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# UC Berkeley PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

## IMPACT REPORT: DESIGNING TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING TO PREPARE SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADERS

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*Rebecca Cheung*

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research supports the urgent need to describe, document, and research innovative praxis in the field in order to assess and improve educational leadership preparation at the state and national levels, particularly given existing shortages of highly qualified principals and superintendents and the complex demands of leading school reform efforts.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, leadership preparation that specifically supports the development of social justice- and equity-minded leaders are in need. Without frameworks, investigation and documentation are difficult to accomplish, as the conditions, resources, and pedagogical strategies necessary cannot be articulated in a holistic way that can help more leadership preparation programs explore new ways to *look in the mirror* in order to improve their programs.

For over 20 years, the Berkeley Principal Leadership Institute (PLI) has been innovating new strategies and methodologies in its approach to leadership preparation by engaging with practicing artists, incorporating creative and culturally-based teaching strategies, designing performance assessment events, forming partnerships with arts education organizations, using and applying research on creative and arts-based pedagogy, and networking with other educator preparation programs.<sup>2</sup> This report highlights the impact of a pedagogy integrating performative modalities into social justice leadership preparation across four domains of praxis: Identity & Vision, Model, Conditions, and Reflect. Furthermore, this impact brief highlights some of the powerful learning experiences that provided transformational learning for aspiring leaders who have gone through our program. Finally, we give a basic overview of the PLI Social Justice Leadership Preparation Landscape and how leadership preparation programs can visualize the conditions, resources, standards, and infrastructure needed to support this work. A fully elaborated version of this work is available [here](#).

Finally, we would be remiss not to acknowledge the COVID-19 pandemic and its influence during the time of publication. In the last month, all public schools and universities in California have sharply pivoted from largely in-person experiences to distance learning. While it is too early to assess the full impact, the work we describe in this Impact Report continues to serve as a strong foundation, even in this new reality.

## INTRODUCTION

Our work is situated at the intersection of three theoretical and contextual spaces, namely *theories of social justice leadership*, practices within the field of *social justice leadership preparation*, and last, the *California context* where, since the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978, arts education has been slowly yet systematically defunded. PLI has been innovating new strategies and methodologies in its approach to leadership preparation by integrating performative modalities rooted in the arts, creativity, inclusive cultural and community practices, as well as social justice. By creating a transformational learning experience, PLI provides access and an experiential base for aspiring social justice leaders to deeply interrogate issues of equity in schools.

The PLI signature pedagogy extends the concept of Powerful Learning Experiences (PLEs) to create a new and different type of leadership preparation experience that facilitates personal development in addition to intellectual development. In the words of the program director (co-author), “The experiences we are giving them help transform students into the leaders they need to be. We’re focused on the process. Other arts education and arts-centered approaches focus on the end product. Whether you call it developing a craft, the habits of mind, or ways of thinking, it’s a focus on the process, actually a lifelong artistic process.”

Social justice leadership preparation programs struggle to describe, document, and research innovative praxis in the



Cohort 19 students at AileyCamp Open House

field. Our goal is to revolutionize leadership preparation in service of more equitable outcomes for vulnerable and historically underserved youth. By sharing this signature pedagogy integrating performative modalities, we have detailed a framework that can be used to inspire and catalyze ideas in our peer institutions.



Cohort 16 Theater of the Oppressed activity

“Praxis is reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed.”

*Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire, 1970)*

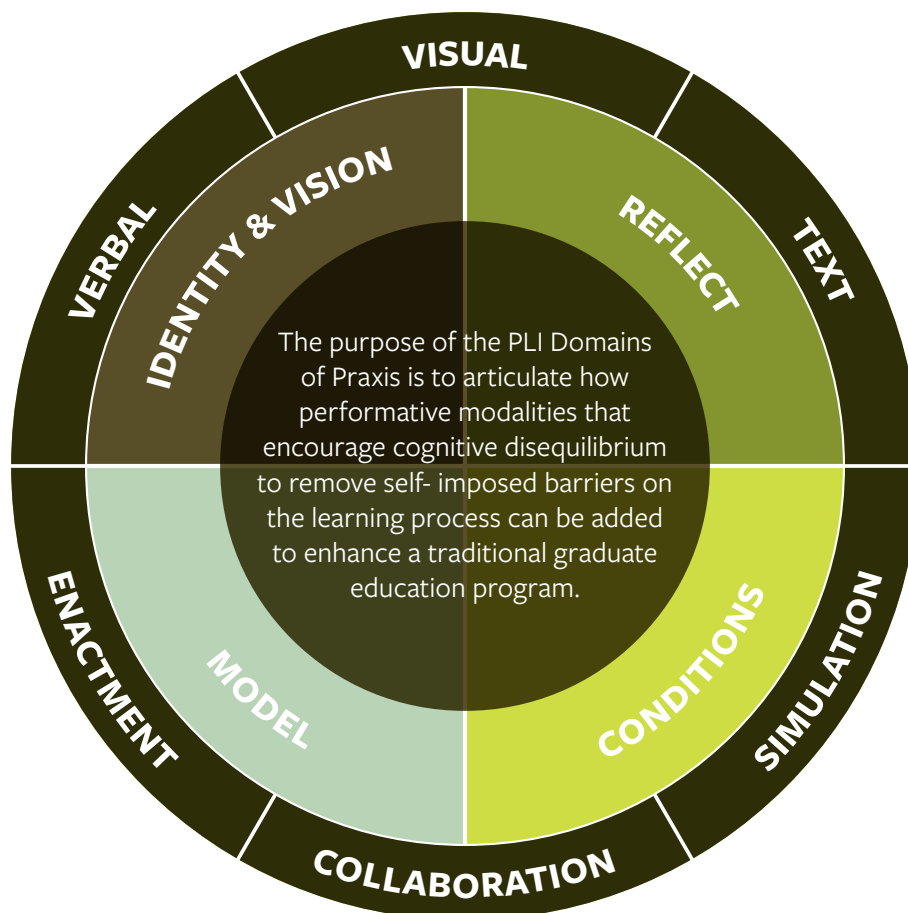
Borrowing from Freire’s (1970) conception of praxis, we have created a framework for the PLI Domains of Praxis as an approach to integrating enactment modalities within the context of a leadership preparation program situated in an institute of higher education. The purpose of the PLI Domains of Praxis is to articulate how performative modalities can be added to enhance a traditional graduate education program. It supports students to develop social justice leadership through performative modalities (e.g., art, ritual, or drama), in addition to conventional modalities (verbal, visual, and text) that encourage cognitive disequilibrium to remove self-imposed barriers to the learning process.

The four domains are:

- **CONDITIONS:** Set the conditions for supportive individual and collective development;
- **IDENTITY & VISION:** Cultivate individual identity and vision for equity and social justice leadership to enact change in schools;
- **MODEL:** Model transformational teaching and learning to develop equity-centered instructional leadership;
- **REFLECT:** Develop habits of deep reflection.

To enact the PLI Domains of Praxis, six modalities are used in different combinations depending on the focus: Verbal, Visual, Text, Enactment, Collaboration, and Simulation. These modalities are to be “intentionally orchestrated through coursework and other forms of student engagement within the framework of a professional learning community as part of the cognitive disequilibrium process.”<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the integration and refinement of the domains of praxis is a long-term process that spans several educational and programmatic foci, namely: shared teaching strategies, assignments, and program-wide events.

