

Principal Leadership Institute (PLI) Evaluation: Executive Summary

In the spring of Spring of 2004 members of the Social Research Methodology (SRM) Evaluation Group designed an evaluation proposal for the Principal Leadership Institute (PLI) at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). The UCLA PLI Leadership Team felt a need to develop an internal system for on-going data collection and evaluation in order to gather information regarding student demographics, PLI program processes, student knowledge, and participant perceptions. Based upon the SRM Evaluation Group's proposal, this internal data collection system creates a mechanism for PLI stakeholders to monitor progress towards important outcomes over the fifteen months of student training for each cohort. The evaluation design permits for cross-cohort analysis, intra-cohort analysis, as well as the understanding of individual development as the program progresses. With the commencement of a fifth cohort of students in June of 2004 and the graduation of a fourth cohort of students in August of 2004, the SRM Evaluation Group began collecting empirical information to measure PLI's success in accomplishing its mission to develop a cadre of transformational urban school leaders prepared to create learning communities where all students achieve an excellent education and have the choice to attend college. Key evaluation questions focus on the entire PLI process from recruitment to preparation to on-the-job effectiveness. What follows in the executive summary is a description of the evaluation details and a summary of available results. For a full report and analyses, please contact Janet Lee or Tanner LeBaron Wallace of the SRM Evaluation Group.

Evaluation Details

In this section we provide a review and overview of our proposed evaluation before going into detail about activities, methodology and results. Our approach to evaluation is a utilization-focused process. We believe the evaluators' role is to facilitate a process that will yield maximum utility to the intended users of the evaluation. Therefore, we will collaborate with the PLI Leadership Team throughout the course of this evaluation to ensure that questions asked, data collection strategies used, and information provided will meet program needs.

From extended conversations with the Leadership Team, it is our understanding that PLI is ready to take a broad look at the program in order to eventually measure overall effectiveness and to plan for future development. The overarching question being asked is: To what extent is PLI successful in its mission to develop effective change agents in urban schools? Based upon these information needs, our evaluation focuses on the following four areas:

- Creating a system for on-going, internal data collection;
- Gauging the experiences and development of PLI students over time;
- Locating areas for improvement within the PLI program; and
- Ascertaining the effectiveness of the program.

We proposed conducting a staged evaluation in order to meet the program's immediate and long-term needs.

Stage 1: Building Evaluation Infrastructure – Currently in progress

1. Assess the current state of the program

The first step in the evaluation is to assess the current state of the program. In our utilization-focused approach, it was necessary to work with the intended users of the evaluation to specify from discussions, interviews, and extensive document review a Theory of Action, or logic behind the structure of the program. Based upon this important initial step of the evaluation, the evaluators along with the primary-intended users are able to hypothesize relationships between important aspects of a program theory such as inputs, activities, immediate outputs, intermediate outcomes and ultimate goals. In essence, PLI's Theory of Action, developed and created in collaboration with the Leadership Team, links important program components in relationships that demonstrate ideally how the program intends to achieve its ultimate goal of developing effective change agents in urban schools. PLI inputs, activities, immediate outputs, intermediate outcomes and ultimate goals are mapped out and linked to form a PLI program theory (see Appendix A). This theoretical model serves to focus the efforts of key stakeholders. All of the outlined relationships must be present in order to accomplish the ultimate goal which, for PLI, is a principal training program grounded in social justice theory working to produce leaders able to transform schools into places where every student has the opportunity to learn and succeed. Moreover, the Theory of Action provides the evaluation team the all-important "compared to what" of the evaluation. As the idealized version of the PLI

program, the model informs the evaluators what data to collect as well as how to subsequently analyze the data.

The components of the model were determined in conjunction with the PLI Leadership Team. Several key discussions with the PLI Leadership Team were then held to clarify the linkages between each of the model components. The importance of establishing PLI's Theory of Action cannot be understated. Identifying the logic behind how the program intends to achieve its ultimate goal not only focuses the all program stakeholders in order to accomplish the program mission, but also invaluablely assists the evaluation process by providing a point of comparison.

