

# Deconstructing Whole Leadership

BY MIKE ABEL

Last week, Teri Talan opened this blog series on Whole Leadership by inviting you to engage with us in a dialog to explore the “multi-faceted and nuanced” nature of early childhood program leadership. We first began this exploration last May at Leadership Connections, the McCormick Center’s annual national conference, by discussing the concept of instructional leadership with our Advisory Board. During that spirited discussion, we began to see the need for a clarifying framework for early childhood program leadership to support professional development efforts, research, and policy initiatives. I would like to continue the blog discussion from last week by introducing some terminology to describe overarching areas (perhaps these could be considered domains, categories, or types) of whole leadership for early childhood programs. My colleagues and I have identified three areas of leadership (each including leadership competencies), which could be incorporated into a whole leadership framework—leadership essentials, administrative leadership, and pedagogical leadership. Here’s my take on it. See what you think.

**Leadership essentials** are foundational competencies necessary for leading people that are expressed in personal leadership styles and dispositions. These essential competencies include awareness of self, others, and the profession; communication and team-building skills; cultural competence; and ethical conduct. Essential leadership qualities include courage, empathy, vision, inspiration, authenticity, and passion. Leadership essentials are often developed through reflective practice. These qualities are embedded in everything the leader does and are necessary for both administrative and pedagogical leadership.

**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.

**Pedagogical leadership** is about supporting teaching and learning. It includes instructional leadership—supporting classroom teachers in their key role of implementing curriculum. But, pedagogical leadership is a broader term that encompasses many roles and functions in learning organizations. For example, pedagogical leadership impacts teaching and learning by establishing organizational norms of continuous

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quality improvement. Pedagogical leaders influence children's learning by fostering family engagement, ensuring fidelity to the organization's curricular philosophy, using data to evaluate the effectiveness of the learning program, and meeting standards established to optimize learning environments.

**Perhaps considering these ideas raises additional questions.** I want to challenge you to ask yourself:

- How does the concept of leadership essentials relate to other aspects of the whole leadership framework?
  - Should leadership essentials be viewed as a third overarching area of the whole leadership framework?
  - Are leadership essentials core competencies embedded within administrative and pedagogical leadership?
  - Are leadership essentials the foundation on which administrative and pedagogical leadership is built?
- What is missing from the descriptions of leadership essentials, administrative leadership, and pedagogical leadership?
- Are there other overarching areas of whole leadership to consider including in the framework?
- How should we refer to the overarching areas that constitute whole leadership? Domains? Categories? Types? Something else?
- What does a comprehensive framework that captures the competencies of early childhood program leaders look like?

Your perspective is valuable to this process. As we emphasized in last week's blog, we would like you to share your thoughts about whole leadership. We need your help in creating a comprehensive framework that captures the competencies and functions of early childhood program leaders. Please join the conversation by posting a response in the comments section to this blog post. Also, please join the conversation on social media using #WholeLeadership. **By any mode, we are eager to hear from you.**

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