FIGURE 1: PLI DOMAINS OF PRAXIS



### IDENTITY & VISION

Cultivate individual identity and vision for equity and social justice leadership to enact change in schools

### MODEL

Model transformational teaching and learning to develop equity centered instructional leadership

### CONDITIONS

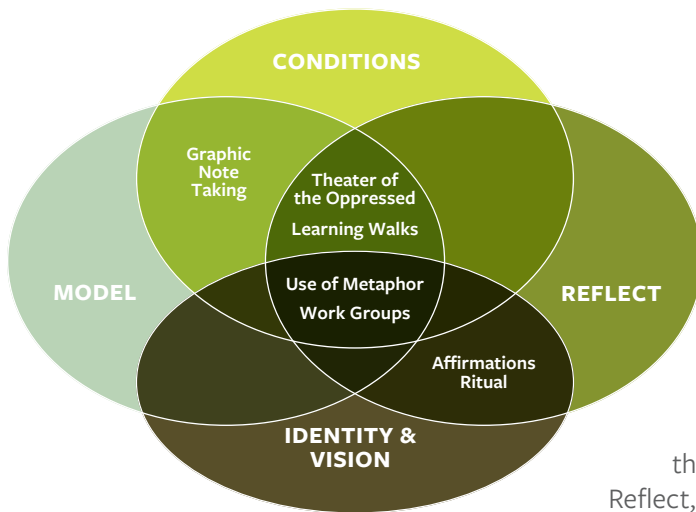
Set the conditions for supporting individual and collective development

### REFLECT

Develop habits of deep reflection

## PLI IMPACT ON TRANSFORMING LEADERSHIP PREPARATION

To illuminate our intended meaning and to document our current practice of using the Domains, the following 2D Venn diagrams convey in a graphic format the multimodal nature of shared teaching strategies, assignments, and program-wide events across the four Domains of Praxis. Starting with a brief description of each of these areas, we illustrate some of PLI's key signature leadership education activities classified by their primary domains.

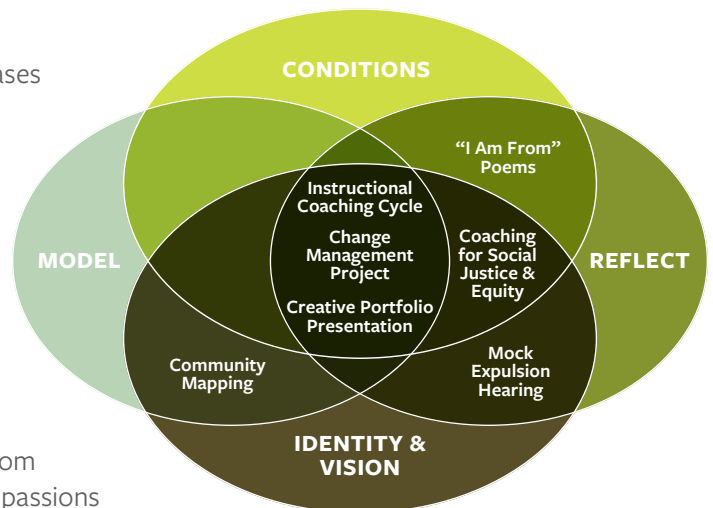


### Domains of Praxis Through Shared Teaching Strategies

Because they are used by multiple instructors across courses, shared teaching strategies create coherence for students throughout their program experience. For example, graphic note taking exemplifies a way to integrate the Model and Conditions Domains because students engage in different forms of graphic note taking to support, summarize, and analyze course content and discussions. The Theater of the Oppressed activities and Learning Walks fit into the overlapping space of three domains: Conditions, Model, and Reflect, as they involve physical movement and embodiment.

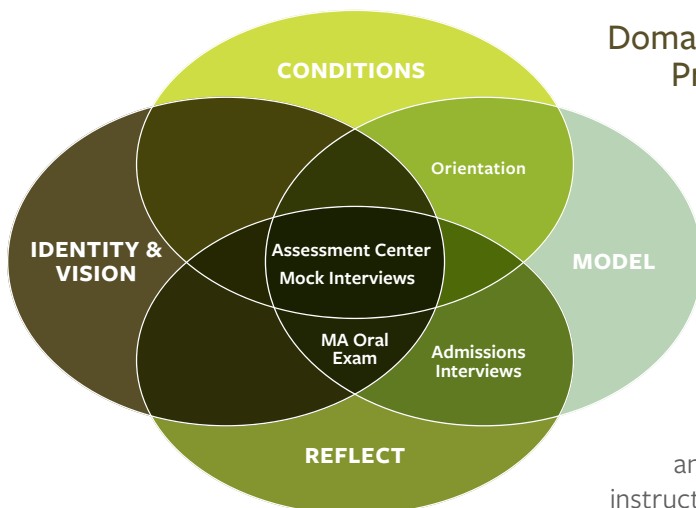
### Domains of Praxis Through Assignments