2. Establishing a web-based system for evaluation

A primary goal of the PLI evaluation is to develop a web-based, internal data collection system to gather on-going information over time. This system should be low-maintenance and easily accessible to a variety of stakeholders. The data collected over time will help PLI determine: Whom does PLI recruit? How is PLI currently operating? And, where does PLI need to change in order to accomplish "the mission" as outlined by the Theory of Action? Several survey software options have been presented to the Leadership Team. However, the introduction of the Moodle course management system to PLI in November 2004 may eliminate the need for a separate software application. One of the Moodle modules can be adapted in order to administer secure online surveys to cohort members. The module will also organize data, perform basic statistical analysis, and permit raw data to be exported to other applications. Working in conjunction with Jovic Slobodan of the Educational Technology Unit, the evaluation team plans to administer the first on-line survey to Cohort V in February 2005. From that point on, all surveys in the series will be administered through the secure PLI course management system.

Stage 2: Formative Evaluation – Started June 2004

Internal data collection activities

The evaluation team began collecting data in June of 2004. We developed a series of five surveys to be administered to PLI students at predetermined points during the PLI program and beyond. The dates have been purposefully chosen in order to provide longitudinal data. This

system will allow for cross-cohort comparisons, intra-cohort comparisons, as well as the ability to follow individual students as they develop during the program. The proposed dates of administration for these surveys, as well as what data will be collected can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Survey Timeline

Survey Number	Time	Information Collected
Survey 1	Start of Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment Information • Demographics • Social Justice Orientation • Career Objectives
Survey 2	End of First Summer Session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection on Summer Session • Evaluation of Program Components • Social Justice Orientation
Survey 3	February During Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal and Professional Growth Indicators • Program Feedback • Social Justice Orientation • Career Objectives
Survey 4	End of Second Summer Session/Graduation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality and Importance of Program Components • Social Justice Orientation • Leadership Prompt Action Plan
Survey 5	One Year After Graduation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection on PLI Program Preparation • Current Professional Position • Career Objectives • Social Justice Orientation

Survey Results

Over the course of the year that we worked with PLI, we administered surveys to members of Cohort IV, V, and VI. Cohort IV members were given Survey 4, Cohort V members Surveys 1 and 3, and Cohort VI members Survey 1. These surveys were all administered as the beginnings of the on-going data collection efforts by PLI. The evaluation group also did a one-time follow-up interview with members of Cohorts II and III. In this executive summary, we will provide a brief summary and synopsis of results, by cohort. For a full report with detailed results for each of the surveys given and interviews conducted, please contact Janet Lee or Tanner LeBaron Wallace.

Cohort VI

The average member of Cohort VI is 33 years old and has 6 years of classroom teaching experience. Just over two-thirds of Cohort VI identified themselves as either Latino/a or Euro American. The majority of cohort members are still classroom teachers with most being elementary school teachers. 83% of the cohort reported currently working in an urban school setting. All cohort members reported social justice is something important to them with 21 cohort members reporting it is “something they think about all the time.” All cohort members felt urban schools need to change either “a lot” or “completely.” When asked to “Name the most important change you think needs to be made in schools in order to develop every child’s greatest potential,” the most frequent response related to changes in curriculum. Most cohort members feel “somewhat capable” of leading the urban school transformation. A third of the cohort feel they will need the most support with “the risk and uncertainty of leading change” and “state and federal accountability mandates.” The majority of the cohort heard about the PLI program through alumni, colleagues or the Internet. The majority of the cohort decided to enroll in PLI due to the program’s affiliation with UCLA, the social justice orientation of the program and the Tier 1 Administrative Credential offered by the program. The majority of the cohort intends to pursue additional graduate studies after PLI. Of the 25 cohort members that agreed with the statement that their main career objective is to be an urban school leader, 50% envision being an elementary school principal.

Cohort V

Approximately two-thirds of Cohort V is female, and on average, 33 years old. Approximately one-third of the students are Euro American/white, one-third are Latino/Hispanic/Chicano, and the last third are Asian American, African American, or identified themselves as 'Other.'

