

# Whole Leadership

BY TERI TALAN

A couple of weeks ago I taped a video chat with Susan Ochshorn on how to put the whole child in the center of early childhood education policy reform. This got us at the McCormick Center thinking about a parallel concept—whole leadership of ECE programs. The whole child approach recognizes there are multiple and equally important domains of development for the young child. As reform efforts strive to close the achievement gap, child development experts caution against an unhealthy emphasis on cognitive development at the expense of young children’s social, emotional, and physical development. I fear we may be embarking on a similar, “one single ingredient” way of thinking when it comes to reforming policy around ECE leadership.

There is a lot of interest these days in ECE leadership. Last year the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council released its seminal report, “Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation”. One of the 13 major recommendations in this nearly 700 page book concerns ECE program leadership:

- **Recommendation 8:** Ensure that policies and standards that shape the professional learning of care and education leaders encompass the foundational knowledge and competencies needed to support high-quality practice for child development and early learning in their organizations.
  - **Recommendation 8a:** The nation’s major early childhood policy and research organizations...should review existing statements of core competencies and qualification requirements for early care and education leaders and establish updated and comprehensive standards that reflect what these leaders need to know and be able to do, especially in the area of instructional leadership... (p. 539- 40).

Thought leaders across the country are reviewing the competencies and qualifications of early childhood administrators, both school principals and center directors. At the McCormick Center, we, too, have responded to the challenge by reviewing our published statements on ECE leadership as well as the content of our professional development initiatives. This effort has led us to two conclusions:

1. **Effective ECE leadership is multi-faceted and nuanced.** While instructional leadership is important, so is administrative leadership. Should instructional leadership be prioritized over administrative leadership? What exactly do these terms mean? Are there core competencies of leadership that are missing from an either-or conceptual frame?

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2. **Effective ECE leadership should be defined by those doing the work.** While researchers, funders, and policymakers are busy reviewing existing frameworks and professional statements of competencies (mea culpa), the center directors, family child care providers, elementary school principals, and other program administrators on the ground should be consulted on what leaders need to know and be able to do to lead their organizations most effectively.

Over the next several months, the faculty and staff of the McCormick Center will post weekly considerations of the whole leadership concept. We really want to hear from you, the program leaders doing the work, to help shape our multi-faceted, nuanced understanding of ECE program leadership.

Please join the conversation by sharing your thoughts, ideas, and concerns in the comments section on each weekly post—including this one! Alternatively, join the conversation on social media using #WholeLeadership. Or e-mail me directly at [teri.talan@nl.edu](mailto:teri.talan@nl.edu). Regardless of how you share your view, we are so eager to hear your perspective on whole leadership. Leadership matters! Help us shape this new conversation.

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