Assignments are specific course-embedded (in some cases multi course-embedded) teaching and learning sequences. In particular, the Change Management Project (CMP) and Instructional Coaching Cycle assignments are good examples of learning sequences that extend over many months. For example, for the CMP, students identify an equity gap using evidence, determine a theory of action that is research-informed, and conduct cycles of action research as they lead changes with a group of adults in schools. Finally, the Creative Portfolio Presentation presents an opportunity for students to creatively enact their leadership metaphors in lieu of traditional presentations. Ranging from paintings to videos to dance, students integrate their personal passions to describe their leadership development journeys.



### Domains of Praxis Through Program-Wide Events

Program-wide events focus on community building both within cohorts and across cohorts. These are distinguished from course-based assignments and teaching strategies because they involve the integration of many components and staff of the program. For example, Admissions Interviews involve faculty, instructors, program leaders, and coaches. The multi-day Orientation intersects primarily with the Conditions and Model Domains and involves the Graduate School of Education's Student Services Office, PLI administrative staff, and program leaders, while Mock Interviews and Assessment Center activities involve all four Domains as well as instructors and coaches.





Cohort 19 performance of I've Been 'Buked in "Pilgrim of Sorrow," Alvin Ailey's Revelations

## DOMAINS OF PRAXIS MODALITIES IN ACTION: AILEYCAMP

The AileyCamp learning sequence is an illustrative example of how to use the Domains. In the first summer of the PLI program, students engage in courses focused on issues related to transformational teaching and learning as well as social justice leadership. The program has developed a partnership with AileyCamp, a nationally acclaimed summer program based at UC Berkeley and conceived by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, as a space for understanding visions of socially just instruction. AileyCamp uses dance as a vehicle for developing self-esteem, creative expression, and critical thinking skills among sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students ages 11–14.

### Going Deep: Exploring Issues of Transformational Teaching and Learning Through AileyCamp

How does a leadership preparation program design powerful learning experiences for future leaders?

The AileyCamp partnership and related learning sequence provides a specific example of the multimodal nature of the Domains of Praxis. The program sets the conditions for supportive individual and collective development by celebrating risk-taking and partnering with an on-campus organization in the field of dance, a field of art that is less common and more daunting than other disciplines (Conditions). The sequence of activities allows students

to cultivate their individual identity and vision for equity and social justice leadership to enact change in schools by providing an opportunity to witness a program that is culturally relevant and rigorous for low-income students

“The concept of developing powerful learning experiences (PLE) in exemplary leadership preparation has emerged through the work of the University Council for Educational Administration. Researchers posit that PLEs help to ‘transform the ways candidates identify and understand leadership and provide an ontological toolkit from which to draw in their leadership contexts.’<sup>4</sup>”

of color (Identity & Vision). The sequence models how to plan and organize transformational teaching and learning to develop equity-centered instructional leadership capacities in leaders through participatory learning, collaboration, integration of theory, and observation (Model). Finally, the multiple opportunities for both verbal and written reflection are critical to the learning process (Reflect).

## Impact of AileyCamp Assignment

Over the years, the instructors and Program Director who teach this sequence have read and analyzed the final papers to determine the impact of the partnership. The most prominent themes include understanding the power of the arts in a culturally relevant and transformational education, connections to social justice leadership and education, and the power of trusting relationships between students and teachers. To illustrate, we have selected a few quotes from recent students.