In Survey 1, when students were asked how they initially heard of PLI, an overwhelming majority of students' initial contact with the program was through a personal connection, whether it be a friend, colleague or faculty member. On average, members of Cohort V had been teaching for 7 years when they enrolled in the program, but classroom teaching experience ranged from 0 to 20 years. When asked about career aspirations at the beginning of the program, approximately 80% of students did agree that their main career objective was to be an urban school principal.

In Survey 3, a mid-year survey, students were asked to reflect on various aspects of their experience during the first half of the PLI program. First, students were asked if and how their enthusiasm level towards a career in urban school leadership has changed since the beginning of the program. Approximately 88% of the students who responded to the survey reported that their levels of enthusiasm increased or stayed the same. Amongst those who said their enthusiasm had increased, PLI classes, and PLI faculty/staff were consistently rated at the top as the reasons for this increase. Regarding social justice, students were asked on a scale of 1 to 10, to rate how important social justice was to them BEFORE entering the program, and how important social justice is to them NOW. There was also a statistically significant increase ($t(33) = 7.45, p < .001$) in the importance of social justice. Cohort V was again asked in this survey about their main career objective. There were a few students who do appear to be less sure of becoming an urban school principal mid-way through the program. Students were also asked in both surveys how capable they felt to lead the process of urban school transformation.

Cohort IV

Cohort IV began the program in the summer of July 2003. The only survey administered to Cohort IV was the survey created to be given at the end of the program. However, because of

the timing of the development of the surveys some additional questions were asked of this cohort that will not be included in subsequent end of program surveys. Demographically, Cohort IV looks much like Cohort V. The majority of students learned of the PLI program through a personal contact. The information session and website were particularly influential in the individual decision to apply to the program, and once accepted, there were a wide variety of reasons why students decided to enroll in PLI. On average, members of Cohort IV had been teaching for 9 years when they enrolled in the program, but classroom teaching experience ranged from 3 to 27 years. When asked to agree or disagree with the statement “My main career objective is to become an urban school principal,” just over 85% of students did ‘agree’ or ‘somewhat agree’ with this statement. Added in Survey 4 were additional questions regarding program components, in order to capture some end-of-program sentiments about PLI. Students were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5, how important eleven different program components were in their preparation to become a principal. Almost 100% of students indicated that the cohort discussions and fieldwork experiences (97% and 95% respectively) were ‘important’ or ‘very important’ to their preparation to becoming a principal. Approximately 75% of the respondents indicated classroom assignments and shadowing mentor principals were also ‘important’ or ‘very important’ components of the training program. In order to assess curriculum content knowledge, the evaluation team developed a leadership scenario prompt. Based upon a hypothetical leadership scenario, the students were asked to develop an action plan to respond to the situation.

Cohort II & III

In an attempt to broaden the amount of evaluative information gathered from PLI students, the Evaluation Team developed an alumni interview protocol. This protocol focuses on the transitional period from graduation to obtaining and fulfilling the professional role of urban school leader. The questions ask the alumni to reflect on the most useful aspects of the PLI training as well as skills they felt they needed in an administrative position, but did not have. Many of the alumni expressed a desire for the social justice theme to be more thoroughly developed throughout the PLI program. Alumni, especially those currently in leadership positions, suggested expanding the PLI curriculum to include more rigorous coursework focused specifically on working with data systems. Many of the alumni suggested adding more school

law coursework related to everyday practice. Another coursework suggestion from alumni related to more thorough management training. Many alumni described the fieldwork component of the PLI training as one of the most meaningful. However, there was a significant amount of variation among experiences. A common theme with those alumni who actively searched for a leadership position after PLI —both successfully and not — was a strong desire for PLI to work more closely with local school districts. The alumni interviewed had a variety of opinions as how best to support alumni. All, however, expressed a disappointment with the lack of connection to the cohort after graduation. All of the alumni were relatively positive about their decision to receive their administrative credential from UCLA's PLI.