

Why Pedagogical Leadership?

BY MICHAEL ABEL

With all the buzz in educational circles about instructional leadership and pressure on K-12 for improved academic performance, an overemphasis on instruction may be a misguided notion for early childhood. Born in the effective schools movement, instructional leadership has traditionally been applied to the role of a school principal—particularly one that is actively engaged with teachers in the curriculum and academic learning in the classroom. **This picture of leadership seems inadequate to address the complexity of early childhood programs, birth to age 8, where child growth and development go hand-in-hand with learning activities.**

This disconnect shifted our thinking at the McCormick Center to consider another term that might better reflect the breadth of our field to describe leadership for teaching and learning practice—hence pedagogical leadership. It is not a new term for our field. Lilian Katz, wrote about pedagogical leadership in *Leadership in Early Care and Education* (Kagan and Bowman, 1996). We realize the term may sound rather scholarly or even stuffy, but in our ongoing dialog to develop a leadership framework, we are choosing to embrace it. Pedagogical leadership is more inclusive of what an early childhood program director might demonstrate to improve a learning organization. When we began this series on Whole Leadership, we offered the following description of pedagogical leadership:

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 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.

Early childhood program leaders influence what happens in the classroom by fostering an organizational climate where teachers and other staff members optimize learning opportunities for children and strive to improve their own practice. **Pedagogy is the art and science of teaching with an emphasis on the dispositions and behaviors of teachers and their interactions with children.** Pedagogical leadership can apply to infant/toddler classrooms and Kindergarten classrooms alike. Pedagogical leaders keep the collective focus of the teachers and families on whole child development and protect against mission drift.

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