“Dance at AileyCamp is not the end goal—empowered children, and eventually adults, are the end goal. Dance, then, is a tool that enables the campers to develop their sense of self, tap into many forms of expression, and begin to heal from the trauma of layered oppressions.”—*Cohort 17 student*

“Just the fact that we actually got to participate in dance, and then interview dance teachers and observe, and just directly experience how that program created an equitable learning environment and promoted equitable outcomes for the participants. That was just such an engaging way to see that happening, rather than like reading about AileyCamp in a book, or just reading about how to create positive outcomes for students of color.”—*Cohort 16 student*



Cohort 19 cohort circle altar. OUSD strike flag provided by student

“The successful, transformative nature of AileyCamp reminds me that allies are necessary to even begin the work of empowering our marginalized youth. Specifically, as a leader, an explicit and shared vision will have to be established collectively with allies to address underlying systemic inequities that continue to pose a barrier to what our students deserve: an educational system that believes in their abilities and addresses their needs.”—*Cohort 15 student*



Quilt of Hope by Cohort 14, ArtCorps and Kazoo Studios, in response to the death of Trayvon Martin

“AileyCamp profoundly impacted my practice. It helped expand my vision of what summer programs that impact academics look like. Before I had a narrow vision that in order to increase academic performance, we needed to engage students in academics. But AileyCamp helped me realize that in order to increase academic performance, we need to immerse students in an experience that allows them to feel self-love and confidence while taking pride in collectively working hard toward a goal. AileyCamp also helped me experience first hand an afro-centric program. One that always held a strengths-based lens towards students and emphasized love. AileyCamp also helped me realize the importance of having students work collectively toward a long term goal/performance. It helped affirm how important it is to celebrate learning with performances. It made me think about the other ways schools can authentically and joyfully celebrate learning.”—*Cohort 19 student*

“ I think that as a program, the emphasis on being relevant to and responsive to diversity is embedded. I think there also is a focus on being proactive. I think in many instances programs don’t necessarily engage students at the level of reflection, where they’re constantly evolving in terms of their own perceptions of what’s happening in their environment. And I think also the modeling cultural consonance and professional learning, I can see how that is always used as a tool for being responsive to the immediate environment so that you are adapting and adjusting as you go along. I think the equity stance that a program promotes is more directly related to being a transformative leader, and also being a leader who is receptive and assessing the environment on a regular basis. ” —PLI coach

## OUR MODEL OF THE LEADERSHIP PREPARATION LANDSCAPE

The PLI signature pedagogy extends the concept of PLEs further by using elements of the arts and creativity, in combination with critical theory and community and cultural practices, to create a new and different type of leadership preparation experience that involves personal development in addition to intellectual development.

While this report focuses on the impact of a signature pedagogy that integrates performative modalities through the PLI Domains of Praxis (discussed above), we would be remiss if we did not also acknowledge and articulate the conditions, resources, standards, and infrastructure needed to support this work. Without the underlayment of the broader landscape, it would be difficult to implement the Domains of Praxis program-wide. Figure 2 visualizes the broader landscape for supporting robust leadership preparation. By landscape, we mean the systems, structures, and conditions for doing the work.

The first layer of the Landscape (bottom row) consists of the staffing, resources, and supportive conditions necessary to do the work. These include physical space, funding, partnerships, and instructor profile.

