

Administrative Leadership: What Is It? Why Is It Important?

BY Teri Talan

Reading over the series of blog posts and comments on [Whole Leadership](#), I am struck by the level of engagement the discussion has evoked. Clearly, deconstructing program leadership and exploring leadership essentials are topics that resonate. However, I am taking the discussion in a new direction—a consideration of administrative leadership. My hope is that this aspect or domain of Whole Leadership can be equally thought-provoking.

My colleague, Mike Abel offered this description of administrative leadership in an [earlier post](#):

***Administrative leadership** is about orchestrating tasks (and often includes mobilizing people) to develop and sustain an early childhood organization. Successful administrative leaders are able to establish systems that protect and sustain essential operational functions to meet the needs of children and families. There are at least two important aspects of administrative leadership—operational leadership and strategic leadership. Operational leadership is accomplished through activities like hiring and supporting staff, overseeing budgets, and maintaining a positive workplace climate. Strategic leadership involves guiding the direction of an early childhood organization with the future in mind. Strategic leaders clarify purpose, inspire individuals to pursue a shared vision, and ensure that goals and outcomes are attained.*

I really like this description for a couple of reasons. First, it makes it clear that orchestrating the work of teaching and learning, mobilizing staff to achieve child and program outcomes, and establishing systems to effectively run a healthy, thriving organization are indeed leadership functions. In our field of early care and education, these responsibilities are typically characterized as management functions and are less valued than leadership functions. Instead of thinking of this important work as management (and therefore less important than leadership), **let's claim it for what it really is—administrative leadership.**

Second, the above description of administrative leadership includes both operational and strategic leadership dimensions. One of the responders to an earlier post asked about advocacy and where it fits in the Whole Leadership framework. I believe that advocacy is a part of strategic leadership. In my experience, **effective administrative leaders engage in advocacy because they are future oriented**; they want to have influence on external conditions that impact their programs, not just react to them.

Finally, I believe that pedagogical and administrative leadership are like the double strands that form the DNA helix. They are in a constant relationship to each other, separate but connected. The most

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qualified teachers cannot be effective in their work with children and families if their work environments (including supervisor support, opportunities for professional growth, decision making, collegiality, rewards and recognition, role clarity, task orientation, innovativeness, and physical environment) do not adequately support them. Administrative leadership is important because without it, pedagogical leadership cannot be sustained and children and families will be poorly-served.

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