

Whole Leadership Series: Putting the Pieces Together

BY MICHAEL ABEL

Over the last 11 weeks we have published a series of posts to explore the multifaceted, nuanced nature of leadership in early childhood programs. We invited you to participate in an online discussion exploring the concept of **Whole Leadership**—a broad view of program leadership—evidenced in many areas, which we collapsed into three domains: **leadership essentials**, **administrative leadership**, and **pedagogical leadership**. The blog posts were:

- [Whole Leadership](#)
- [Deconstructing Whole Leadership](#)
- [The North Star of Leadership Essentials](#)
- [Leadership Essentials Begin Within](#)
- [Are Leadership Essentials the Foundation of Whole Leadership?](#)
- [Administrative Leadership: What Is It? Why Is It Important?](#)
- [How Do You Develop Administrative Leadership Skills?](#)
- [A Critical Intersection: Administrative and Pedagogical Leadership](#)
- [Why Pedagogical Leadership?](#)
- [The Art of Teaching and Learning: Pedagogical Leadership Resources](#)

You robustly responded, which led to a rich conversation—expanding on our initial thoughts. I took the opportunity to analyze the 82 posts and replies submitted in this series in order to give you an update on what we are learning thus far.

- There is affirmation that Whole Leadership is a useful and meaningful term for considering early childhood program leadership.
- There is a great deal of overlap across leadership domains, and they are highly interconnected.
- A substantial number of resources are available to support early childhood leaders, but clarity is needed about the distinctive aspects of leadership in the field.
- **Skill related to leadership essentials** are foundational for all facets of leadership.
 - Competencies associated with leadership essentials may include confidence, creativity, cultural competence, efficacy, ethical conduct and morality, freedom, humility, inspiration, intentionality, an internal compass, intuition, self-discovery, self-awareness, transparency, and knowledge
 - Leadership essentials can be learned
 - Some activities related to leadership essentials include assessing change readiness among staff, journaling, reflective practice, and shared leadership.
 - Competencies associated with leadership essentials may be helpful in buffering the challenges that many program leaders face—leadership essentials provide a strong foundation to help program leaders get through challenging times.

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- **Administrative leadership** is important for the success of learning organizations and includes operational and strategic leadership dimensions.
 - Administrative leadership includes management functions such as orchestrating the logistics for teaching and learning, mobilizing staff to achieve program outcomes, establishing systems for effectiveness, and influencing organizational climate to foster collegiality and harmony.
 - Strategic leadership includes planning, operationalizing, and executing initiatives to advance the program’s mission.
 - Leadership for advocacy could be considered a dimension of strategic leadership because it is future oriented.
 - Professional learning communities for program leaders may be helpful for developing administrative leadership skills, sharing management ideas and resources, and providing emotional support.
 - Reflective practice is a method that some leaders have found useful for improving their administrative skills.
- **Pedagogical leadership**—inclusive of instructional leadership—addresses the complexity of teaching and learning in birth to age 8 programs.
 - Effective pedagogical leadership fosters organizational cultures through reflective inquiry, continuous quality assessment and improvement, professional learning communities, and intentionality in allocating resources for teaching and learning.
 - Pedagogical leaders support family engagement, align curriculum to philosophy, make data-informed decisions, and optimize learning by applying evidence-based standards.
 - Bridging the Birth-3rd grade continuum should be a priority for all pedagogical leaders, regardless of the ages their programs serve.

This week, we are continuing the discussion started in this blog series at the McCormick Center’s [Leadership Connections™](#) conference in Wheeling, Illinois. Over 600 participants will be invited to join the conversation through several interactive experiences. Members of the McCormick Center national Advisory Board will be examining ideas explored thus far and will contribute to the discussion.

Over the next year, the McCormick Center will continue to refine and clarify our understanding of early childhood program leadership. We hope this will lead to the development of a Whole Leadership framework which will add value to the field. We believe this is only the beginning of these efforts and encourage you to join us in the journey.

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