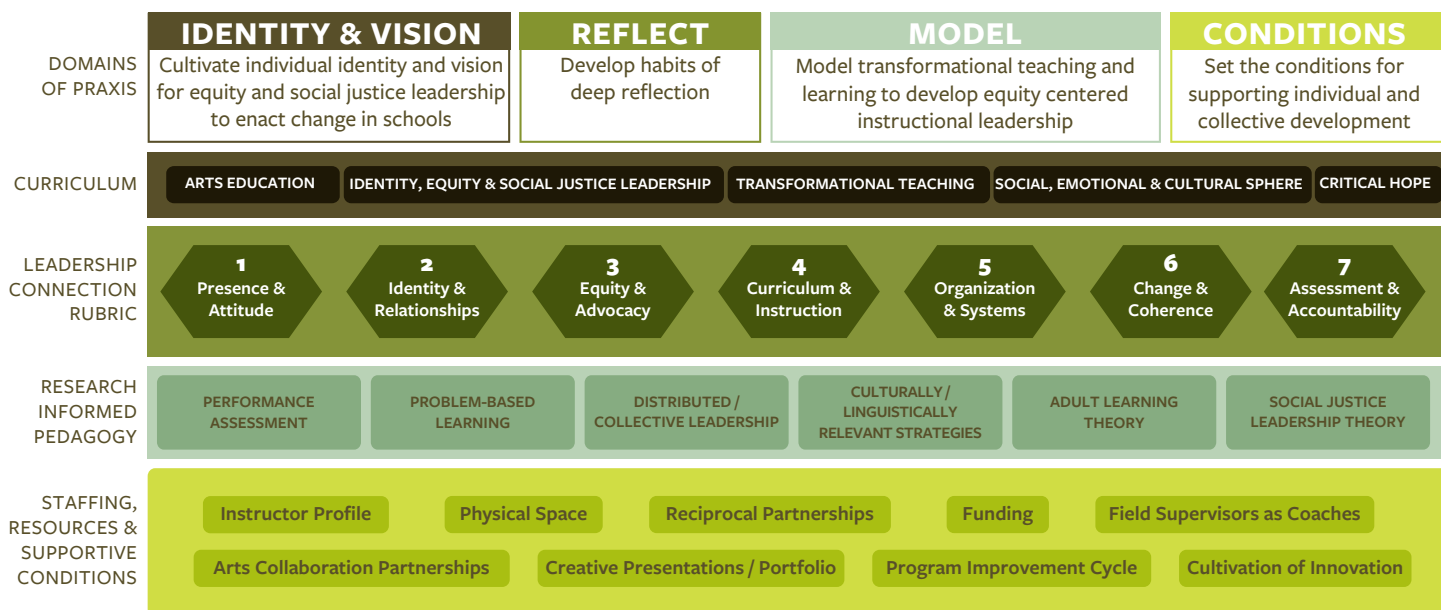
The second layer of the Landscape is the research basis of the program. Sample categories include performance assessment, problem-based learning, distributive leadership, culturally relevant strategies, adult learning theory, and social justice leadership theory.

The Leadership Connection Rubric provides the third layer to the Landscape as it guides PLI’s research-informed pedagogy by connecting the theory to measurable leadership competencies, dispositions, and actions.

The fourth layer consists of the curriculum and content of the courses in the preparation program. The courses are informed by the first three layers of the Landscape and integrate the intended outcomes with the research base through supportive conditions.

Finally, the PLI Domains of Praxis (see Figure 1) enhance the leadership preparation curriculum by integrating performative modalities into student experiences within the courses to promote cognitive disequilibrium for the purposes of growth.

FIGURE 2: PLI SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADERSHIP PREPARATION LANDSCAPE





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## CONCLUSION

By memorializing the evolution of the PLI over 20 years, we intend to support future efforts of continuous improvement. With the Domains of Praxis formalized, we can open up new and continuing dialogue within our programs and instructors by informing existing work and design with consistent frames. As one instructor noted, this paper catalyzes questions such as “How can this document be used by other instructors in terms of the perpetuity of the program? Should we have professional development, planning retreats, syllabi review, and other protocols designed around the Domains?” The Domains of Praxis and Social Justice Leadership Preparation Landscape also detail a framework that can be used to inspire and catalyze ideas in our peer programs and institutions as well as K-12 school districts. We aspire to promote a much-needed conversation about the “how” of social justice leader preparation. In other words, what is the process or theoretical base for designing powerful learning experiences? How can programs prepare the kinds of leaders that vulnerable and historically underserved youth deserve?

## CREDITS

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<sup>2</sup>A report describing the 20-year impact of the PLI is available [here](#).

<sup>3</sup>Farmer, T. (2008). Unconsciously indigenous leadership: The role of cognitive disequilibrium in preparing democratic educational leaders. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the University Council for Educational Administration. Orlando, Florida.

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