinxs and positions them as creators and holders of knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Moreover, a muxerista framework challenges traditional research paradigms by blurring the lines between researcher and participant.Thus, the research process becomes a collective effort.

Methods

In accordance with a *muxerista* framework, I engaged in *pláticas* with the mother leaders to learn more about how they define, enact, and embody leadership. *Pláticas* are conversations or dialogues common within the Latinx culture that transmit *consejos* (advice), knowledge, and ideas (Avila 1999; de la Torre, 2008). The method of *pláticas* was best suited for the purpose of the study as I had already established relationships with the mother leaders through my involvement with the parent group. More importantly, I engaged in *pláticas* with the mothers about cooking recipies, home remedies, and even shared our birthing stories. Including *pláticas* in the study was a natural fit for the mother leaders and I. I also used observations and field notes to compliment *pláticas*. Field notes were used as records of observations but also as reflection journals. Marshall and Rossmann (2011) explain that field notes are "detailed, nonjudgmental (as much as possible), concrete descriptions of what has been observed" (p. 139).

3 "Muxerista is an alteration of the word mujerista, which literally translates into womanist. A Muxerista is a woman-identified Chicana/Latina who considers herself a feminist or womanist. The "x" replaces a "j" to signify a connection to the ancestry and languages of Mexico and Latin America" (Revilla, 2004, p. 82).

Data for the research study was transcribed, coded, and translated. The pláticas were coded by hand and organized by themes that emerged from the individual and group *pláticas*. Each transcript was also revisited several times while listening to the audio. The emergent themes were shared with the mother leaders on two separate occasions after the data collection phase of this study to allow the mother leaders to give their feedback and input on the connections/disconnections that were made between the data and theoretical frameworks (Delgado Bernal, 1998b).

Del Corazón (from the heart) Leadership Framework

"It's guidance. Leadership is just guidance and sharing the knowledge that you, that you've used and put into practice, that's worked for you and will work for others but it has to work in their own way. I'm all for improving healthy family shapes to their own reality, not mine, theirs."

The quote shared above is from Alondra. It is a description and definition of leadership that, I argue, best captures how the mothers in this study understand and conceptualize leadership. The mothers' understanding and conceptualization of leadership is detailed below in the framework they (co)constructed. This framework emerged during the group *pláticas* of this study when I asked mothers how they would describe leadership. Specifically, I asked the mothers what came to mind when they heard the words "líder (*leader)*" or "liderazgo (*leadership*)." Writing their words on a classroom whiteboard, I documented their thinking verbatim as they shouted out words. From this list, the mothers condensed their conceptualization of leadership into the following five main ideas, after which I proceeded to ask the mothers to further describe and/or further elaborate in each concept. I shared the five-tenet leadership framework with the mothers during the final group *plática* of this study to verify and crosscheck their constructed framework.

Del Corazón [*From the Heart*]

The first and probably the most powerful tenet of this framework is what the mothers referred to as "del corazón." For the mothers, leadership must come from the heart. It must be and feel genuine. Using the school teachers as an example, Mayte explained:

Yo he visto unas maestras que les nace, que quieren ayudar a sus niños, que les gusta. Por ejemplo la Maestra Carmen y la Maestra Miranda. Las dos son calmadas y yo siento que le dan su todo. Y a veces más. Como la Maestra Carmen a sido muy paciente con la niña. Pues yo veo verdad. [I

have seen that teaching comes natural to some teachers. They want to help the children. They enjoy it. For example, Ms. Carmen and Ms. Miranda. They are both calm and I feel they give it their all and sometimes more. Ms. Carmen has been very patient with my daughter. Well, that's what I see.]

Similarly, Marisol explained:

Uno sabe... como siente, puede ver uno pues cuando realmente le importa algo a uno. Aquí en la escuela uno ya sabe a quien deveras le importa los estudiantes. Y no no más de "hay tienes que traer la tarea." [One knows . . . one can see when someone really cares about something. In the school, one knows who really cares about the students. It is not just about "You have to do your homework."]

Using an example of another teacher who has leadership that comes "*del corazón*," Yanira explained:

yo veo que la Maestra Yvette toma su tiempo con los niños y también con los papás. Se preocupaba, hablaba a la casa de que necesitaba hacer esto. Oséa, no es de que nomás de clases. [I see Ms. Yvette. She takes her time with the kids and with the parents. She worries, she calls home.]

For the mothers, being *del corazón* (from the heart) is a trait that requires authenticity. It is perhaps not measurable under traditional educational leadership paradigms and measurement tools but it is felt and seen. Furthermore, an individual whose leadership comes *del corazón* (from the heart) shows genuine care and investment in those she/he is serving and working with by doing the "little things" that have meaning to parents and families. Taking the time to make a phone call home to inform and update a parent and families about their student's academic progress and/or struggles is an example of being *del corazón* (from the heart). As a result, trust is established and a broader relationship is developed because of the care that is given to the overall well-being of their children.

Representante [*Representative*]

Being *"representante (*representative)" entails being "la voz de la gente (*the voice of the people*)." Yanira explained that being able to be a *representante (*representative)" required "que le importe la raza . . . e interés en el buenestar de la gente (*care about la Raza. . . and interested in the well-being of people*)." When asked to further explain and to give examples what they meant by

representante, Yanira once again mentioned Luis because "*parece que sí entiende lo que está pasando con nosotros la raza pues los Hispanos pue*s . . . *(*It appears he understands what is going on with us, la Raza, well the Hispanics . . .*)*" Being *representante (*representative)" also requires transparency across the board. Natalia explained:

> *Es que es importante que haiga comunicación entre todos. Que no 'no más voy a hacer esto porque es lo que yo pienso' que se tiene que hacer. No. Es de todos estar de acuerdo.* (It is important that there is communication between all of us. There cannot be any of "we are going to do what I think needs to be done." No. Everyone has to agree.)

Humilde [*Humble*]

"*Humildad* [humility]" was very important to the mothers and their understanding of leadership. As Dulce explained,

> Tú no debes decir, 'yo sé más que tu' oséa... no porque tu no sabes lo que yo sé. Es saber enseñar… ayudar entre compañeros. (*You can't say, "I know more than you." No, because you do not know what I know. It is knowing how to teach . . . helping one another.*)

What Dulce is describing is a type of leadership that is not hierarchical but rather a collective process and action. In this case, the leader, "*Tiene que tomar (en cuenta) la opinión de la otra gente* (Has to take the opinions of others into account)" and have "respeto a la otra persona (respect for the other person)." Yanira also explained that being *humilde* (humble)is "*tener sentimientos, de lo que siente una persona de que está en necesidad. Oséa, ponerse en el lugar de esta persona* (understand how someone in need feels; put yourself in their persona)." Mayte also added that being humilde is "*tratamiento de otra persona, preocuparse por otra persona* (how you treat someone, worrying about someone)."

Awareness of Larger Issues

Leadership is also an awareness of larger issues. As Yanira explained, "*uno tiene que entender que los problemas no más son de allí* (one has to understand that the problems are not only here)." While not explicitly stated, the mothers knew and understood that the *problemas* (problems) that they encountered in their children's school, individually and collectively, stemmed from larger issues such as intersectionalities of racism, classism, and sexism. Thus, a leader should also be

aware that *problemas* in schools are part of much larger issues that should also be acknowledged and addressed.Building and Sustaining Relationships

Leadership requires being able to build and maintain relationships with people. More importantly, a leader must be able to establish relationships built on trust so that one can "*sentirse con confianza* (trust one another)" to approach him/her for help and with concerns. Cataleya explained that a leader needs to be "*amable* (friendly)" so he/she can be approachable. Natalia stated:

> *A uno no le gusta ir a alguien que quizás no sea amistoso. O que haga mala cara. Si uno sabe que le van hacer mala cara uno ni se acerca. ¿Para qué?* [No one likes to go to someone that may not be friendly. Or that is not welcoming. If you know that someone is not welcoming, you are not going to approach them. What for?].

Being friendly and being someone able to build and maintain relationships with many types of people, with various personalities and dispositions, is a necessary component of leadership as it allows leaders to establish and nurture relationships with those they are working with. As a result, relationships built on trust and respect are more viable and their development is more able to be nurtured.

Conclusion

A "*del corazón* (from the heart)" leadership model is a reflection of the mothers' knowledge, experiences realities, and values. Such model offers possibilities of how to best address the mothers' and their children's material conditions. For the mothers, defining and conceptualizing a leadership framework "talks back" to dominant and prevalent deficit ideologies about Latina mothers as their leadership framework is a "theory in the flesh." Because parents and families of color have historically been silenced and "kept out" of schools, their thoughts and opinions regarding educational leadership are rarely taken into account (Deyhle & Villenas, 1999). However, narrow definitions about educational leadership and exclusionary school practices and policies have not prevented parents of color from organizing and advocating for their children's education and community's survival. In 1946, Felicitas Mendez, a Puerto Rican mother, and other parents of color challenged school segregation in Orange County, California, in *Mendez v. Westminster* (Valencia, 2005). In 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education* struck down the "separate but equal" ideology in an effort to address and create educational opportunities for people of color. Both court cases were victories for people of color but their long-term impact on the educational access and opportunities for people of color can be debated. However, the efforts and courage of parents and families to organize and advocate for their children's

education cannot go unnoticed. The work of the parents and families involved in the *Mendez v. Westminster* and *Brown v. Board of Education* court cases are key examples of parent of color leaders as well as their continuous struggle to obtain an equitable education in the U.S.

Even though the mothers did not speak of themselves as leaders when they collaborated on the leadership model, they all embody and enact several if not all of the "*del corazón* (from the heart)" leadership model elements. A "*del corazón* (from the heart)" leadership model can also be interpreted as the type of leadership the mothers expect from school leaders. Furthermore, the five tenets of "*del corazón* (from the heart)" leadership model build on one another to create and imagine new possibilities for educational equity and social change for their own children and future generations. At the core of the mothers' own leadership model and their understanding of leadership is the humanity, respect, love, and care not discussed enough in the educational leadership discourse.

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